

## CHAPTER —✦ TWO ✦—

**F**rom Bob and Maria's home, it is only six blocks to the law offices of Miller and Hill. After a brisk Friday morning walk, Bob arrived a little before seven. He left the door locked behind him. It would be at least an hour before anyone else arrived, which would give him time to get through some of the papers piled on his desk.

Sherman Miller had approached Bob about forming a law partnership shortly after Bob was elected to the Senate. Sherman was an Adamsville native, about 20 years older than Bob. He was a careful, knowledgeable, lawyer with an excellent reputation for honesty. But he had a dread of courtrooms that had become almost a phobia. He had a sizeable probate practice, and appeared in circuit court on uncontested matters, but, because he was too conscientious to represent a client unless he could do a good job, he referred to other lawyers cases that were contested or might be contested. So he had a good office practice, but was handicapped by his inability to

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carry matters on to court when necessary.

Because of Bob's tough stance on plea bargains, he had tried an unusually large number of jury cases — 86 during his four years as prosecutor. He had developed a good courtroom manner, always serious, always courteous, and intense enough to show his sincerity. He had developed good rapport with the juries and had won the respect of the judges and other lawyers. So the partnership of Miller and Hill proved to be a natural fit and their clientele grew steadily. Because of Sherman's greater experience in the law, and because Bob would be in Jefferson City part of the time, they had agreed that Sherman would receive 65% of the profits and Bob 35%. Bob was happy with this arrangement. His share plus his senator's salary provided a comfortable and growing income.

Bob read through his mail, dictating replies as needed, and then turned to the case files on his desk. Sherman Miller arrived a little after eight and stuck his head in Bob's door. "Good morning, Senator. What atrocities did our state Senate perpetrate against its constituents this week?"

Bob laughed. "We're still in the preliminaries. The atrocious part of our session comes later. I hope the firm of Miller and Hill has had a prosperous week."

"As a matter of fact we have. Our fee in the Goss estate has been approved and paid, and a Mrs. Clark came in with what appears to be a very good automobile case. She has a serious back injury, the liability is there, and the insurance company has failed to make her a decent offer. So she wisely decided that she needs a lawyer. We made an appointment for her to see you at one today."

"That's fine. I have a hearing set before Judge Nichols at ten this morning but it shouldn't take more than an hour. A man named Mullins is coming out from Washington to see me late this afternoon. I don't know what he wants, but I do

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want to talk to him. He is from the Democratic National Committee.”

Sherman whistled, “Hey, don’t go running off to Washington just to be president or something. Things are going too good here.”

Bob laughed again. “He probably wants me to do some kind of leg work for them out here. But Sherm, I won’t make any promises without consulting you first.”

Sherman retired to his office and Bob resumed his dictating. At nine o’clock, Virginia North arrived. She had worked for Sherm Miller for twenty years before the partnership was formed, and knew all the ins and outs of running a law office. She was the only full time secretary the firm had, but they had hired a young married woman who worked as a part time typist. She would be in at ten to type Bob’s letters and pleadings.

Bob’s hearing before Judge Nichols involved Bob’s objections to some interrogatories, and took longer than expected, but he finished before noon, walked home for lunch, and then drove back for the one o’clock appointment with Mrs. Clark, thinking that he might need his car if any investigation was called for. As it turned out, it was nearly twenty miles to the scene of the accident, and Mrs. Clark wasn’t able to ride that far, and Bob didn’t have the time, so it was agreed that he would pick up her husband and go out there Saturday afternoon. Sherm had already obtained a copy of the Highway Patrol report, and with that plus Mr. Clark’s knowledge of the scene, Bob would be able to get the measurements and photographs that he wanted. The Clarks left about three and Virginia sent in a client in a dissolution case who claimed he was being denied visitation rights with his children. Bob called the opposing counsel and obtained her promise to meet with Bob and Bob’s client Saturday morning at eight to

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pick-up the children. David Mullins arrived a little after four.

He was a stocky man of medium height, mid-forties, and partially bald. He had an easy smile and an outgoing personality. He looked around the office, and seemed to like what he saw. The typist had gone home at four, but he visited briefly with Virginia, talked to Sherman for several minutes, and then suggested they go to Bob's home. From the conversation with Sherm, Bob got the impression that Mullins had already checked the background of Sherman Miller and that he even knew something about their secretaries. Bob felt sure that Mullins' friendly eyes had not missed anything of importance in the offices of Miller and Hill.

Maria was wearing a pretty but simple red and black dress; the house was spotless; and she had gotten a baby sitter to keep the boys in the play room so they could talk undisturbed. Mullins wanted to meet the boys first. Six year old Jacob and four year old Joseph stopped playing to be introduced. They were handsome, well-mannered, little boys and remembered to thank Mr. Mullins for the Washington Redskins T-shirts he had brought to them, and remembered to call him "Sir" when answering his questions.

After Maria, Bob, and their guest had retired to Bob's study, and Maria had served hot tea, Mullins stood up, closed the door, and resumed his seat. "I don't want the baby sitter to hear what we say. First, please call me David. Second, let me get right to the point. This is not as yet for publication, but your good old congressman, who has been there since before you were born, has finally decided to retire. He will not be running again next year. Bob, we want you to run."

"Why David there must be dozens of people in this district who are better qualified to . . . ."

"Wait a minute, Bob. Wait until you hear the rest of it. Let me explain our reasoning. As you well know, the black vote is

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absolutely vital to the Democratic Party. Except for a few old timers who are still loyal to Abraham Lincoln, it has been all ours. But we are beginning to see some slippage. Some younger blacks are getting tired of being taken for granted. A small but growing number are taking a look at the Republicans. If this trend continues, we Democrats could well end up as a permanent minority. We have got to give more recognition to the vital role that blacks play in our party and in our nation. We have got to have a black on our national ticket.

“Now, of course, you are thinking, ‘What about Jesse, what about all those black mayors and congressmen?’ Bob, our problem is this. We need a black man on our ticket, but it has got to be a black who will not scare away the white voters. It has got to be someone who has never embraced Fidel Castro or endorsed Jane Fonda or taken any kind of extreme position that will turn off the whites. We need a black who can do well with the whites. That is why you caught our eye. Almost every black in public office was elected from a district with heavy black population. But you are different. Your votes were nearly all white votes, and basically conservative, mainstream whites at that.

“Bob and Maria, it is obvious that you are both sharp enough to know the score, so I am simply laying all of our cards on the table. We have checked you out every way we can. We have checked your families, your friends, your business associates. If you have any skeletons in your closet, we sure can’t find them. Most importantly, we know Bob was elected prosecuting attorney in a county that is 99% white and was so well liked that these same voters would have re-elected him almost unanimously. We know that he was elected to the state Senate in a district that is over 98% white, and has done a good job in the Senate, especially on the

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Criminal Jurisprudence Committee. What I am saying is this. After about three terms in the United States Congress, and that is just six years, Bob would be a prime candidate for vice-president. And eight years later, who knows, maybe the first black president of the United States.”

Bob shook his head in wonder. “David, that’s crazy. Maria, what did you put in that tea?”

Maria raised her hand. “Wait a minute, honey. I can have dinner on the table in five minutes. Let’s eat on this, let it all soak in, and talk some more later.”

David protested. “I shouldn’t impose on you. I’ll go get something to eat and come back after supper.”

“Everything is ready. You won’t be imposing one bit. Besides you need to check out our table manners, don’t you?”

David laughed. “Okay Maria, you win. Let’s eat.”