

In the course of a few short months, Judge Sean Riley and his peace officer lady, Jo, confront their deepest fears, find true love and vanquish the sinister forces that seek to destroy them both.

Good Will Win in the End

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...Eventually, Sean broke the ice by asking, "Did I hold up well during my interrogation?"

After pausing for what seemed like several eons to Sean, Jolene replied simply, "Very well. You give good answers."

Sean retorted, "You ask good questions."

After another long pause, Jolene very softly asked Sean, "Am I too young for you?"

He replied, "That all depends on whether I'm too old for you."

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GOOD WILL WIN IN THE END

Rory R. Olsen

BOOK I: THE ROMANCE

Chapter One

“Hi Sugar!” the shapely blonde said, as she planted a wet kiss on Sean’s cheek. Sensing her boss’s embarrassment, his dark-haired receptionist, Miriam, smiled and asked with a big grin, “Should I hold your calls?”

Judge Sean Riley, sensing that he was outgunned and outnumbered, smiled weakly and told Miriam to hold his calls. As Sean shut the door and ushered Kyra Townsend into his office, he thought about giving Kyra his usual lecture about not being so informal and friendly with him around his staff. Sensing that Kyra was trying to get a rise out of him today, he said nothing. Since Kyra practiced exclusively criminal law as a prosecutor, Sean didn’t have to keep her at arms length as he did with lawyers who practiced before him.

As the blonde prosecutor made herself comfortable on the sofa, having already kicked off her black high heels, Sean asked her if she wanted something to drink. Smiling, Kyra answered, “Diet Coke™ will be fine.”

When Sean returned from the refrigerator with the Diet Coke, he couldn’t help but notice that Kyra had settled comfortably on the sofa, sitting width-wise so that her legs took up most of the sofa. He also couldn’t help but notice that although Kyra had thickened a bit in the middle, her legs were still long, tan and awfully shapely. Since she was wearing nude hose, he also noticed that her toes were freshly polished a bright red. Kyra was one attractive woman from head to toe.

“Sean, darlin’, you’re lookin’ at my legs again,” Kyra said, with a hint of a tease in her voice and a sparkle in her brown eyes.

“If I didn’t look, you’d be even more worried about me than you are now, wouldn’t you?” Sean asked, without any affect in his voice.

Not answering him directly, Kyra said sweetly, “Sean, no matter how long you live here, you still act like what you are—a Damned Yankee!”

“Kyra, you just figured that out now? I’m proud of you!”

“Well if you were a gentleman, you wouldn’t be so obvious about lookin’ at my legs!”

“If you weren’t such an obvious flirt with such great legs, I probably could be more discreet!”

“Do you look at the legs of the lady lawyers in your courtroom like that?”

Smiling, Sean said, “Heavens, No!” But, Sean was lying. As he spoke, he thought of the reddish-brown-haired lawyer named Kim Brownlee, who while waiting for her case to be called this morning, had positioned herself on the front row of the pews and very obviously flirted with him by crossing and re-crossing her legs and dangling her shoe. Every time he looked up from his papers, there she was. Every time he made eye contact with her, she gave him a friendly smile.

“Sugar, the fact that you are noticin’ my legs is a good sign. I think that you may recover!” Kyra said emphatically.

Kyra and her husband, Max, were two of Sean’s oldest and dearest friends. They both worried about him because ever since Cheryl’s death, he had kept his grief bottled up inside. Sean really appreciated their concern, but wasn’t ready to open up yet. After Cheryl’s death, Sean directed his psychic energies toward the Twins and buried himself in his judicial and academic duties.

“Why do you say that I may recover?” Sean asked distractedly.

“Darlin’, we well know that if a happily married man loses his wife, odds are he will remarry fairly quick. Since you were very happily married, it’s ’bout time for you to start showin’ some interest in the opposite sex!”

“Kyra, you know that Cheryl has been dead little more than a year! How can you talk about me getting married again so soon?”

“Sean, before you can get married, you have to start datin’. You haven’t started, have you?”

Kyra, whether she knew it or not, had scored a hit, a very palpable hit. Being a judge is about the worst job to have if you are middle-aged and trying to meet the opposite sex. The only women that Sean saw on a daily basis were his staff, the ladies in the clerk’s office, the widows (and other litigants) in the court and female lawyers.

If a judge were to get involved with one of his staff members, the door would be wide open to a sexual harassment suit. At age fifty, the prospect of being a defendant in this sort of suit was not something that was very appealing, so Sean never seriously considered that option—Miriam’s great legs notwithstanding.

The clerks were ruled out because the ladies over there love to talk and talk. The widows on his docket and the female lawyers presented a less clear-cut problem. If Sean met a widow, he could conceivably ask her out after her case was over and done with for good. But, if someone were to file an ethics complaint, Sean would have to justify his actions to an inquiry of the Judicial Ethics Committee. This was not a very appetizing idea since the

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committee was well known for being rude and abusive to judges, even if there was no evidence to support a complaint.

Similarly, if a woman lawyer only handled uncontested decedent's estates before him, getting involved with her would not necessarily be unethical. But, since most of the women lawyers that practiced before Sean also handled contested matters before him regularly, they were out of bounds. God help a judge accused of sleeping with a lawyer who had a case pending before him! That would be a real bad idea for both of them.

Sean also taught two courses at night at the law school of Southern University,¹ where he met many women. However, with the university's draconian policies regarding sexual harassment, Sean long ago realized that the women he met there were strictly off limits—more so than his employees, the clerks, widows and other litigants and female lawyers appearing before him.

Since the loss of Cheryl was still too fresh and this was an election year, Sean had let the subject of dating go for now, telling himself that he would think about it later. Little did he recognize it then, but destiny—acting through Kyra—had just taken a hand in this game.

"Kyra, we both well know that my chances of meeting anyone that I would and could go out with are pretty slim. If and when I find someone to date, I'll let you know!" said Sean, hoping that Kyra would get off of the uncomfortable subject.

"Sean, would you like Max and me to fix you up with someone?" That did it! Sean sensed that he was cornered. Kyra had played him perfectly.

"By any chance, do you have someone in mind?" Sean asked. He could see what was coming as clearly as someone standing at a railroad crossing could see a smoke-belching steam locomotive coming down a railroad track on a sunny day on a Kansas prairie. Sean asked the question on purpose, hoping that he could find an objection to any specific person that Kyra proposed.

"I don't think that you know her. She's a sergeant on Sheriff Walker's staff," said Kyra, exploiting her advantage.

Damn! He was trapped. "Can I give you an answer in a couple of days?" Sean asked out of desperation.

"Sean, you're a judge. You make many, many decisions daily. We both know that if you wait a day or so, you won't be any smarter. Why not just get it over with and agree?"

Very tentatively, Sean asked, "What did you have in mind?"

"A double dinner date on Friday about six over at The Palm Tree™."

“This is Wednesday. Will you and Max have time to arrange a sitter for your kids?”

“My mother is gonna pick the kids up from school. It’s all set.”

“Errr... What is this sergeant’s name?”

“Jolene. Jolene Scruggs.”

“Are you going to tell me anything about her?”

“You’ll like her. She reminds me of what I would have been a few years ago if I hadn’t gone to law school. She all piss n’ vinegar on the outside, but a real special lady once you get to know her.”

Sean surrendered meekly by orally confirming the time and place, and then writing it down in his bulky calendar. Then, the conversation wandered off for a moment into the required references to the health of Max and the Twins. When this was done, Kyra stood up and put her shoes back on.

“Jury ready to come back?” Sean asked, knowing by Kyra’s hairdo, tasteful but expensive black dress, black high heels and pearls that she had been in a jury trial. Normally, when not in front of a jury, she wore a blue suit, little or no jewelry and had her hair in a ponytail.

“Yes Sugar, I’ve got a rookie waitin’ on the jury. Since my cell phone hasn’t gone off, they must still be out. I’d best go over there before the poor lad dies of worry.”

After a passionate and very sincere hug, Kyra left, having reassured Sean that, as his friend, she was looking out for him and that all would go well on Friday. As Kyra left his office, leaving behind the strong but delightful scent of her perfume, Sean sighed. He realized that it was good to have friends like Kyra and Max to look out for him. But, he wasn’t ready to date!

Thinking further, Sean realized that he probably had been a real dud at being single when he was younger, never having actually initiated the relationship with the four women with whom he had been seriously involved. The last time he had begun a new relationship, Richard Nixon was still president. The rules for dating, which he understood poorly back then, had all changed. He started feeling like a time traveler, who had gone too far into the future to understand the new world into which he had ventured.

What really bothered Sean was the prospect of becoming intimate with someone new. Cheryl and he had been together for over a quarter century. The thought of going through all of the adjustments and pain of a new relationship was rather daunting. Sadly, Sean, being a man, had no one to ask for help.

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On the way home, Sean pulled his F-150™ off to the side of County 191. After looking carefully both ways, he ran across the road and stopped at a simple, wooden, white cross that stood a few feet off of the road, between the edge of the road and the bank of Flatboat River. He crossed himself, said a short prayer and then glumly, after looking carefully both ways, went back to his F-150 and resumed his ride home. The cross marked the approximate spot where Cheryl's Explorer™ had veered off the road and into the river after hitting a patch of ice on that cold March morning last year. In a typically mindless bureaucratic way, the county had also placed a memorial marker there, as well. A few days after the accident, large, yellow signs had appeared on both sides of the short hill that was between the site of the accident and Sean's home, cautioning drivers that the roadway was slippery when icy. While the signs were posted too late to have done anything for Cheryl, Sean hoped that maybe they had been posted in time to save some other poor soul.

When Sean entered the house, he was greeted immediately by two loud sounds, best described as "Mrrrrw!" Law and Equity, his two Siamese princesses, were there to welcome their human sugar daddy home. Petting them for at least five minutes, Sean was repeatedly nuzzled, rubbed with cold, wet cat noses and told that he had been missed and that he shouldn't have left.

After the furry love-in, Sean looked over his mail. There wasn't much today. Just a few bills, a legal magazine, today's issue of *The Wall Street Journal*,™ a few bits of junk mail and one white envelope, the size and stiffness of an invitation. Opening the invitation, he noticed that it was for the bar association's annual Spring Fling on a Saturday in early May, which, as he reckoned, was only six weeks from now.

Sean choked up for a second. Then his eyes grew moist. Cheryl and he had always enjoyed the Spring Fling, which was one of the few fun formal events that they used to attend. This would be the second one that he would miss. He knew that he would miss it because he had no one to take. If he went alone, he would feel even more alone than he did now. Plus, if he did go alone, that would be an open invitation to every single female lawyer to pounce on him. Even worse, the married women present would start trying to fix him up with their widowed, divorced and single friends and relatives. After Cheryl died, he had offers from ladies to cook and clean for him. He politely and firmly brushed aside the invitations and eventually they slowed down, but had not totally stopped.

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As Law purred in his lap, he petted Equity. Suddenly, an intriguing idea came to mind. He thought, *If this Sergeant Jolene isn't too bad, maybe I should ask her to the Spring Fling, just so the word would get out that I have a girlfriend.*

Sean realized that even the rumor that he had a girlfriend had possibilities. It wouldn't stop his few close friends, like Kyra and Max, but it would certainly discourage many of the predatory females he had met and their co-conspirators. With this somewhat useful thought in his head, Sean changed into his workout clothes and hit his home treadmill. After the treadmill, he worked out on his weight machine. As he was doing his last set of reps for the night, something that Cheryl had said to him popped into his brain.

One night, several years ago, when they were experiencing the early joys of having an almost empty nest—which began as soon as the Twins had friends old enough to drive—Sean and Cheryl watched a chick flick on cable. This sort of entertainment wasn't necessarily his thing. But, since Cheryl really liked them, he watched with her from time to time. She had a predictable routine for such occasions. She liked to watch her chick flicks wearing a thin T-shirt with no bra, tight blue jeans and barefoot. She would always stuff herself on microwaved popcorn during the early part of the flick, and then want to sit close to Sean during the rest of it. Invariably, after the movie ended, they would wind up in the bedroom. Sean really missed those chick flick evenings now.

This particular night, after the sex was over, Cheryl snuggled up next to Sean and said, quite out of the blue, “You know that plot was silly. In real life, widowers rarely have to choose between two women like the doctor did in that movie. In real life, if the widower was happily married, the first woman to bed the widower usually weds him.” Sean asked himself why he had to remember this conversation less than two days before his first date post-Cheryl.

After his workout, Sean, following his usual custom, grabbed a quick salad. As he was eating under the watchful eyes of Law and Equity, another thought popped into his brain. The name “Jolene Scruggs” rang a bell in the back of his mind. He had heard or read that name somewhere else. Not being able to place the name any better, he took a quick shower and prepared for bed.

Just as Law and Equity started leading him into the bedroom, the idea that he had heard or seen the name “Jolene Scruggs” popped into his brain again. Rather than tossing and turning all night, Sean decided to go online to

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check the name out. Searching the website of the *Bugle* yielded a link to a brief story, with a headline that simply said, “Deputies receive awards.” The article was very short. All it said was that the sheriff had presented medals that morning to a number of deputies, who had distinguished themselves above and beyond the call of duty. Seven names were listed, including Sergeant Jolene Scruggs.

What really caught Sean’s eye was the photo that appeared below the text of the story. In the group photo, were the sheriff, of course, five male deputies and two female deputies, both of who appeared to be brass. One of the female deputies was heavy set, mean looking and not at all attractive. The other one, as best Sean could tell from the small Internet photo, appeared to be a dark-haired beauty. Assuming the worst, Sean logged off and went to bed, much to the relief of Law and Equity, who scolded him for not having obeyed their bedtime command previously. Ten minutes later, one tired, lonely, scared judge and his two furry, purring mistresses were all curled up together in a deep sleep.

On Thursday morning, while sipping his morning tea, Judge Riley had a chance to chat with his trusty bailiff, Bubba, before going out on the bench. Deputy Weston Claxton “Bubba” Connors looked as if Central Casting had picked him to play the part of a southern lawman. He was about 5’10”, mostly bald with gray fringes and had a bit of a potbelly. He had a deep, resonant voice and brown eyes that could pierce you all the way down to your soul. But, what was most noticeable about Bubba was his manner of speaking. He talked so slowly that people said you could plant and harvest a crop while he was still speaking the same sentence.

Actually, there was a lot more to Bubba than the stereotype. He had been a Marine non-com, last serving as a D.I. After doing his twenty, he retired from the Corps and joined the sheriff’s department right before the merger with the University City Police Department into the current system, in which the sheriff headed the entire law enforcement operation for the county.

Bubba, notwithstanding his occupational choices, was a very kind, gentle man. He hadn’t married while in the Corps because of his concerns that marriage and long overseas deployments did not mix well. Two years after joining the sheriff’s department, Bubba married the widow of another deputy, who had died in a vehicular mishap while chasing a fleeing felon. His bride, Shirley, was a fetching, young, buxom brunette who had been left

with three teenage boys. They were a great match because she loved to talk and he didn't talk much. The joke was that he talked so slowly because he had few opportunities to speak at home.

Sean asked Bubba, "What do you know about a sergeant named Jolene Scruggs?"

Bubba replied slowly, "Well Judge, from what I hear, she is one damn fine peace officer—even though she's a woman. If'n I remember rightly, couple of years ago she stopped a couple of bank robbers by herself. Brass, in their typical dumb-assed way, thanked her for being so good at her job that she got kicked upstairs to headquarters."

Sean always suspected that Bubba's true calling was to be one of the loafers that sat in rural filling stations, whitlin', spittin', sippin' Dr. Pepper™ and adding local color to an otherwise boring community. After a lengthy pause, Sean concluded that Bubba had finished his thought.

So, Sean then asked, "What does she look like?"

Bubba, after pausing a bit and mulling over his delivery, finally said, "Well Judge, as I recall, she's a real looker!"

Sean, his curiosity piqued, waited for more. It didn't come. Finally, he asked with a bit more speed and loudness than he intended, "Know anything else about her?"

After waiting for what seemed like several eons, Bubba finally said very, very slowly, "Well Judge, any place like the Marine Corps or the department, where there's a whole lot more men than women, the men do talk and talk about the women, 'specially the lookers. With respect to Sergeant Scruggs, seems as if there is what you lawyer types call a *divergence of opinion*. A few deputies say that she isn't the sort that likes men, if you know what I mean."

Pausing for effect, Bubba continued, "Personally, I never put much stock into them sort of comments. Seems like when a man says that 'bout a woman, it's mostly 'cause she had the good sense to stay away from a feller like that."

After a long, slow sip of coffee and a bite on his donut, Bubba continued, "Well Judge, the second bunch says that she only likes to date much older, rich men. Personally, I don't have no reason to say whether that's true or not. But if she does, that ain't a bad thing if'n that's what she wants to do. Older men tend to appreciate young women a lot more than young men do. And of course, it's just as easy to love a rich man as a poor man."

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Sean started to get a sinking feeling. Was Kyra fixing him up with a woman who preferred her own sex or was just a gold-digger? As Sean began to space out, he was jolted back into reality by Bubba.

“Well Judge, the third and biggest bunch says that she’s a bright, smart lady with a good education and sense of humor, who isn’t about to hop into bed with some blue-suited, whorin’ drunkard just ’cause he starts feedin’ her a line of bull***t.”

Sean smiled, knowing full well that Bubba didn’t think much of men who drank too much and much less of men who cheated on their wives. Glancing at the clock on his computer, Sean reminded Bubba that it was time for Sean to take the bench.

Sean thought as he made his way onto the bench, *On tap today, we have a nasty guardianship spat.*

As the parties took their turns throwing verbal mud pies at each other, Sean scribbled “Gold-digger?” on his legal pad, circling the word for emphasis. He had reason to be concerned. His late maternal grandfather, a chemist from France, who immigrated to the U.S. after the Great War, had made a substantial fortune from his patents. This money eventually passed in trust to Sean after his mother and grandparents died.

Sean’s late mother had been a very successful author of children’s books. Her will left the rights to her books to the trust that her father had created. These rights had been a gold mine, greatly increasing the value of his trust. Several years ago, Sean’s father died, leaving his estate to the trust also. While not as successful in financial matters as either his wife or his wife’s father, Sean’s dad, as a medical school professor and practitioner, had amassed an estate worth several million additional dollars.

Last summer, when Sean hit the big 50, the trust had terminated and Sean received the funds in his own name. He placed the money in a management trust for a matter of convenience. But, since he had the right to claim it at any time he wanted, for the first time ever, he would have to report the existence of this large fortune—valued conservatively at over fifty million dollars—on his annual financial disclosure form later this year.

In retrospect, perhaps the smartest thing that Cheryl and he had ever done was to have her write a will directing her trust fund to pass at her death in trust for the benefit of the Twins. The five million dollars that Cheryl passed this way to the Twins meant that whatever happened in life to Sean, the Twins would never be penniless. The financial disclosure requirement

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had bothered Sean a good bit for the last few months, giving him something unrelated to Cheryl's death to worry about, which may have been a good thing.

After pausing from his introspection for several minutes to overrule an objection, Sean calmed down. Even if Sergeant Jolene was a gold-digger, there was no way that she could know how wealthy he really was. While it had never been a secret that Cheryl and he were well off since they lived in a big house on a multi-acre tract of land, for a while, at least, there was no way that Jolene could possibly know.

After sustaining an objection and chiding counsel to move their mud fest along, Sean realized that if Kyra arranged a date for him, he was probably safe. Kyra had a career prosecutor's jaundiced outlook on human nature. If she was arranging the date with Sergeant Jolene, she had probably vetted her about as well as the Senate Judiciary Committee vets prospective federal judges nominated by a president from the other party.

After a while, the applicant rested. Following a short recess, the other daughter had her chance to blacken the family name even further. On and on it went, until mercifully the second sister ran out of gas and rested.

Looking at the clock on the wall, Sean recessed court until after lunch, promising to announce his decision at that time.

Sean made it over to the Joe's Diner™ just in time to meet his friend and campaign consultant, Bob Griswold, for lunch. It would be mostly a social lunch, with enough business worked in to make it deductible for Bob.

Bob, like Kyra and Max, was a former student of Sean's. Bob had been a lineman for State University and, after graduation, played for several unremarkable seasons in the NFL.² On a lark, one off-season Bob took the L.S.A.T. and to his great surprise, scored in the top one percentile. Although his grades had been mediocre at State, Bob was admitted to Southern University's law school, mostly based on a really impressive interview he had with the Assistant Dean for Admissions. In the interview, Bob won the dean's confidence and impressed him with his maturity, freely admitting that his grades were the result of a lack of interest at the time. Bob's intense sincerity persuaded the dean to give him a shot, for which Bob repaid him by doing very well in school. After graduating, he went into practice with a small firm in Capitol City.

Bob had been quite content practicing law. One day, however, one of his partners decided to run in a special election to fill a vacancy created when a

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congressman died in a boating accident. Bob's partner asked him to run his campaign, which he did brilliantly. The consultant that the RNC had sent out to assist on the campaign was so impressed with Bob that after the successful election, the consulting firm offered Bob a job, which he accepted.

After spending several years in Washington, Bob came back to Southern State and opened his own political consulting firm. As things turned out, Sean was appointed to the bench in '91 on the very day that Bob sent out his announcement cards. Sean was Bob's first client. Having gone through two campaigns with Bob, they were close friends.

Sean inquired about Bob's family. Then, Bob reciprocated by inquiring about the Twins. The pleasantries over, Sean and Bob quickly got down to business.

Bob said, "Sean, this year is going to be a lot different than '92 or '94. In '92, you were the new kid on the block. You had no serious opposition from the D's because you didn't have a record to run against."

Sean realized that was true. Since Sean had been on the bench for little more than a year before the '92 general election, his opponent was a semi-retired, alcoholic lawyer, who had never impressed anyone during his many years in practice. His poor reputation, constantly red face and eyes, his somewhat slurred speech and his unruly mop of white hair scared off what little support he might have had. Besides, his opponent was running against a professor who had drafted portions of the Probate Code and was well respected throughout the state as being an expert in probate law. It was a slaughter. Even the very liberal *Bugle* endorsed Sean.

Bob continued, "In '94, Clinton had so alienated our local electorate with his wife's socialized medicine plan that there was no way a Republican could have lost an election that year, even if he was caught in bed with a dead woman **and** a live man."

Sean knew that statement was undoubtedly true. His opponent that year had been well qualified and personable. Unfortunately for his opponent, even the area around the university broke Republican. Considering how many jobs in the area were tied into the huge Southern University Medical Center, the fear of socialized medicine was not taken lightly.

Bob said, "In general, things have been going our way over the last few years. The suburbs of Capitol City, which have spilled into our county, have added over ten thousand Republican-leaning voters to the county's voting rolls since '94. That is in our favor. But, on the other side of the ledger, the local Democratic Party has been getting a lot of funding from the DNC.

They are going to make a **maximum effort** to try and stop us this time, both locally and statewide.”

“How do things look in my race?” Sean asked, with a bit of apprehension creeping into his tone. Bob opened his briefcase and, after sorting through some file folders, handed Sean a memorandum entitled, “Opposition Research—Greene, Thomas A.”

While nothing to rival Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the memorandum was gripping reading in its own way. Thomas A. Greene, unlike Sean, was a native of Southern State. Unlike Sean, Greene was a veteran of Viet Nam. Not only had Greene been a top graduate of the United States Military Academy (West Point), he had also served two tours of duty in-country, coming home after each tour with a chest full of medals.

After leaving the Army, Greene graduated near the top of his class at Harvard Law. After spending several years as a federal prosecutor, Greene joined a PI firm. After twenty years, he retired from the firm a very wealthy man, having bankrupted many a doctor and hospital along the way. Nowadays, Greene only took on cases that interested him, usually death penalty appeals cases. Apparently, Greene had success in a number of these cases, earning quite a few new trials.

Needing reassurance, Sean asked Bob, “Okay, how bad is it going to be?”

Bob replied, “Sean, he does have a few things going for him that you don’t have going for you. True, he has a military record and you don’t, but you’ve got a proven probate track record to run on and he doesn’t. As far as my researchers could find, there is no record anywhere at all in this state of his ever having been involved in any sort of probate case—not even getting a will admitted to probate. Also, there is something else that I should tell you about Greene. Lawyers who know him say that while a very competent lawyer, he is downright nasty when challenged and holds grudges against people who oppose him.”

“That’s good?” Sean asked in mock seriousness.

Not catching on to Sean’s attempt at humor, Bob pontificated, “A man like that racks up enemies for no reason. That’s real good!”

Continuing in his solemn mode, Sean asked, “Will that be enough to get me reelected?”

Bob said in his usually blunt way, “I think so! You’ve got a good record to run on. That should be enough. But, let’s not give them any help. Between now and November, try to keep your head down and don’t do anything stupid! Promise?”

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Sensing that mentioning he had a date tomorrow night would get him lectured or at least a frown of disapproval, Sean looked at his watch and indicated that it was time to return to court. After a hasty goodbye, Sean scurried back to the courthouse.

After lunch, Sean quickly replaced his suit coat with his robe and mounted the bench. After taking the bench, he sat quietly and looked over the expectant crowd. Finally, once he had the crowd's full attention, Sean intoned his best authoritative voice and said, "Guardianships are very different than other types of cases. In most other types of civil cases, there is a winner and a loser. Contested guardianship cases aren't like that. In these cases, our focus is purely on the ward and on his or her well being. From what I can tell here, unless there are some very serious attitude readjustments, neither applicant would be a good choice because of the conflict between the two applicants. If there is conflict in the family, it can't help but have an adverse impact on the ward because incapacitated or not, no one likes to see their grown children fighting."

After a pregnant pause, Sean continued, "Fortunately, under the Probate Code, my choices are not limited to just the two applicants. I have a third option. If I find it to be in the ward's best interest, I can appoint a neutral third party, who need not be a family member, to serve as guardian. At this time, I am going to leave the bench. If I do not hear back from the lawyers within an hour that the parties have reached an agreement that is satisfactory to me, I will appoint a neutral third-party guardian. This would be a thing for the parties to consider seriously because a neutral third-party guardian will expect to be paid from the ward's estate."

Exiting the courtroom in a hushed silence, Sean hurried off the bench, leaving the two sisters to stew in their own juices for a while. After he left the bench, Sean used the time to chat with the ladies in his office. Once he got back to his desk, he returned several telephone calls.

The last call that Sean returned was from the head librarian at Southern University's law school, Beth Shelton. She had called to say that she had been able to purchase an original copy of one of Professor Maitland's lesser-known works. She said that she was keeping it in her office, so Sean could see if he wanted any of it copied for his Legal History class. Being a sucker for old books, Sean indicated that he would be by to see her before his next class started.

After hanging up the telephone, Sean glanced at the mail that had come in. While most of it was junk mail, there were a few things that required his careful review. As Sean went through these items, his concentration was interrupted. Looking up, he noticed that Miriam, his loyal, if sometimes annoying, secretary-receptionist, was staring at him.

With a bit of a smirk, Miriam said, "Judge, Kim Brownlee is out in our waiting area. She asked if you could see her for a minute. I told her that you had people in the courtroom and that you had to leave for your class soon, but I'd check, even knowing full well that you're too busy to be interrupted. Should I send her away?"

Sensing that Miriam was being a bit too territorial, Sean smiled and asked that Kim be sent back to his office. By the time that Kim and Miriam reached Judge Sean Riley's office, he had shed his robe in favor of his suit coat, adjusted his tie and sprayed some breath freshener into his mouth and applied fresh cologne. Sean warmly shook Kim's hand and directed her to the sofa in his office.

Standing in the doorway, Miriam inquired, "How soon before you need to go back on the bench?"

Looking at his wristwatch, Sean replied, "Twenty minutes or so will be fine."

"I'll remember to remind you in twenty minutes," Miriam said a trifle too loudly for Sean's taste.

Sean sat in the small chair located perpendicular to the sofa. As he glanced over at Kim, he furtively peeked at her crossed legs. Kim, having a somewhat ruddy complexion, knew that black hose was the perfect color for her shapely legs to be noticed. Being too polite to embarrass the judge by acknowledging his interest in her legs, Kim made several minutes of small talk. While she was talking, Sean noticed that her reddish-brown hair was nicely accented by her pale-green suit. After the small talk ended, Kim rapidly shifted toward what was really on her mind.

Sweetly, Kim asked, "Judge, can I ask you something somewhat personal?"

Sensing a possible attempt at a *verboten* ex parte communication or something even worse, Sean replied, "Possibly."

"Judge, if I'm not being too forward, I was wondering if you had anyone to take to the Spring Fling? If you do, please forget that I asked."

Sean was in a ticklish spot with that question. Kim had obviously mustered up a good deal of social courage to ask him the question. If he declined her invitation, he risked hurting her feelings. Since he had been on

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the bench, he came to respect her as a lawyer and, now that the question had been raised, he realized that he was also fond of her as a person. He certainly did not want to hurt her feelings. Sean sensed that if he did hurt her feelings, he would probably spend all night thinking about tears coming from her big, green eyes, feeling as guilty as he could be. But, if he said that he would go with her, he might possibly be harming both of them.

Courthouses are full of nasty people, who have way too much time on their hands. If he went to the Spring Fling with Kim, by noon on Monday, half of the lawyers in the county—and all of the non-lawyers working in the courthouse—would have heard some sort of rumor that Kim Brownlee was sleeping with a judge. Even if their relationship never progressed any further than just attending the Spring Fling together, Kim could face some horrible consequences.

For instance, the next time that Kim had a contested matter before him, the opposing side could file a motion to recuse him from the case. If he didn't give in, Kim would be fair game to be grilled on the stand about her relationship with Judge Sean Riley. Sean probably wouldn't be called to testify, but it was a distinct possibility.

Conceivably, someone might file an ethics complaint against him, alleging that he was trading sexual favors for appointments and favorable rulings. Fortunately for Sean, the hearing would be private at the first level, which barring evidence of something more than a social contact would be as far as the matter went. While not likely, the possibility of an ethics complaint was another factor to consider.

Sensing that he was in the position of a law student called upon by a professor on the one day of the year that he was unprepared, Sean did what law students have done ever since the case method was adopted. Sean quickly glanced up for guidance. As he looked up, Sean saw his large, bulky planner sitting on his desk, which reminded him of tomorrow's double blind date. This was proof positive of the old trial lawyer axiom, "It's better to be lucky than smart."

Looking into Kim's eyes, which by now appeared as green as the ocean on a warm summer day, Sean calmly told her that his friend, Kyra Townsend, had fixed him up with a date just yesterday. Now, this was true. He just didn't say that the date was for tomorrow evening. Speaking from the heart, Sean said, "Kim, thank you for being so kind as to ask me to go with you. I really do appreciate your concern for me."

Whatever doubts Sean might have had about his feelings for Kim were dispelled when he realized that he had been holding her hands in his when

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he declined. Seconds later, the voice of Miriam announced that the lawyers had reached an agreement, so Sean was needed in the courtroom. As he walked Kim toward the door of his office and into the custody of Miriam, who seemed to be very eager to escort Kim away, Kim suddenly turned and hugged him tightly, saying softly so that only Sean could hear, "Take care of yourself. If you ever need anything, please feel free to call me."

As Sean quickly removed his suit coat and put his robe back on, he realized that his life, miserable as it had been since Cheryl died, had suddenly become quite complicated. As he walked by Miriam's desk on his way to the bench, Sean felt a decided chill.

On the bench, he let the lawyers read their settlement into the record and asked them to send a proposed order to him tomorrow. After that, Sean thanked the lawyers for their efforts, congratulated the applicants on their wisdom and maturity in putting their differences aside for the ward's benefit and adjourned court for the day.

As Sean drove the few short blocks from the courthouse to the campus, a disquieting thought entered his mind. What if his date with Sergeant Jolene didn't pan out? What would he do about Kim? If he didn't go to the Spring Fling, whatever he said afterwards would still make him look like a liar, which was a disquieting thought in and of itself. What bothered Sean even more was the realization that he probably wouldn't be able to stop himself from calling Kim if tomorrow night didn't work out. Sean suspected that Kim had broken down his defenses and he was emotionally vulnerable around her. Evidently, she had his number.

Before Sean was able to upset himself any more, he turned into the law school parking lot, foolishly thinking that he would be safe there.

After checking the mail in his faculty mailbox, Sean went over to the library to visit Beth Shelton. When he knocked on her office door, he was astonished by what he saw inside her office. Beth, who always seemed to have bought her clothes at a second-hand shop and reportedly eschewed all cosmetics more expensive than Ivory Soap™, looked stunning.

Beth was wearing a flowing, gold dress that nicely accented her figure and features. Beth's dark hair, which he had never seen her wear in any way other than a bun, was long, lustrous and had a nice wave in it. Her red lipstick contrasted very favorably with her fair skin and dark hair. Her makeup made her look younger than her forty-four years.

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Rising, Beth asked Sean to sit in one of her two guest chairs. Sitting next to him, she gently handed Sean the book that they had discussed earlier. As she handed him Professor Maitland's treatise, he noticed that her usually short and unpolished fingernails were long and red.

As he examined the book, Beth interrupted him and offered to point out something of interest in this obscure, old edition. When she leaned toward him, Sean was doubly surprised. First, he was pleasantly surprised by the very nice scent that she was wearing. And, as she pointed out several interesting features in the book, he noticed two fleshy features peeking out from the top of her dress. Beth, who in all of the years he had known her had never displayed any signs of sexuality, was oozing with it today.

After agreeing to let Sean keep the book in his faculty office for a week, Beth flashed her pearly whites at him and asked if he had received his invitation to the Spring Fling in the mail. Seeing what was coming next, Sean just smiled as Beth said, "I was wondering if you were planning on attending the Spring Fling."

Having had a good chance earlier to develop his story, Sean decided to stick with it. Looking Beth in the eyes, he told her the same thing that he had told Kim less than two hours before. Looking at his watch, Sean pointed out that he was due in class and took his leave. As he left, Beth, with a sexy tone said, "Judge, I enjoyed visiting with you. Feel free to come back whenever you need anything."

Smiling, Sean waved as he left her office. He could not help but notice that the now standing Beth had very nice legs uncovered by hose. That was information Sean really didn't need right then. Knowing that his Legal History class was an all-male refuge, Sean headed for its safety.

On Friday morning, Sean shaved more closely and attentively than he had in years. After splashing on several extra doses of after shave and combing and spraying his hair down real well, he ventured into his closet. Therein a problem rapidly developed because he couldn't decide if he should wear a gray or a blue suit. After a fruitless five-minute internal debate, Sean decided to do what Bob always told him to do on the campaign trail, namely, "When in doubt, always go for the red, white and blue." So, a few minutes later, attired in a blue suit fresh from the cleaner's bag and not yet covered in cat hair, a crisply starched, custom-made, white shirt, a solid red silk necktie, a relatively inexpensive Rolex and gold cuff links, Sean left to meet the world.

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As he walked by the living room sofa, Law stretched and Equity rolled over. Sean asked both of them, “If tonight doesn’t work out, will one of you ladies go with me to the Spring Fling?” Not surprisingly, there were no volunteers.

This Friday morning, like all the rest of the Fridays since he had gone on the bench, Sean went to the county mental hospital to hear mental health civil commitment cases. Unlike his usual Fridays, today none of the patients wanted to come to court, all of them having waived their right to hearing. Sean thought that might be just as well since, with the way the last two days had been for him, the female patients would probably ask him if he had plans for the Spring Fling.

After grabbing a quick lunch, Sean called the office and told Miriam that he was going to duck into his faculty office for a while. So, if anyone needed him, they should call him there. After spending a peaceful two hours perusing the Maitland book, Sean emailed a request to Beth to have one small chapter copied for him and left in his mail slot.

Hoping to avoid Beth, he darted into the law library and left the book in the care of a junior law librarian. Then, Sean reluctantly left to go back to his chambers and prepare for his blind date.

As Sean drove back downtown from campus, he realized that if things didn’t work out on tonight’s date, he had really painted himself into a corner. If Sergeant Jolene wouldn’t go with him to the Spring Fling, he would have Kim Brownlee and Beth Shelton angry with him. Since he liked both of them, he would feel their displeasure acutely. Trying to think positively, he told himself that everything would work out just fine.

At 1720 hours, Sean entered his private bathroom and ran an electric razor over his face for the second time since he had returned from campus. After checking his once naturally sandy blonde hair to see if a stray hair had wandered out of place, he applied a generous helping of aftershave to his face. Glancing at his watch, he knew it was time to leave.

As Sean walked by Miriam’s now empty desk, he recalled that she had been very maternal all afternoon. He guessed that she knew he had a date—probably from eavesdropping on his conversation with Kyra—and was very scared. Shutting off the lights in his chambers, Sean left bravely to face his doom.

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Sean arrived at The Palm Tree at exactly 1740 hours. Two minutes later, having reserved a table for four people at six, he took a seat at the bar near the door. As he sipped his Perrier™ very slowly, he felt his pulse begin to race while, at the same time, his stomach began to twist into knots more convoluted than any he had learned in the Boy Scouts.

At 1748 hours, Max appeared. After greeting Max warmly, Sean asked the lady at the podium to seat Max and him at their table. Max still sported the same short haircut that he had worn as an infantry officer in the Corps. Max looked just as trim and fit as ever. Sean guessed that if he had to, Max could probably still fit in his first dress blues.

By 1755 hours, Sean's nerves were getting to him. Hoping to calm himself, Sean asked Max as off handily as he could, "Have you met my date?"

Max replied in the negative. Sean felt his level of tension rise to an even higher level. Sensing that Sean was jumpy, Max calmed him down by telling him that Kyra must have really used her considerable powers of eloquence on Jolene since the two had gone shopping on both Wednesday and Thursday nights. When Max mentioned that Kyra had returned home empty handed both nights, Max remarked that had been a first for Kyra.

At 1758 hours, Sean instinctively checked the other doors to The Palm Tree, partially to see if Kyra and Sergeant Jolene Scruggs had entered from another door, but mostly to make sure that he had a ready escape path if one was needed.

At exactly 1800 hours, the door opened and a gaggle of people entered The Palm Tree all at once. Standing, Max and Sean both saw Kyra's bobbing blonde mane from across the room. Seeing them, Kyra waved and then led a small parade of people heading for the tables. Since the others were all behind Kyra, the men in the group blocked any view of the approaching women. Feeling his internal organs getting ready to do cartwheels in his body cavity, Sean braced himself.

As Kyra neared their table, she turned to let her companion arrive at the table first. When Sean saw Jolene standing there in the flesh, two thoughts burst into his consciousness all mixed together. His left brain signaled him, **DANGER! DANGER! TOO YOUNG!** At the same time, his right brain signaled, **RESISTANCE IS FUTILE! SURRENDER NOW!**

Fortunately for Sean, the two competing streams of thought cancelled themselves out, leaving him standing there, appearing quite handsome and dapper in Jolene's eyes.

Jolene correctly guessed Sean to be fifty years old, 6'2" or so and reasonably trim. His face was classically handsome. Jolene noticed favorably that Sean had the upper body of a weight lifter. His sandy blonde hair nicely complimented his green eyes. His suit was custom tailored. What impressed her the most about Sean was his aura of kindly strength. Jolene had a feeling that Sean was a decent man with a strong, but warm character.

Kyra handled the introductions. With her most mellifluous tone of voice, Kyra said, "Sean, I'd like you to meet Sergeant Jolene Scruggs."

Not being entirely sure as to what he should do now, Sean lightly shook her hand and told her that he was pleased to make her acquaintance.

When Kyra introduced Sean to Jolene, her response was a simple nod of the head and a "Judge, how you?"

After they took their places at the table, before the wait staff appeared, Jolene looked at Kyra and asked, "Is this the same judge you told me about? He's a lot younger than what I expected!"

Before Kyra could say anything in reply, Sean said that Kyra's description of Jolene was equally defective since Jolene was far lovelier than what Kyra had described to him. Before Jolene could tell Sean that he was full of something brown and malodorous, the waiter appeared. While the ladies were debating their orders, Sean's brain did some rapid, adrenalin-driven calculations. Based on his observation, he guessed that she was 5'10" barefoot.³ Jolene appeared to have a nice figure, but it was obscured by her dress.

Jolene looked perfectly color coordinated. Her royal-blue dress, which was set off with a lighter blue scarf that had some kind of gold geometric pattern on it, perfectly accented her stunningly beautiful blue eyes. Jolene's face was delicately carved. Her red lips were full and inviting. She was wearing just enough makeup to add color to her cheeks, but not enough to obscure her freckles. The scent that Jolene wore reminded Sean of a warm spring day. Overall, she was stunningly beautiful. The only flaw in her otherwise perfect appearance was her chocolate-brown hair, which while lovely, was teased and sprayed into submission. While her hairstyle screamed out "COUNTRY GIRL!" the rest of her was put together with great skill and taste.⁴

After Sean ordered the poached salmon, the conversation picked up again. Jolene lobbed her first shot right at Sean by asking, "Are you one of those damn cop-hatin' liberal judges that have screwed up this country so bad?"

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At this, Kyra intervened, “Say what you will about cop-hatin’ judges, but Sean isn’t one of them. Sean, tell Jolene about how you nearly gave Professor Rodriguez the vapors.”

Relaxing just a bit, Sean told the story about how the buzz in the faculty lounge one day a few years ago had been about allegations of police brutality in a case in another county, where two alleged cop killers had arrived at the county jail with black eyes and bruises. Suit had been filed against the cops, their agency and the city that employed them. Professor Rodriguez had waxed on and on about what “low life” law enforcement people were in general. Finally, she had blurted out, as far as she could tell, the only reason that most of them went into law enforcement was because it offered great opportunities for promiscuous sex, first crack at the best illegal drugs and great power over other people. At this, Sean had sweetly asked her, “Isabel, I’m confused. Are you talking about law enforcement or law professors?” The laughter in the faculty lounge shut her up. Professor Rodriguez avoided Sean like the plague for several months after that, which was probably much better for the both of them.

After their salads arrived, Jolene struck again, asking, “What are you, a Catholic Yankee, doin’ here?”

Sean replied sweetly, “If you check your history books, you will see that during the War Between the States, a number of Yankees and a number of Catholics held very high positions in the Confederacy.”

“Like who?” Jolene asked out of genuine curiosity.

After telling Jolene abbreviated versions of the stories of the several northern-born men who had handled the business affairs of the Confederacy in Europe, he told her at greater length about Catholic Dick Dowling, who had recaptured Galveston Bay from the federal blockaders. Then, he closed his case by telling her in great detail about one of America’s greatest naval heroes, Admiral Raphael Semmes, CSN. Ending with a rhetorical flourish, Sean rested his case, sure of victory.

Mercifully, at this time the entrees arrived. Once Kyra had eaten a few bites, she asked, “Sean, remember teachin’ our first class?”

Since he was too tense to eat much, Sean relished the chance to regale another listener with his experiences on his first day teaching in law school. Looking into Jolene’s lovely blue eyes, Sean told the story of how, on his first day in his first class—first-year Civil Procedure—he had recounted the facts of an obscure case, in which an innocent victim of federal governmental incompetence had her case barred from recovery because of the vagaries of the federal Tort Claims Act. When he had asked who thought

the decision was unjust, Max, who had had plenty of experience with mindless bureaucracy in the Corps, volunteered.

When he then had asked who thought the decision was just, Kyra raised her hand. So, telling the class that a good lawyer should be able to advocate either side of an issue, he directed them to argue the positions opposite to what their personal feelings were. After the class ended, their classroom argument continued for days and days in the student lounge, much to the amusement of their classmates and the professors and staff, who caught bits and pieces of it.

By the end of the semester, it seemed like everyone in the building, except those two, knew that they were destined to be together—either in marriage or in a double homicide—since they were always arguing about something. As Sean finished his story, he felt Kyra’s foot nudge his leg under the table. He smiled back at her to indicate that her message had been received loud and clear.

Feeling brave, Sean asked, “Who finally won that argument?”

Kyra just smiled. After a moment, Max grudgingly said, “Kyra did, of course!” Max, unlike many men his age, had learned that the best aphrodisiac ever invented was the phrase, “Yes, dear!”

A few minutes later, when the waiter appeared, Max motioned for the check. After Sean made the obligatory move to pay the check, Max paid and indicated that they had better run off to rescue Kyra’s mother from their children.

After Kyra and Max had left, neither Jolene nor Sean said anything for several minutes. Eventually, Sean broke the ice by asking, “Did I hold up well during my interrogation?”

After pausing for what seemed like several eons to Sean, Jolene replied simply, “Very well. You give good answers.”

Sean retorted, “You ask good questions.”

After another long pause, Jolene very softly asked Sean, “Am I too young for you?”

He replied, “That all depends on whether I’m too old for you.”

She said, “No seriously, am I too young for you?”

He replied, “When a man reaches my age, the age of the opposite sex becomes largely irrelevant. I don’t have a problem dating you, unless your mind being seen with a man old enough to be your father.”

Jolene smiled and said that Sean looked very young for his age.

With that issue off of the table, Jolene asked Sean for a ride home, letting slip how she and Kyra had ridden into downtown together this morning.

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On the ride to Jolene's place, they were both quiet. As he pulled up into her driveway, Jolene asked him if he would like to come in for a second. Sensing danger, Sean tried to talk his way out of going into her house. Jolene overruled him by simply and softly saying, "I need to show you something."

Once they entered Jolene's house, she asked him to wait by the door. A few seconds later, Jolene returned with what looked like a photocopy of an invitation to the Spring Fling. Jolene said, "Kyra told me that you would either be too shy or too stressed out to remember to ask me about this, so she made me swear on a stack of Bibles that I shouldn't let you get away without tellin' you that I would be honored to be your companion, if that is your heart's desire."

"Indeed, it would be my heart's desire," he replied.

Jolene said, "Thank you, kind Sir. This simple, country girl will try to make you the most envied man there."

Not wanting to push his luck, Sean thought, but did not say, that if Quasimodo was there with Jolene, every man at the party would think that Quasimodo was in fact very lucky. After exchanging telephone, pager and cell phone numbers, as well as email and snail mail addresses, Sean was about to leave when reality hit him. "Jolene, the Spring Fling is in early May, and this is only the end of March. Could I see you before then?"

Being prepared, Jolene just happened to have the entertainment section of the *Bugle* available in her purse. After reviewing it, Sean suggested that they see a screening of a colorized version of *Casablanca* next Saturday afternoon on campus, and then take it from there. As he paused to leave, Jolene kissed him tenderly on the cheek, hugged him softly and told him that he had made tonight very easy for her. Not having the slightest idea what she was talking about, Sean smiled and told her how much he was looking forward to their next visit.

About the time that Sean fired up his F-150, Kyra and Jolene were on the phone. Kyra spent quite a bit of time telling Jolene that Sean was really as nice and gentlemanly as he seemed. After that, she reassured Jolene that she had impressed Sean, notwithstanding the fact that she was bare legged thanks to a last minute snag in her pantyhose. Jolene almost sounded like she believed Kyra's assurances that Sean didn't think of her as a dumb cop and a white-trash country girl.

About the time that Kyra and Jolene finally hung up their telephones, as Law meowed and Equity tried to block his view of his CRT, Sean ordered two sets of flowers online. The red roses were to be delivered to Jolene's

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office at the sheriff's department. The note that was to accompany the roses said simply, "Looking forward to our next meeting. Sean." The dozen white carnations were to be delivered to Kyra at the DA's office with a simple note that said, "Thank you for being my friend. S.R."

Next, Sean found the invitation to the Spring Fling and wrote a check to pay for two people, completed the reply card, inserted the check and card into the envelope and stamped the envelope. He then put the envelope into his bulky black calendar, so he would be sure to see it and remember to mail it. A few minutes later, two rather tired and irritated cats purred an already mellow Sean into his first peaceful, deep sleep in months.

Jolene also retired. But, she did not sleep as easily or as deeply as Sean since a bad memory kept tormenting her.

Chapter Twelve

As Jo admired Sarah's engagement ring, Sarah said, "We bought it the Monday after y'all got hitched." Jo noticed that the stone was the same size as hers, but thought that it looked smaller on Sarah's larger hand.

Somehow, despite the large meal Sean and Jo had eaten, they managed to find room for the peach cobbler that Sarah offered them. As they ate, Justice Brown said, "While y'all were off on your honeymoon, I was real busy. The Monday after the weddin', I actually took a half-day off to shop for a ring with Sarah. That afternoon, I went back to chambers and turned in my resignation to the Chief Justice. The effective date will be September 1st, which will give me thirty-two years to the day on the bench."

Jo asked, "Justice Brown, what are you gonna do after you retire?"

Grinning, he said, "Probably, I'm gonna spend a lot of time tellin' people to call me *Sam*."

After all four of them laughed, Sam Brown continued, "Jo, that was a fair question. I'm plannin' on doin' what I'd originally wanted to do when I was a law student. I want to help people solve their problems."

Sean said, "You certainly helped people your entire professional life."

Sam continued, "Lawyers were respected in the small town that I grew up in. It's true that most of them made more money than the average person and got to dress up nice. But, that wasn't why they were respected. Forty years ago, lawyers always seemed to have the time to listen to people's problems. If they could help, they would. If the troubled person needed to be referred to someone else—maybe a preacher or an accountant—they'd make the referral. But, if they couldn't do anythin', they'd at least listen and offer their sympathy, if nothin' else. That's why they were respected. They put people first and money second. Unfortunately, I lived a different life than that of a small-town lawyer."

"What happened?" Jo asked.

Sam continued, with a wry smile, "Like most things in life, there was a lady involved."

After the four of them shared a laugh, Sam went on explaining, "Toward the end of my second year of law school, I met an undergraduate lady at S.U. Since I had started law school so young, she and I were the same age. We really hit it off. The idea crossed my mind about marriage. Then, it dawned on me that if I followed my plan of hangin' up a shingle, I wouldn't have anythin' to offer her. So, when the District Attorney in my home county offered me a job with his small office, I jumped at the offer. My plan

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was to stay there long enough to save up some money to tide us over when I finally hung up a shingle. Unfortunately, about that time, the governor asked me to accept a district court bench. You know the rest.”

Sean asked, “Why are you retiring now?”

Sam replied, “Sean, two things happened at once to point me in that direction. First thing was at the beginnin’ of the year, the retirement people sent me one of their computer generated mailin’s that showed me how much money I’d get if I retired at age sixty. ’Cause I’ve been on the bench since I was twenty-eight, when I retire, I’ll make about as much as I do right now. So, from a purely economic standpoint, I’m just about workin’ for free. That makes no sense to me.”

Jo, Sarah and Sean all agreed with Sam on that point.

“The other thing was meetin’ Sarah,” claimed Sam. “She and I really enjoy each other’s company. I’d rather not have to get up every mornin’ and drive to Capitol City, when she’s right here. So, if I open a law office here in Smithville, I can be closer to her.”

Turning to Sean, Sam asked, “Sean, what are your career plans?”

Sean, looking a mite confused, said simply, “Getting reelected.”

Sam laughed and said, “Are you interested in becomin’ an appellate judge?”

Sean indicated that he’d never thought about the matter one way or another. Then, he asked, “Why do you ask?”

Sam indicated, “Sean, back when I was a trial judge, trials were slow things. Most trial judges heard pleas and motions in the mornin’ and often didn’t start the trials ’til after lunch. Trial judges weren’t under the pressures that they are now. Nowadays, with the big dockets that trial judges face, they have to act fast to keep dockets movin’. For instance, there’s a district court judge in Queen City, who tried over one hundred felony jury trials last year. Can you imagine the strain that poor man is under day in and day out? Bein’ under that much pressure is a young person’s game. You’re still pretty young, Sean. But, someday you won’t be. You should plan to get out while you’re still doin’ a good job. Nuthin’ makes the legal system look bad as much as a trial judge who hung on to the job too long.”

Sean said, “I understand very well. Why did you mention becoming an appellate judge?”

Sam said, “I had a couple of reasons. Appellate judges have less stress in their lives than trial judges do. I figured that Jo might appreciate seein’ a bit more of you, particularly in a good mood, than she would if you stay a trial judge. My other reason is that I think you’d be a good appellate judge.”

Sean's reply was a simple, "Thank you."

Sam continued, "In a few days, there's gonna be an appellate bench comin' up. Want me to put in a good word with the governor? Knowin' how slowly these things move, I doubt that he'd name anyone 'til after the November general election."

Sean looked at Jo for guidance. Jo, not being cursed with an overly introspective mind, nodded her head. Sean said, "I doubt that the governor even remembers meeting me. Feel free to pass on my name, for what it's worth."

After some small talk, Sam obtained permission from the ladies to take Sean outside for a short walk. As they walked in the balmy, late summer evening, Sam said, "When Sarah and I discussed my settin' up a law practice, we agreed that I need to have a younger lawyer to work with me. You know, I haven't tried a case as a lawyer in over thirty years. I suspect that once I send my announcements out, I'll have more business than I can say grace over. At your weddin' reception, I talked to a young lawyer, who said that he's tried cases in front of you. What do you think of Tom Ritter?"

Sean said, "He's got a great reputation. First time he was in my court, he was beaten up pretty badly by a lawyer, who knew the tricks of mental health law better than he did. Since then, he's been back in my court many times. He's done a real fine job those times. I think that he's got a good grasp of civil practice. I think you'd be real happy with him."

Sam smiled and said, "That settles it for me. If you think that he's good, that's good enough for me. I'll call him at home tomorrow and offer him a partnership. Between September 1st and when he can leave the county, I'll be a solo practitioner. Look for an announcement of our new firm sometime in mid-September. I've got an option on some office space in Smithville. The space will hold two lawyers real easy. There'd be room for a third lawyer if you decide to retire someday."

Sean just smiled.

As Sean and Jo made the short drive home, Jo asked, "Precious, did you say nice things about Tom Ritter?"

Sean, being curious, wanted to know, "Why do you ask?"

"When you and Sam were walkin', Sarah guessed that's why Sam took you outside."

Laughing, Sean said, "I told the truth. He's a fine lawyer. What else did Sarah say?"

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“She said that you’d be a good successor to Sam.”

Sean asked, “What else were you two up to?”

Jo replied, “She asked if she had embarrassed you too much that night she hugged you at the resort.”

“What did you say?” Sean asked.

“I told her that I was workin’ real hard to get you over bein’ quite so easily embarrassed. I told her that livin’ with me, you’re gettin’ a chance to stop bein’ so stuffy.”

Sean said, “We’re home. Just in time, I think!”

As Jo stepped off of the elevator with Sean at the Horizon Club, she immediately noticed the very large sign in the middle of the lobby that read:

JUDGE RILEY RECEPTION
Main Dining Room
August 30, 2000
5 – 7 pm

The sign was surrounded by two large clusters of red, white and blue balloons. As Jo and Sean walked into the room, Sean said, “If you can’t read someone’s name tag, squeeze my hand, so I can introduce the guest to you.”

As soon as Sean was done speaking, Bob and Roxanne Griswold appeared, warmly greeting Jo and Sean. After the greetings were over, Bob said, “Sean, I hope that you’re in good voice today. We’ve received over one hundred RSVPs in the mail as of noon. So, you can probably expect another hundred to show up with checks in hand.”

As Bob walked Jo and Sean to the table at the entrance to the room, which was manned by two very pretty young ladies, Jo asked Sean, “Do you really know two hundred lawyers by name?”

Sean replied, “By face, I know a lot more than that. The problem is sometimes I have trouble putting the name and face together. That’s why we give them very nice, large name tags. Unfortunately, that doesn’t always solve the problem. Last time I ran, I made a complete fool of myself at my fundraiser. A lawyer showed up with a very pretty, little redhead. I made the mistake of assuming that his lady was his wife, who I knew was a very pretty, little redhead. It turned out that the lady he was with was the reason

that he was getting divorced. I guess that he has a thing for pretty, little redheads. I hope I've learned from that experience."

Jo said, "Should I ask who the two sweet, young things were at the reception table?"

"Beautiful, nowadays, most Political Science professors require that their students put in some time getting involved in actual politics. I'm sure that those young ladies are students fulfilling their course requirement."

Being playful, Jo asked, "Seein' them, are you sorry that you rushed into marriage like you did?"

Sean, more alert than usual, said, "No! The only mistake I made was waiting so long. I should have proposed on our blind date. Besides, those sweet, young things are about the age of my daughters. A wise man never gets involved with a woman the same age as any of his daughters. Doing that tends to make holidays a little too exciting."

As Sean finished speaking, Roxanne appeared and placed very large, plastic-encased name tags on their lapels. No sooner had she finished, when the elevator dinged in the distance as the first of the guests started to arrive.

Jo, being a stranger to the world of day-to-day politics, found the fundraiser to be fascinating in a strange way. It seemed to her, *if* all the lawyers who spoke to them were telling the truth—something that she very much doubted—Sean must have at least one hundred and fifty close friends that he had never told her about.

As they greeted their guests, Jo noticed that all of the conversations seemed to share the same theme. Either the speaker was telling Sean that it was a darned shame someone was running against him, that he needn't worry because everyone loved him or that he was doing a great job and shouldn't worry about the election.

Jo noticed that she seemed to have caught the eye of most of the male lawyers. The female lawyers also gave her the eye, but much more critically. Since Jo was wearing a conservative, navy-blue suit with an expensive white blouse, a small string of pearls, moderate black heels and nude hose, she knew that none of the women lawyers could find fault with her attire. Jo was wearing her hair up, which accented her face and blue eyes.

Jo was surprised by how many of the guests at the fundraiser had seen her on television. She managed to entertain a number of the guests by telling them a bit about how reporters behave when off camera. She was a big hit with both sexes.

Jo's biggest surprise of the evening came later, when Kim and Covey appeared near the end of the reception. Kim told Jo that she and Covey had

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gone out of state the week before and had gotten married. Jo handled the situation well, chatting with Kim for a few minutes before wishing her the best. Covey looked a bit sheepish when his time to speak to Jo came. Jo took his hand and wished them both the best. Then, Kim and Covey moved on, their places in the line being replaced by other well-wishers. (Jo found out later that their check, drawn on a new checking account with the names Kimberly and Covington McReynolds III, was in the maximum allowable amount of \$5,000.00.)

On the ride home that evening, Jo asked Sean about why people gave money to judicial candidates. Sean told her that originally he thought the idea of taking money from lawyers smelled a bit funny. He told her that he had gotten over his initial revulsion after he figured out that big-time lawyers all gave about the same to all the candidates—incumbent judges and their challengers. So, it sort of cancelled itself out. Sean said that what had pleasantly surprised him was the large numbers of lawyer donors, who might only appear once a year in his court on something uncontested. They were doing it out of public spiritedness and a chance to hobnob with all of their lawyer friends.

As they drove along, Sean wondered if he should say anything to Jo about Covey and Kim. Fortunately, just as Sean was caught in the midst of indecision, Jo said, “I’ll bet that Covey and Kim went out of state to get married to avoid hassles with his mother. I guess that he learned from our engagement that he shouldn’t give her time to react.”

Sean asked, “Think she and Kim will hit it off?”

Jo surprised Sean when she said, “I doubt it very seriously. From what I’ve heard about Kim, she’s really scrappy—in a nice, polite way. Sean, did you know that she was an Army nurse before she went to law school? In my experience, women with military nursin’ experience tend to handle pressure pretty well and don’t take kindly to bein’ bossed around.”

Remembering that Jo’s mother had been a Navy nurse, Sean smiled at Jo.

Then, Jo added, “Kim’s a JAG major in the reserves. From what she told me, she has a good shot at changin’ the color of her oak leaves in the next few months.”

Sean said that he never knew that about Kim. Although Sean thought the matter was closed, Jo added, after a minute’s silence, “Precious, I was still in my twenties when Covey and I faced his mother. Kim’s got to be a decade older and a lot more mature and sure of her place in the world. I doubt that Mrs. McReynolds will get to her like she got to me.”

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As soon as they got home, Jo led Sean into the bedroom. Sean knew exactly what she wanted and gave it to her. Afterward, Jo held Sean very close to her and whispered in his ear several times, “I love you.”

Sean held her tightly and told her that he loved her, too. If Law and Equity hadn’t demanded that their food bowl be restocked right then, Jo and Sean would have just drifted off to sleep in each other’s arms. When they finally turned in for the night, both slept very well.

The main parking lot of the Ransom County Fairground was starting to fill up when Jo and Sean arrived for the big September 4th Labor Day Campaign Rally. Since the morning was almost over when they arrived, Sean and Jo were dressed for the heat, knowing that the rally would be outside. As they walked from the parking lot to the reception area where they would sign in, Sean said, “Labor Day has traditionally always been the start of the *official* campaign season for the two parties. For many years, we have always had our rally at the fairgrounds. The opposition has its rally in the central city. Both sides battle for better media coverage. My guess is that we are going to win the battle of the rallies this year because we are going to have the governor and one senator at ours.”

As soon as they had checked in and received their name tags, Roxanne Griswold appeared and greeted them both warmly. A moment later, Bob appeared. After explaining the schedule to Sean, he told them to grab some barbeque before the line got too long and then to work the crowd. As Bob and Roxanne were about to greet someone else, Bob turned and asked Jo if he could take Sean aside for a second.

When they were by themselves, Bob said, “Sean, I sent you an email just before I left home this morning. The governor’s office called me earlier today and asked if you would be interested in the opening on the Supreme Court. Are you interested?”

Sean said, “I hadn’t really thought about it.”

Bob replied, “They’re interested in you. My email tells you what to do, which is basically to email a letter along with your biography to the appointments secretary. I don’t know what you did, but they called me, which has got to be a good sign.”

A few minutes later, Sean whispered to Jo what Bob had said as they worked their way through the food line. Jo smiled and said, “I’ll give you one guess who suggested your name.” They both laughed.

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The part of the rally before the speeches was a lot of fun. Jo was surprised at how easily her usual shy and self-effacing husband slipped into the role of politician. She smiled at the thought that Sean was a lot like her, in that both of them easily adapted to their surroundings. Jo noticed that Sean, who normally found being with people to be a drain on his energy, seemed to draw strength and energy from the many well-wishers that he spoke with at the rally. She couldn't help but be impressed with how Sean was pumped up and ready for reelection. Jo was sure that the festive surroundings, the music, the smell of the excellent barbeque and the prevailing red, white and blue color scheme had worked their spell on Sean, just as they had on her. She was also energized.

At precisely 1345 hours, as it was scheduled, the master of ceremonies requested that the candidates and their companions go to the side door of one of the buildings, off a way from the main pavilion of the fairgrounds. Once they were in the building, the candidates were given the numbers of their seats on the big stage. After they were numbered, the candidates and their companions went through a receiving line to meet the guests of honor—the senator and the governor.

Since Sean and the senator didn't know each other, Sean and Jo just exchanged the usual remarks with the senator and his wife. When they got to the governor and first lady, they were very pleasantly surprised. The governor greeted Sean very warmly and told Sean that he had heard good things about him from a number of different people, including the dean of the S.U. law school. The governor knew enough about Sean's biography to convince Sean that he was definitely under consideration for the S.C. opening. The first lady surprised Jo when she greeted her by her law enforcement rank. She knew enough of Jo's background to impress Jo. When the first lady quoted the sheriff, saying that he had mentioned she was on her way to higher positions, Jo was pleasantly surprised.

After the candidates and their companions had completed their treks through the receiving line, the candidates were led out the door to their seats on the stage. The companions of the candidates were led to their reserved seats at the front of the crowd. Jo had guessed correctly that the companions of the candidates—wives mostly, but certainly not entirely—were going to be seated up front. Obviously, they would know when to cheer and would cheer loudly. But, Jo also deduced that the companions acted as a shield for the people on stage since, if there was anyone in the audience intent on causing harm, they would be another ten to fifteen feet further back from the

stage than they were in the first row. (Jo knew that, at distance, very few people could hit much of anything with a handgun.)

The crowd was lucky that afternoon. Both of their illustrious speakers were committed to fly to other parts of the state after their speeches were over at the fairgrounds, so they gave short speeches. At the end of the program, each and every one of the local candidates on the upcoming November ballot was introduced. Jo was very proud and happy when Sean got a big cheer. Sean suspected that he got the big cheer because his name was the last one of the candidates, but didn't say anything like that to Jo, who was beaming with pride.

After the program ended, Sean was glad to be back with Jo. She was very happy to see him, planting a big, wet kiss on his cheek as soon as he was within range. Sadly, their embrace was interrupted by a voice coming from behind Sean. Turning to the sound of the voice, Sean said, "Jo, may I introduce our illustrious County Chairman, Bill Morrow."

As he shook her hand, Jo noticed that Bill's eyes kept darting back to her chest. Although most women would find Bill's handsome, square face offset by dark, earnest eyes; his dark hair; his tall, athletic physique; and his toothy smile attractive, Jo did not. He struck her as very insincere and a born backstabber.

Sean and Bill talked for several minutes about Bill's plans for the upcoming campaign. Bill went on and on about the great television ad that the county party was going to prepare for wall-to-wall advertising during the last ten days before the election. When Bill turned to Jo and said that after talking to her, maybe he should revise the ad format to allow camera time for judicial spouses, Jo wanted to gag. But, in spite of her revulsion, she said, "Bill, that would be very nice. But, I think that the voters would probably want to see the judges, not their families."

Feigning a reluctant retreat, Bill agreed with Jo. Then, Bill surprised Jo when he asked, "Jo, have you ever considered running for office? You have a great presence. The voters would take to you very readily. You ought to think about it for 2002."

Jo replied, "I'm flattered that you'd even think about me runnin' for office. I'm not a lawyer, so what could I run for?"

Bill, sensing that he was making some progress, said, without hesitation, "Ransom County is going to pick up one or two seats when the Leg redistricts next time. You'd love being a legislator."

Jo, being intrigued with the idea, said, "I'd have to quit the department, wouldn't I?"

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Morrow, knowing that Jo had caught the bug, said, "I'm not a lawyer, but I don't think so. State law doesn't let governmental agencies fire, demote or reassign employees for service in the Leg. Besides, by then, wouldn't you be vested in the pension plan? If you did leave the department, I'm sure that you could find some other business venture to keep you occupied. Or, you could divide your time between being a homemaker and a legislator. Think about it."

After exchanging a few further pleasantries, Bill departed. Looking at his watch, Sean said to Jo, "I guess that we'd better be leaving. I've got to get ready for class tonight."

As they rode home, Jo asked, "Precious, do you think that Bill was serious?"

Sean said, "Bill is always serious about politics. He eats, sleeps and drinks politics."

Jo inquired further, "If I ran, would I have to leave the department?"

Sean replied, "I have no idea. Why don't you wait until after the Leg completes its redistricting plan next year? If it looks like a seat might be available, talk to the sheriff. In the meantime, you can get your name and face out before the public by working with me on my campaign. After the election, you ought to get involved in a Republican club."

Sensing that Jo was intrigued, Sean decided to change the subject. "Beautiful, what did you think of the rally?"

Jo answered, "Precious, I had a good time. I was really impressed with the energy and enthusiasm of the crowd. The senator and the governor both gave really good speeches. The lady from the Bush campaign was really good, too. But, the best part of the rally was when you were introduced. I got a lump in my throat when I heard everyone cheerin' as your name was called out. I was so proud."

A few second later, Sean's F-150 was at the gate to their home. As they pulled up the driveway, Jo asked Sean if it would be okay with him if she planted flowers alongside their driveway and some trees by the stone fence that separated their property from County 191. Sean agreed that planting flowers and trees there would be a nice touch.

When they entered the house, Sean quickly showered, changed clothes and headed off to class. Sean never liked making the law students go to class on a legal holiday. But, because law school classes had started the week before, the schedule said there would be classes on Labor Day. So, law students had to labor on Labor Day while everyone else got the day off.

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As Jo and Sean hurried to his truck in the late afternoon sun on a very hot Wednesday, September 6th, Sean said, “I hope this evening with Professor Rodriguez and her husband, Dr. Rodriguez, the Chemistry Professor, won’t turn out to be a dud. I was shocked when she extended the invitation at the reception. When I saw her at the beginning of the new semester, I’d hoped that she’d forgotten all about it. I guess not. I have no idea what to expect.”

Jo asked, “Precious, what’s she like?”

Sean replied, “She’s very passionate. I don’t know much about him. I guess that we’ll just play it by ear.”

La Casa Rodriguez was in a very nice, tree-lined area of University Acres, located near the campus. As soon as Jo and Sean rang the bell, the door opened and they were greeted very warmly by the Dr. and Professor Rodriguez. Soon, Sean’s misgivings were gone.

Before they sat down to eat, Professor Rodriguez said, “Sean, I imagine that you probably don’t remember, but back after you joined the faculty, the few female professors and the wives of the male professors held a tea to welcome Cheryl to our extended family.”

Sean said, truthfully, “You’re right. I don’t remember it.”

Looking at Sean, Professor Rodriguez said, “Not announcing your engagement until the very end of the school year and then getting married over the summer created an etiquette problem for us.”

Turning to Jo, Professor Rodriguez continued, “Lieutenant, please accept our apologies for not contacting you sooner about the scheduling of the tea, but a number of us were concerned that with Sean’s reelection campaign, you might not have any spare time available until after the election. Would you prefer to wait until after that is behind you?”

Jo replied, “Professor, that would be fine.”

Professor Rodriguez responded by saying, “I’ll write you in a few weeks with several proposed dates. But, please call me Isabel.”

Jo replied, “I’ll look forward to the tea. But, I’ll only call you Isabel if you call me Jo.” Isabel agreed.

The diner was fabulous, featuring dishes from both Spain and Cuba. Over the meal, Sean and Jo learned a good deal about their host and hostess. Both of them had stories to tell.

Isabel’s family was from Catalonia. They were highly placed in the Loyalist Government. When that government fell, her family escaped to Cuba, as did many other Loyalist families. Isabel was born in Cuba.

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Fortunately for her, the family business was export-import, so when Castro came to power, they just transferred their business operations to New York City. She grew up wealthy. She was also an overachiever in school, graduating Summa cum Laude from Vassar and Order of the Coif from Columbia Law. After clerking for a U.S. District Court judge in Manhattan, she was an Assistant U.S. Attorney for several years. After that, she surprised her colleagues by going to work for the federal public defender's office.

Isabel said, "The work load was incredible. We didn't have enough lawyers to handle all the cases that we had. After about three years, I was near burnout. One day, purely out of the blue, I received a call from a law school classmate who told me that she had heard about an opening at Southern University to teach Evidence and Criminal Law. As soon as she told me about the opening, I rushed—actually, I ran—to a pay phone to find out if it was true. Thinking back, I'm surprised that the lady who first took my call didn't just assume I was a mental patient calling from Bellevue and hang up. I must have talked a mile a minute in my rapid Cuban-accented English. A few days later, I was out of the cold and damp of Manhattan and in the sunshine of University City. I probably would have worked for free if the Dean had asked me. I didn't know it until I arrived at Southern University, but I hated the cold and the congestion of New York."

Jo asked, "Is this where you met your husband?"

Dr. Rodriguez now spoke. Befitting his elegant manner, his words were calm and measured. "The first week of the school year, there was a reception in honor of the new faculty. Because I was a junior tenured professor in my department, I was asked to attend the reception. But, since my first wife had been dead for less than a year, I only went out of a sense of duty."

After Jo and Sean both expressed their regrets at hearing of Dr. Rodriguez's first wife's passing, he continued, "Just like your first wife, Judge, my wife died in an automobile accident. She left me very lonely and sad. But unlike you, I had three small children in the house."

After pausing for a second, Dr. Rodriguez continued, "As soon as Isabel spoke, I knew that she had grown up speaking Catalonian-accented Spanish. As a Castilian, I can sense those things. We spent enough time talking at the reception that I was emboldened to ask her for a date. To my surprise, she accepted my offer."

Jo said, "Doctor, did y'all hit it off well on your first date?"

Jo was surprised when both members of the host couple laughed at her question. Dr. Rodriguez first requested that Jo call him Carlos. After that, he continued, “On our first date, I made the mistake of making a political remark. She was not impressed at all with my politics. We argued the entire time. Our first date seemed to be a miniature version of the Civil War, with Isabel telling me just how evil Franco was. When the evening was over, I knew that we would never see each other again.”

Isabel added to the narrative by saying, “Carlos was shocked when I delivered a note to him right before the start of one of his classes a few days later.”

Carlos continued, “She stole my heart with the note.”

Jo said, “May I ask what she said?”

Carlos laughed, “The note, which was written in proper Castilian Spanish, said the war is over. If we agree to never discuss politics again, I would love to see you another time.”

Isabel added, “We never, ever discuss politics in this house. I know that he belongs to Opus Dei, but I say nothing. He knows that I am very liberal, but says nothing. Love is more important.”

Sean asked Carlos about his area of interest within Chemistry. When Sean seemed to follow along with his explanations, Carlos inquired if Sean had a background in the subject.

Sean said, “Indirectly.”

When Carlos asked Sean what he meant, Sean explained that his grandfather had been a chemist. Carlos asked his name.

When Sean replied, “Pierre Le Beque,” Carlos smiled and said, “I do not know if you realize just how great a chemist your grandfather was. My work today is based on discoveries that he first wrote about after World War I. He was truly a giant in Chemistry.”

Sean was flattered to learn that his grandfather was that well regarded. Jo started to wonder if their children would be too smart for her to understand.

The rest of the evening’s conversation was devoted to Isabel’s war stories about several criminal cases that she was working on. Jo was a little surprised that Isabel practiced law on the side.

As they drove home that evening, Jo remarked, “Precious, I was surprised to hear that Isabel handles criminal cases. I thought law professors just all taught school and wrote books and stuff.”

Sean commented by saying, “Daphne sees patients, doesn’t she? Why should law professors be any different? Actually, once you’ve got tenure,

outside of your academic responsibilities, it is really up to you. I have some colleagues that might write an article or two a year, but don't do much else. Some of my colleagues are real scholars, cranking out books and articles year in and year out. I have other colleagues who work part-time for law firms and are well paid for their efforts. Some of my colleagues sit on various boards and committees for the bar and the state. But, one of my colleagues, a guy named Reddick, is into fitness. When he isn't teaching, he is either working out or running someplace. He cranks out an occasional article on Sports Law, but his heart isn't into the law anymore. We all suspect that he likes teaching because he gets to use the university's athletic facilities for free."

Jo was surprised to learn that academics could be so dissimilar. Changing topics, Jo inquired, "Precious, did you know that your grandfather was famous?"

Sean responded, "Sort of. When I was an undergraduate, I had a course that dealt with the Theories of History. There has been an ongoing debate for about a century and a half or so whether great people make history or if ordinary people, being caught up in extraordinary times and events, make things happen."

Jo asked, "What do you think?"

Sean continued, "As part of the class, we had to do a paper about someone we knew personally who was famous. For this assignment, someone was considered famous if they were listed in an Encyclopedia or some other reference book of famous people. Being only twenty, I didn't think that I had ever met any famous persons. But, when I discovered that my grandfather and both of my parents were famous in their fields, I understood the question. To me, they were just regular people who did what they had to do, or needed to do, when the time came."

Jo said, "Sean, until I met you, I don't think that I ever knew anyone famous."

Sean replied, "Are you forgetting your father? I'm sure that if we look in the library, we could find his name in a book of Medal of Honor recipients. What about you? You've been decorated for valor and been on TV. A lot of people recognize you by sight. Doesn't that make you famous?"

Jo, after pausing a minute, replied, "My Daddy just got the Medal of Honor for doin' what he was supposed to do. I was decorated for bein' at the bank at the wrong time and reactin' like any other peace officer would."

Sean said, "You've just made my point. Famous people are just like everyone else. We all have families, get sick, shop for groceries and make

love. Famous people are just like everyone else—except that somebody else decides that what they did deserved special recognition.”

Jo looked surprised at Sean’s comment. Sean, employing his teaching skills to their fullest, said, “Jo, somewhere in my library, I’ve got a book written about President and Mrs. John Adams. If you read the part that contains the letters between them when he was working on the Declaration of Independence, you can see that in addition to trying to give birth to our country, he also had to deal with all of the problems of normal life, things like running low on funds, the cow stopping giving milk and the like. He was just a human being in extraordinary circumstances. He rose to the circumstances, as the truly great ones always do.”

Jo asked Sean to find the book for her when they got home. As they got near home, Sean said, “One of the great things about America is that both the great and the regular people all lead ordinary lives. So, it is hard to tell them apart. When I was in law school, there was a professor there who had been in a number of high positions in government, including a stint as attorney general of the United States. One day, after Cheryl and I were married, we saw him and his wife shopping for groceries. He was a great person, doing an ordinary thing. If he would have lived in another country, he wouldn’t have done those things for himself.”

Jo pondered what Sean said for the rest of the ride home. Later that evening, as they were snuggling together with Law and Equity in their bed, Jo asked Sean very softly, “Precious, if we found ourselves in extraordinary circumstances, would we rise to the occasion?”

Sean, after thinking for a moment, said, “God willing, may we never find out.”

Sean was tired and jumpy. First, the wind started making the windows shake and rattle around 0200 hours. At 0315 hours, a thunderclap followed a second later by a bolt of lightning, shocked Sean, Jo, Equity and Law into a groggy state of semi-wakefulness. A minute later, the rains came pouring down. At 0450 hours, Sean gave up and slipped into the kitchen to fix himself breakfast, knowing well from years and years of experience that thunder, lightning, rain and a falling barometer made him edgy, irritable and nervous. As Sean ate, he recalled Durkheim’s thesis in Sociology that weather like this was strongly linked to increases in deviant behaviors, such as crime and suicide.

After eating, Sean went back into the bedroom. Jo was still sound asleep. So, he gathered up what he needed to shower and shave, and went to a guest bathroom, hoping that he wouldn't wake her. He didn't.

Jo didn't wake up until the alarm went off at 0615 hours. Sean kissed her on the cheek and told her to drive carefully because this Monday, September 11th promised to be a nasty day.

Sean was at his desk in his chambers by 0700 hours. Normally, court didn't start until 0900 hours, so on most days he would have been way early. But, since he had an emergency guardianship hearing set at 0730 hours and was going to begin picking a jury at 0900 hours, he really wasn't all that early. As he reviewed the file for the guardianship hearing and the research that Laura had done for him, Sean realized that he'd left home without picking up his copy of the *University City Bugle* from the metal delivery box near his front gate. Sean decided that he probably didn't have time to read the *Bugle* this morning, anyway. He hoped that his copy would stay dry until he got home.

The guardianship hearing really was an emergency. An adult child of an elderly ward—the one who had been rejected by Sean as the guardian at a previous hearing just six weeks ago—was being accused by the guardian of planning to abduct the ward. The guardian was seeking an injunction barring the accused child from the premises of the ward's nursing home, except under strict supervision. The behavior of the witnesses was as unruly as the weather that morning. Mercifully, the parties ran out of verbal ammunition just as the lawyers for the jury trial were beginning to arrive at around 0830 hours. Sean granted the injunction and then warned the enjoined child of the very serious potential consequences of violating one of his orders. Sean hoped that the message sank in, but he had his doubts.

After a quick recess, Sean returned to the bench to ask the lawyers if they had any preliminary matters to be addressed while Bubba was waiting for a jury panel. The lawyers surprised everyone present by informing the court that a settlement had been hammered out in the hallway a few minutes ago. After the lawyers read the settlement into the record, the lawyers and litigants left the courtroom. While Angela called Bubba to tell him that they weren't going to need a jury panel that morning after all, Sean talked to Jane about her upcoming wedding.

Angela interrupted the conversation by saying, "Judge, Bubba said that we were really lucky they settled, because it would have been a close call on getting a jury this morning. He guesses that the rain scared off a lot of potential jurors."

While Angela was speaking, Sean was pleasantly surprised to see his lovely bride of one day less than one full month enter the courtroom. As Jo walked slowly toward the bench, Sean sensed that something was very, very wrong with her. When Jo slowly approached the bench, Sean noticed that she looked like someone who had just experienced a major trauma. By the time that Jo was standing right in front of the bench, Angela and Jane were both staring at her silently. When Sean came around to her and put his arm around her, Jo just stood there motionless. When Sean asked Jo what was wrong, she struggled to speak. But, no intelligible words came out of her mouth, just sounds. Sean sensed that Jo was close to hysteria and did not want to break down in public.

Sean very carefully led Jo back to his office, followed by Angela, Jane and Miriam. When Sean and Jo reached the door to his office, Sean said, "Miriam, please hold my calls."

When Miriam waved a pink message slip at Sean and tried to say something to him, Sean glowered at her with a look that most Marine Drill Instructors only dream of developing. Once Jo was seated on his sofa, Sean closed his office door, none to gently.

Sitting very close to Jo, Sean asked in his softest, kindest voice, "Beautiful, what's wrong?" Jo stared at him, biting her lip while tears started pouring down her cheeks.

Sean asked, "Is it your family?" Jo shook her head.

Sean asked, "Are you sick?" Jo shook her head again. Being frustrated by his inability to communicate with Jo, Sean asked, "If I give you a legal pad and a pen, will you write down what's wrong?"

Jo nodded. A minute later, Jo wrote on the legal pad, in a very unsteady hand:

I'M ON PAID ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE UNTIL THE
HEADHUNTERS ARE DONE WITH ME!
HELP ME!!!!

While Sean didn't know too much about law enforcement procedures, he did know that if a cop was placed on paid administrative leave, the accusation was probably either not too serious, or not too credible. Still, he hadn't the foggiest idea what Jo could have been accused of doing. Sean let

Jo cry until she had managed to work it out of her system. Finally, Sean summoned the courage to ask her, “What happened?”

Jo stopped crying. Very slowly, she reached into her purse and pulled out a copy of the second section of that day’s edition of the *Bugle*. Jo pointed to Winfred K. Rudd’s column, which read:

SPECIAL RULES FOR SPECIAL PEOPLE

If you or me, or anyone else that we know, stood to inherit fifty million dollars if our spouse died, and if our spouse died under very mysterious circumstances early one morning when our whereabouts were unknown, what would happen? We’d probably get to learn a lot about the so-called Criminal Justice system, wouldn’t we? At a minimum, we’d be grilled by the toughest, meanest homicide detectives that they could find, right? If we couldn’t come up with a good alibi, we’d probably get hauled before a grand jury, indicted and arrested, wouldn’t we? Of course, any regular Joe or Jane would.

But, if a judge is the person under suspicion, different rules seem to apply. In March of last year, Judge Sean Riley’s wife died while he was allegedly out of town. The next year, his financial report shows him being \$50,000,000.00 better off than he was when his late wife, Cheryl, was still alive. Has anything happened to him? Not a blessed thing has happened to him.

But wait, the story gets more interesting. Not long after his wife was dead and buried and her death was swept under the rug, Judge Riley started showing up at fancy restaurants

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with a stunning brunette, a female sergeant from the sheriff's department, who just happened to have been a supervisor at the very same precinct that investigated Mrs. Riley's death.

Sound suspicious to you? It does to me. But wait, the story gets even more interesting. A year after the late Mrs. Riley was laid to rest, there is now a new Mrs. Riley, the stunning brunette, who before she married Judge Riley, was known as Sergeant Jolene Scruggs. Well, now she is Lieutenant Jolene Riley, having been promoted to the personal staff of the sheriff, himself. Really interesting, huh?

It gets better. Before Sergeant Scruggs became Lieutenant Riley, she seemed to live pretty high on the hog for a lowly sergeant. She drove a brand new SUV, with no debt on it. She lived in a swanky house near the Southern University campus, which had no debt on it. Since Judge Riley teaches part-time at the S.U. School of Law several times a week, he was just a few blocks away from the future Mrs. Riley's plush pad, far away from prying eyes.

I guess that nothing will happen, though, because as we know, in Ransom County, *there are special rules for special people.*

Jo dried her eyes while she watched Sean read and then reread the column. Jo noticed that Sean was showing no obvious sign of emotion as he read, except that he had loosened his necktie and opened his collar. After looking at Jo for several minutes in silence, Sean leaned over to her, took

her hands in his and said, “Beautiful, do you love me?” Jo somehow managed to rasp her assent.

Sean then asked, “Do you trust me?”

Jo responded, “With my life and my soul, I trust you completely.”

Sean said, “Back on that awful day in August last year when you stopped those bank robbers, you were following your instincts, weren’t you?”

Jo said, “I didn’t have the time to think. I went on instinct—plain and simple.”

Sean said, “As much as I’d like the opportunity to think this through, we don’t have the luxury of being able to do that. Plus, I’m right in the middle of it, so my objectivity is shot. My darling, will you trust my instincts here?”

Jo smiled just a hint of a smile and said, “Of course, I trust your instincts. But remember, Rudd gets the choice of weapon.”

Jo had said just the right thing. Both of them started laughing as they tried to picture Sean dressed in Regency clothing out on a foggy moor, preparing to duel. Sean said, “That’s Plan B.”

Sean rose and asked Jo, “Diet or regular?”

After Jo said that she probably needed some sugar with her caffeine, Sean picked up his telephone and punched in a two-digit number. A moment later, Jo heard Sean say, “Laura, if you’d be so kind, Jo needs a Coke and her husband needs a Diet Coke pronto.”

A moment later, they heard a rap on Sean’s chamber door. After Sean admitted Laura and shut the door behind her, he took the cold drinks from her and said, “Laura, thanks for bringing us the drinks. I used them as a cover to let you in here. Do you know what’s going on?”

Laura said, “Bubba told us all about it. It seems as if the Rudd column was **the** topic of conversation over at the jury assembly ready room this morning.”

Sean reached into his wallet and pulled out a very wrinkled piece of yellow writing paper. He handed it to Laura and said, “I need to talk to Justice Brown. The top number is his home number. The next one down is his cell phone. The number after that is his fiancé’s home number. The last one is her cell phone. When you get him on the line, transfer the call to me in here. If you can’t reach him at any of those numbers, let me know. I might have another way of reaching him.”

As Laura was about to leave his office, Sean said, “Tell Miriam that it’s safe to bring me all of my messages by now. And tell her that I’m not mad at her.” A very nervous Miriam approached Sean’s office. When she entered the office, Sean said, “I’ll bet the first call that you had on voice mail when

you came in this morning was from Bob Griswold, right?" Miriam nodded apprehensively.

After reviewing the messages, Sean said to Miriam, "If anyone else calls, tell them that I probably won't be available to speak to them until tomorrow, but that you'll give me my messages as soon as I am available."

Putting a stack of message slips aside, Sean said, "I'll return these calls today." Handing Miriam the rest of the message slips, Sean told her, "Please call these people back and tell them that I'll return their calls as soon as I can, maybe tomorrow."

Pausing for a second, Sean said to Miriam, "The next few days are going to be really busy for you. If you can't keep up with the calls, you've got my permission to draft Jane, Laura and Bubba to help you. If Bubba starts complaining, tell him that if he won't help, I'll pay Shirley to help. That should keep him awake long enough to help you."

As Miriam left, Jo realized that Miriam probably loved Sean, too, as did Laura. Somehow, Jo was reassured by this realization. As Jo was thinking, Sean took off his robe and put his suit coat back on. As he reemerged from his closet, Laura buzzed and said, "Justice Brown on line two."

After a very brief conversation, in which Sam Brown told Sean that he'd been expecting the call since he'd seen the column, Sam agreed to meet with Jo and Sean at his new office in Smithville. He agreed with Sean that since Bob Griswold was a licensed attorney, his presence would be very useful in analyzing the situation. Sam agreed to invite Griswold to the meeting. So, they planned to meet in Smithville around 1100 hours.

After Jo and Sean left his chambers, Angela, Bubba, Jane, Laura and Miriam all agreed that if this was how the week was starting, it was going to be one long week!

In the course of a few short months, Judge Sean Riley and his peace officer lady, Jo, confront their deepest fears, find true love and vanquish the sinister forces that seek to destroy them both.

Good Will Win in the End

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