

Chapter 1

Peering across the crowded Statehouse lawn in downtown Indianapolis, Randall Jones, Jr. proceeded down the checklist he had memorized weeks earlier in preparation for the public meeting. Jones, Jr., 26, had made a name for himself that relied not upon his father's reputation. Now the coordinator for State Senator Steve Vorbach's gubernatorial campaign, he had brought his candidate from ten points down in the polls to where it was nearly a dead-heat in just over two months, resulting in the leverage to force the challenger to this face-to-face meeting. Randy smiled as the crowd grew to nearly a thousand Hoosier residents who continued crossing streets to gather on the south side of the Statehouse. The platform, a twenty by forty, two-foot high dais with speaker's podiums five feet apart in the front middle, four chairs, two on each side behind the podiums, various tables, plants, and bunting across the front of the platform and on the background behind the platform.

Looks good, he thought to himself.

Glancing upwards to the Statehouse building, a hundred or so feet behind the platform, he noticed the windows of the offices on the third floor. At the other end of the Statehouse, his father's windows would also be on the third floor, where the Supreme Court Justices resided. He did not see his father or any of his father's staff looking down on the scene. He knew a rally of this kind was not something his father would attend. "Too political for me," he remembered his father telling him when he first announced the outdoor debate between the four candidates vying for the Governorship and Lieutenant-Governorship of the state. Even his father's long-time friendship with Senator Vorbach was not enough to make Randy expect his dad to show up on the scene. And if his father would not be there, then none of his staff would be there; especially his father's legal assistant Laura Stiley. And how he had wished his friend Laura could have seen his crowning achievement, a stand-off debate between Vorbach and the opposition, State Senator Gary Allen, which Randy had been able to pull off in spite of Allen's reluctance.

Who was not there did not matter to young Jones, Jr. though. He did not have time to fraternize, even with friends. Besides, his father and staff could watch the debates, as there were plenty of television camera's on the scene. Even Channel 8 was carrying the two one-hour debates in their entirety, the first between the two people running for Lieutenant-Governor, and the second between the candidates for Governor.

Randy had met with the Channel 8 set-up crew hours earlier, explaining to them where their audio and video cables could be run to the mobile video truck. The cables would have to be spaced somewhere between the right edge of the crowd and where the helicopter would land. He looked to his right as he studied the inch-thick cables

running from the cameras, to the platform, and then along the ground to the TV production truck parked along North Capital Avenue. Channel 8's help proved invaluable to Randy. They provided the large speakers on each side of the platform, adjusting the volume and equalization so the candidates could be heard clearly, not only for television, but also live. Each candidate showed up earlier in the day to make sure his voice was given its own proper timbre. The vocal testing continued until each man was assured of the very best quality for his own voice, frustrating the engineers, who would have to make adjustments every time there was another speaker.

Moving through the people to the front corner of the platform, Randy again looked at the large red circle on the Statehouse lawn behind the platform and to the right. Six Indianapolis Police officers already skirted the circle, keeping people far back from the landing zone. He shook his head. Senator Allen's insistence of arriving at the debate in a helicopter still irritated him. *What a grandstanding joke*, he still thought. Randy's idea was for Senator Vorbach to make his entrance from the Statehouse itself, directly out of the doors which led to the Governor's offices on the South end of the Statehouse. He had already briefed the various cameramen from the local stations as to when this would take place. However, to trump Vorbach's entrance was Allen's idea of landing his own personal helicopter on the lawn, and making his grand entrance shortly after his opponent's. Randy smiled as he pictured Steve Vorbach moving to the helicopter to open the door of his rival, personally welcoming him to debate. That had to be featured on every station and in every newspaper in the state: "Senator Vorbach Welcoming Senator Allen to the Statehouse."

The younger Jones moved to the stairs on the right of the platform and mounted the stage. He could get a much better estimate of the crowd which had come from all over the state for this debate. Steve had applauded Randy's idea of renewing the popularity of the Lincoln-Douglas outdoor debates of well over a century ago. The idea was that people from both parties could have their presence be heard by all the candidates at the same time. This would be as bi-partisan as it could get. Just the novelty of the idea brought out scores of reporters, not only locally, but nationally. Their very own press tables lined both sides of the platform. Randy personally counted fifty chairs at those tables, with identification signs on top of the tables from various national press organizations. He had chuckled as he placed the CNN reporter next to the Foxnews reporter. *They're probably friends anyway*, Randy had thought. Most of the reporters were already situated at their seats with laptops open, with any empty seats indicating that those reporters were already milling through the crowd, getting responses from regular Indiana citizens to include in their stories.

Looking over the top of the crowd, and across Washington Street, Randy spied the Westin Inn, noticing people crossing the street to come to the debate. He remembered the flyers, passed out to all the news media about the big debate at the Westin between the Libertarian candidate and the Constitutionalist candidate which

was originally to take place at the same time as this debate. These candidates voicing their disapproval with being spurned from this debate, wanted to believe they could pull people away from it with their own debate. *Two-party state. Sorry guys*, Randy thought. The newer flyers stated that the lesser party debate would be following this one. Now, the newest flyers placed the Westin debate at seven that night. Randy thought of the poor grunts that had to stand at copy machines, making another hundred copies to be passed out across the street from the Westin to the press.

He looked straight up and caught the vapor trails of two fighter jets that the Air Force Reserve had provided from Grissom Air Force Base, sixty miles north of the capital, to be in the air during the debate. Looking to the west, he thanked God for the beauty of this fall day. The air was cool, but a rain would have totally decreased attendance across the board. As he noticed a few clouds, he also realized that Senator Allen's helicopter would be coming in from the airport west of here. Allen's helicopter pilot would drop them off quickly and then leave. Senator Vorbach's opening of Allen's helicopter door and helping him out should be not only a plus for Vorbach, but also a reminder to Allen of the often stated kindness of Vorbach.

Did I really know what I was getting myself into? The logistics alone..., he breathed a sigh of relief. Every detail had come together for this perfect day. He would look back to this day as being the day Steve Vorbach would overtake Senator Allen in the polls. The Statehouse looming just over his shoulder would have another office with the name Randall P. Jones on the door. He would end up as the Chief of Staff of the next Governor of Indiana. He remembered the line his father would use whenever everything would go right on one of their family vacations. He father told him it came from an old TV show. *Now I know what he was talking about*, Randy mused. *It may become my favorite phrase... "I just love it when a plan comes together..."* He chuckled and smiled.

He looked at his watch. In ten minutes, Steve Vorbach and his running mate, Wayne Riley would be coming down the steps behind him, making their way toward the platform. Five minutes later, Senator Gary Allen and his running mate, State Senator Betty Snodgrass, would be descending from the air at the make-shift heliport.

"Hey Junior!"

Randy Jones looked into the crowd where the call had come from. He knew it could only be one person; maybe the only person in the world who would dare call him by that name. He kept searching the faces until his eyes stopped on the face with the big grin. Walking over to the edge of the stage, he stooped down as the familiar face of a friend worked through the crowd to where Randy was kneeling.

"Jackson, how many times do I have to tell you to not call me that in public?"

"Well, you already told me seven times. I think I need to hear it at least a hundred times before it actually sinks into my brain."

"What brain would that be," Randy quipped.

"Good point. How are things going?"

Randy thought for few seconds, reflecting on the day, nodded his head slowly at his friend, and said, "I think I can pull this off."

Lee Jackson had driven over from his church in Crawfordsville that morning, had lunch with Laura and Judge Jones, and had stayed for this momentous debate as moral support for his friend Randy. The younger Jones was glad to see his friend, and his presence brought him comfort. If nothing else, he could count on his friend to be praying for the entire day to be a success. With only two weeks to election day, this debate could mean the difference in Randy's life.

"If anybody can, it would be you." Lee gestured slightly with his index finger toward Randy.

"You just keep praying for me." Randy stared at his friend until he saw the nod of Lee's head.

"Will do," Lee returned with a smile. "How much time do you have?"

"Steve and Wayne will come out of the building in...seven minutes. The film media is already over by the entrance to the building to catch it."

"So, I could hum the Minute Waltz seven times."

"You do that Lee. I've got other considerations." Randy stood straight up, still looking down to his friend.

"I'm sure you do, which is why I'm here to lighten you up. Don't worry. Everything will be just fine. God gave you this great weather. I know you were sweating that. Looks like everyone's here. That's a plus. What could possibly go wrong?"

"Murphy's here somewhere."

Lee looked around, and then back to his friend. "Ol' Murph has his law, but God always uses that to His purpose."

"I sure hope so," stated Randy.

"Anything I can do for you?"

"All my bases are covered. I think I'm good."

"Then I'll just get out of your way and let you shine."

"If you want to be where the action is, get as close as you can to the heliport. I think you'll be surprised by what we have in store for Senator Allen."

"What is it?"

"Can't tell you. You'll just have to see for yourself."

"I'll work my way over there. Doesn't look like many people want to get too close right now."

"Indy's Finest are keeping people away from that area, but if you stand by that tree right behind the platform, you'll get a good view."

Thanks for the tip. And hey... have a great day." Lee reached his hand up to shake his friends. Randy bent down and gripped his friend's hand confidently. Young Jones turned to fill water glasses and cover them. He then jumped off the back right corner of the platform to await the candidates' arrival.

Two minutes passed until the large wooden doors of the Statehouse opened and Steve Vorbach and Wayne Riley stepped out onto the top step, waving to the crowd as camera's clicked and people started noticing what was going on and clapping when they realized that the conservative candidates were waving to them. A pause of thirty seconds, and then the two men shook each other's hands and then descended the steps and headed toward the platform. Steve Vorbach reached where Randy was standing, looked at him with a raised eyebrow, as if to say, "Everything okay?" Randy gave a confident nod as the candidates' passed him and ascended the stairs to the platform, waving to the crowd in front of them. The crowd clapped, waved, yelled, and snapped pictures, all at the same time.

Always good to be first, thought Randy, as he looked from off the stage to the right. Then, as if a political savvy individual had radioed Senator Allen, immediately they heard helicopter blades beating in the west as the Bell 2006 Ranger helicopter swooped over the capital building. Eyes that had been on Senator Vorbach suddenly turned skyward to view the new entrance. Even Wayne Riley looked up, even though he was not supposed to do so.

"Wayne, keep greeting the crowd," the senator cautioned his friend, keeping the smile plastering his face.

"Oh, sorry Steve. Right. My bad." The former prosecutor for Crawford County had never been a consideration for politician of the year.

"It's alright. Just stay focused."

"I will."

"I'm going to open the door for Allen. You just keep waving to people. Go over to the edge of the stage and shake some hands. Just watch me when I get to the 'copter, so the people will too."

"Right."

Vorbach descended the same stairs he had just made an entrance on and headed to the red circle. The helicopter came low over the tree where Lee Jackson was standing and touched down on in the center of the circle. By the time it settled, Steve Vorbach was opening the passenger door and helping his opponent out. Allen did not even recognize his foe was the one helping them, so he just waved in the general direction of the crowd while Vorbach assisted Senator Snodgrass safely to the ground.

Lee Jackson was close enough to see the disgusted look on Senator Allen's face as he realized what was happening, that his opponent was the one helping the two of them from the chopper. *Heaping coals of fire*, thought Lee. He could tell that Allen was completely baffled by what to do next. He did not want to be seen walking with his opponent to the stage, but he wanted to be walking with his running mate. But if he did, then Vorbach would be walking with them also. He knew political wheels were turning in Senator Allen's head. Not knowing how to gracefully escape the inevitable, Allen started walking away from the helicopter by himself, thinking that at least he would not be seen walking with Vorbach. *Let Snodgrass figure out how to*

not look bad by being escorted by our opponent, he thought. Ten steps and Allen spun and made a backhand wave for his pilot to take off, then turned and kept walking toward the stage, all smiles and waves, making his grand entrance all by himself.

The helicopter lifted off the pad, and then ten feet off the ground tried to rotate in order to head back to the airport. No one noticed that the left skid dipped into the ground at lift-off, pulling a temporarily-buried television cable out of the ground and into the air with it. When the pilot pivoted the craft, the cable caused it to pull down on the right side. When the pilot compensated for this dip, the cable snapped, causing the helicopter to back its rotor into the tree limbs where Lee was standing.

Lee watched as the tail rotor tore into the branches, leaving the main cabin helplessly overweight and out of balance. The cockpit headed downward close to where it first landed. Lee saw Senator Vorbach grab Senator Snodgrass, and shield her with his body as the chopper came crashing down upon the two senators. There was no explosion, as there would have been in the movies. There was only dust and dirt thrown into the air, caused by the rotors, obscuring everyone's view of the scene. Lee carefully moved toward the lifeless helicopter as Randy rushed passed his friend straight to where the senators had been standing seconds before.

After the screams of many, a stunned, silent crowd watched in shock. Police and EMT's ran to the crash, as did Wayne Riley. The pilot, badly hurt, was helped into an ambulance. Senator Vorbach's quick actions had momentarily saved his fellow lady senator's life, though she was critically injured. There was no pulse found when Randy checked Steve Vorbach's wrist.