

CHAPTER — † ONE † —

About six p.m. Bob Hill turned out the lights and stepped out into the fourth floor hallway of the Missouri State Capitol. He rattled the office door to be sure it was locked, and glanced at the lettering by his hand — Senator Robert M. Hill. Although he was in the third year of his first term, that title still seemed strange — somehow too grand for a 33 year old lawyer, not quite 8 years out of law school.

The hallway was empty, as was the elevator that responded to his summons. Alone he descended to the basement and crossed the basement parking area. Only eight senators, by virtue of age, seniority, or disability, rated parking spaces in the Capitol basement, and these spaces were all empty. It was Thursday, and the weekend exodus was nearly complete.

Bob walked rapidly through the tunnel to the large underground parking garage just northeast of the Capitol. He tossed his briefcase in the back seat of his car and drove up the ramp and out onto the circular drive around the north

DRUMS OF MOLOCH

side of the Capitol. The late February snow was mostly gone, but, despite his hurry, Bob drove cautiously, alert for icy spots. Perched on the precipitous Missouri River bluffs, Jefferson City's streets are treacherous when slick. As he exited onto Broadway, he thought of the steep grade from High Street down to McCarty. Should he detour around it? The streets seemed to be in good shape, so he decided to continue straight south on Broadway to the expressway.

Once on the highway, he relaxed and let his mind go back to that afternoon phone call. The caller said he was David Mullins with the Democratic National Committee, and he wanted to come from Washington out to Adamsville to talk to Bob. Bob suggested that it would be easier for him to come to Jefferson City, because he could fly into the Columbia-Jefferson City airport. But, Mullins said he wanted to come to Adamsville because he wanted to talk to Maria too, and would like to meet their children and see their home. So it was left that Mullins would fly into St. Louis, rent a car, and be in Adamsville late Friday afternoon.

As soon as he had hung up, Bob asked Catherine if she knew a David Mullins. Catherine McFadden had been secretary for Bob's predecessor for sixteen years and knew just about everybody. After Bob had defeated the incumbent in a close, hard-fought, Democratic primary, it was assumed he would look for a new secretary to run his senatorial office. But Catherine came to Adamsville a few days after the election and applied for the job. She said, "Mr. Hill, I supported your opponent who has been my boss all these years. I was loyal to him, and if you hire me, I will be loyal to you. I have learned a lot about the Missouri state government and about Democratic politics. If I work for you I will do my best to help you be a successful state senator. All of the information I have accumulated will be available to you except confidential in-

CHAPTER ONE

formation that I have received from my present employer.”

Catherine was the ideal secretary for a freshman senator. She was a widow in her mid-fifties with two grown children. Bob had been impressed by her apparent honesty at their first meeting, and he had never found reason to change that judgment. Her keen insight into human nature gave Bob a reliable guide as to whom to trust and what to expect from almost anybody in state government. She listened to the State House gossip and picked up helpful information, but never contributed any gossip herself. So it was standard procedure for Bob to consult with Catherine about anything pertaining to politics or government.

And she had heard of David Mullins. “You might call him a talent scout for the National Committee. They must have their eye on you Bob, and well they should. You’re young, handsome, honest, and black — just what they need. Listen to what Mullins has to say, don’t make any hasty decisions, but don’t pass up any real opportunities. And be sure Maria agrees with the final decision. You can’t be happy with an unhappy wife.”

Certainly Maria would have equal input, as she had throughout their marriage. They had met when they were both third year students at the University of Missouri, Bob in pre-law and Maria in journalism. Her home was in San Antonio, and she had come to Missouri for its School of Journalism. Both of her parents were born in Mexico where her father had worked for an American corporation. Maria was born in San Antonio after her father had been transferred up there by his employer.

For Bob it had been love at first sight. To him, she was the most beautiful woman in the world, the perfect product of her Spanish and Aztec ancestors. Bob had immediately quit dating anyone but Maria, but it was about a year before her

DRUMS OF MOLOCH

other suitors dropped out and Bob felt confident enough to propose marriage. They were married in June after Maria had graduated from the Journalism School and Bob had finished his pre-law. They rented an apartment in Columbia and Maria got a job as a roving reporter for a local television station to help put Bob through the three years of law school. Bob was a salesman in a men's clothing store until his senior year in law school, when he was employed by a law firm to do research and investigations. Before they left Columbia, Maria had become a very popular anchor-woman for the television station.

They stayed in Columbia until Bob passed the bar examination, on his first try, and was licensed to practice law in Missouri. Then they moved to Adamsville, Bob's home town and the county seat of Adams County. They had spent many weekends there with Bob's parents, because Bob wanted to be sure that Maria would be happy in a town of eight thousand. Maria liked the small town atmosphere, found the people to be friendly, and loved Bob's parents. So they came to Adamsville, and Bob opened his own office, hung a sign announcing that he was an attorney at law, and waited for clients. They had expected a slow start, so Maria got a job as reporter and announcer for the Adamsville radio station, there being no television station in Adams County.

A career in politics had never entered their plans, but the Adams County prosecuting attorney was less than vigorous in his duties, and several citizens had suggested to Bob that he run for the office. Bob and Maria had been married more than four years and had delayed having children because Maria needed to work. They were both twenty-six and were anxious to start their family. The prosecuting attorney's salary would make it possible for Maria to quit her job, and the publicity that went with the office would help Bob's civil practice. So

CHAPTER ONE

they decided to run.

Adams County has a decidedly white electorate. Out of a total population of twenty-two thousand, there are slightly over two hundred blacks — about one percent. The conventional wisdom was that Bob didn't stand a chance. Nobody expected that many whites to vote for a black lawyer, especially since he had been practicing in Adamsville only about a year. True, he had grown up in Adamsville; had gone through twelve years in the local schools; had been on the high school debate team for two years and the football team for three years; and had been active in the youth groups at the largest Adamsville church. But he had been up at the university for seven years, and many of his old friends had moved on.

What the conventional wisdom overlooked was the immense popularity of Bob's parents. Matthew Hill can best be described as a black Will Rogers. He had never met a person that he didn't like. He had served as custodian of the Adamsville High School for forty years and, possessing a rare ability to remember names and faces, he knew everybody who had attended that school during those years, which included about half of the population of Adams County. Hardly anyone went through Adamsville High without, at some time, going to Matthew Hill for counsel and advice. He always had time to listen and his advice was always sound.

If Matthew didn't know an Adams County voter, there was a good chance that Hannah Hill did. A deeply religious woman, she had been active in church work since childhood. Her knowledge of the Bible and her natural teaching ability made her much in demand as a speaker and teacher throughout the area. Since Matthew's retirement, they had lived comfortably on his pension, their Social Security, and the income from their modest savings. Both Matthew and

DRUMS OF MOLOCH

Hannah were in good health, and they campaigned vigorously in Bob's behalf. There is no doubt that Bob owed his first political victory to his parents.

During the months that Bob had practiced law before becoming prosecuting attorney, he had spent a good deal of time at the county courthouse observing courtroom procedure. He was often appalled by the laxity of law enforcement. He saw clear-cut cases of drunken driving reduced to careless driving for no reason other than to enable the defendant to keep his driver's license. He saw felony stealing reduced to misdemeanor stealing when the amount involved was clearly in excess of \$150. He listened to plea agreements calling for probation for defendants with two and even three prior convictions. He observed that most defense attorneys tried to delay cases as much as possible, and that the prosecutor usually agreed to the continuance.

Bob was especially concerned about the lack of consideration shown to the victims of crimes. The prosecuting attorney seemed to be oblivious to the stress and inconvenience he placed on the victims by allowing cases to be delayed. Sometimes he even neglected to inform the victims of continuances, causing them to make unnecessary court appearances. And he made matters worse by agreeing to the release of defendants on little or no bond pending trial, thereby exposing the victims to possible threats and harassment. None of this, Bob felt, resulted from any dishonesty on the prosecutor's part, but rather from his easy going nature, from his tendency to be lazy, and from his desire to get along with the other lawyers in the county.

Bob took office determined to make some changes. He wanted to get along with the other attorneys, but resolved that he would not let his desire for popularity override his duty as a prosecutor. He was vigorous in his opposition to unneces-

CHAPTER ONE

sary continuances and to unduly low bonds. When the evidence clearly supported the offense as charged, he refused to reduce it to a lesser offense, and he took a much tougher stance on plea agreements. And he was careful to be considerate of the victims and to keep them advised of the progress of their cases.

At first the other lawyers in the county grumbled about the "new broom" and the "lack of cooperation," but, because Bob was open with them and because he always kept his word, he soon won their respect. Because, during his campaign for prosecutor, Bob had promised to make these changes, the people of Adams County were watching to see if he would produce. When it became obvious that he was doing what he had said he would do, his re-election to a second term was assured.

But Bob and Maria had something else in mind. From the prosecution of drunken driving cases, Bob had concluded that the Missouri statute needed to be strengthened, and had asked the state senator from his district to sponsor the changes. However, the senator was not interested in Bob's suggestions and had declined to take any action. Bob expressed his frustration to Maria and she said, "Bob, there are several loopholes in the law that you believe should be closed. Why don't you run for the state Senate and do something about it?"

At first, neither of them had taken the idea seriously. But the seed had been planted and had found fertile soil. Both Bob and Maria were fascinated by the Missouri State Capitol. During their years in Columbia, their favorite outing on a nice day had been to drive down to Jefferson City where they had spent many hours admiring the Capitol building and enjoying the works of art and historic displays which it contains. The previous building had burned in 1911, and the voters

DRUMS OF MOLOCH

had approved a bond issue of \$3,500,000 to rebuild. Amazingly, construction costs were less than expected, and the tax levy for retiring the bonds produced more than expected. So the state ended up with an extra million dollars, which the Attorney General ruled could be used only on the Capitol. The result was a building blessed with a truly remarkable collection of statuary, stained-glass, murals, carvings, and castings.

Outside the building, Bob and Maria's favorite place was near the great relief commemorating the signing of the treaty by which the United States acquired the Louisiana Purchase from France. The beautiful bronze relief shows James Monroe seated at the table, Robert Livingston standing behind him, and Marbois, Napoleon's treasurer, leaning forward to sign the document which, in Bob's opinion, had made this great nation possible. Bob and Maria were always thrilled and inspired when they stood on this spot, on the brow of the bluff overlooking the mighty river which drains a large part of the land included in the treaty.

Inside the building, their favorite place was the Senate Chamber, and they often sat in the visitor's gallery watching the Senate in session. In front of them, behind the President's chair, was the beautiful stained-glass window showing De Soto's landing in Missouri. To their right were the murals of Daniel Boone at the Judgment Tree, and of Lewis and Clark reporting to President Jefferson upon returning from their famous expedition. To their left were the murals of Thomas Hart Benton, the great champion of westward expansion, speaking at St. Louis, and of Frank P. Blair's courageous speech at Louisiana, Missouri. Bob was always fascinated by the dignity and courtesy and serious formality with which the Senate conducted its business. These thirty-four men and women, here in modern America, were still observing rules

CHAPTER ONE

and customs that originated in the Senate of ancient Rome. The feeling of importance and stability thrilled Bob to his very soul. Surely this was the way the great business of Democracy should be conducted. That he might one day be part of that august body, was beyond his fondest dream.

For several days, when they were alone, Bob and Maria reviewed the pros and cons of a senate race, and the more they talked the more excited they became. A senator's salary was considerably less than a prosecutor's, but Bob would have more time for his private practice. They had worked out a budget that would enable them to pay off their college loans by the end of Bob's term as prosecutor. They had purchased their first house and had the payments well covered. And they now had two sons, Jacob, age 2, and Joseph, age 2 months, and in another month would have the deductible portion of the medical expense for Joseph all paid. Finally they decided to confide in Bob's parents. Hannah said, "Son, you have done good things for this county as prosecuting attorney. You may be able to do better things as state senator. You pray about this and if you feel this is something God wants you to do, then you do it." Within a week the decision was made. Bob was going to run for the Missouri State Senate.

It was decided that Bob would wait and file on the last day of filing, which was about one year away. In the meantime no one would know his plans but Maria, Matthew, and Hannah. His opponent would have the advantage of incumbency, which meant he was better known and would be better able to raise campaign funds. However, Bob would have the advantage of knowing that he was going to run and would have a year to be getting ready. His opponent had been unopposed in the primary the last two times he had run, and had no reason to expect opposition now. The senatorial district consisted of eight rural counties, and was designed to be a safe

DRUMS OF MOLOCH

Democratic seat. So the primary should decide who would be the next senator.

About two months before he decided to run for the Senate, Bob had tried a case involving an unusually brutal murder. The sensational nature of the case, plus the novelty of a young, black, prosecuting attorney, had attracted a great deal of media attention. For two weeks, Bob had been a regular feature on the evening television news and on the front pages of the area newspapers. When the jury returned a verdict of guilty of murder in the first degree and assessed the death penalty, the editorial writers were lavish in their praise of this "brilliant, young, black, prosecutor."

As a result, Bob had at least some name recognition in every county in the senatorial district, and he soon began receiving invitations to speak to various groups. After the decision to run for the Senate was made, Bob discreetly let it be known that he was available as a speaker anywhere in the area. Program chairmen always have a problem filling their schedule, and Bob, being a good speaker, and being somewhat unique because of his blackness, was soon speaking to civic clubs, church groups, schools, and political groups all over the district. He was especially anxious to talk to Democratic women's clubs in every county in the district, knowing that these are the people who do the most work in a primary election.

Bob turned off the highway onto the Adamsville business route. He was glad to see that the snow was nearly gone here. Maybe it would be warm enough to take the boys on a hike this weekend. He smiled as he thought back to that primary election night. It had been close and nerve-racking, but he had won. His opponent's over-confidence had been his main asset in that race. Bob resolved never to make that mistake. Being in the State Senate had been all that he had dreamed of.

CHAPTER ONE

Whatever David Mullins had in mind, Bob couldn't believe it would be good enough to cause him to make a change.

Maria met him at the door. The boys were already in bed. He kissed her and then said, "Honey, I haven't eaten yet, but first I have to tell you about a visitor we are going to have tomorrow."

