

Joe VelDeggio sat perfectly still, oblivious to the noise of clicking keyboards and talking around him. He had learned over the years how to concentrate well in spite of the normal clamor of a newspaper staff reaching deadlines. The political writer of the News, VelDeggio was completely absorbed in a three-inch thick file a copy boy had placed on his desk an hour before. He was extremely still, only moving to turn to the next page. His left elbow rested on the only clear place left on his desk. The first two fingers on his right hand pushed up his forehead as he slouched over the material in which he was so engrossed. The position of his body when researching an article caused his fellow employees to refer to him as “The Thinker”. The heavy, black beard was perfectly trimmed under his chin and down his cheekbones, giving sharp features to his face. He always wore a striped Oxford shirt and red bow tie with matching red suspenders. The only blemish to this vogue dresser was the bald spot forming on the back of his head. Lighting his newest acquisition, a pipe presented to him by the Lieutenant-Governor a few days before for an article well written, at least from the Governor’s viewpoint, the newsman shifted his position as he turned another page. As the phone chirped on his desk, he reached for it and lifted the receiver to his ear without taking his eyes off the paper in front of him.

“VelDeggio,” he stated in a deep, smooth voice.

“Joe, Marty Freedman.”

This was the call VelDeggio had stayed in the office for. “What turned up, Marty?”

“Not much. I spent all day over at the college he went to, checking out sources. I didn’t get much work done for the Philadelphia Inquirer today.”

“I appreciate you helping me out, Marty. It would have taken me three days to fly up there, check it out, and fly back. What did you dig up?”

“Actually? Very little. I went through yearbooks, records and talked to Profs and other people who might have known him. He checks out clean as a whistle. Most people who remembered him thought highly of him. He was in a Fraternity for three years, a uh...Phi Beta Upsilon, known as the good-guy Fraternity. He made the Dean’s list every semester, and was pretty much the boy-next-door. I thought everybody on campuses in the ‘Sixties got in some kind of trouble.”

“We sure had our escapades.” VelDeggio grinned, remembering the underground paper he and Marty had worked on while Journalism majors at the University of Chicago in the mid-sixties.

“Yeah. What with guys like us in the press, neither one of us had better run for office.”

“Or be nominated for a Supreme Court Justice position.”

“I did find the name of a girl he was engaged to before he met his wife. Maybe you could follow that up.”

“Fax me everything you have. I’ll do the rest.”

“You want me to keep looking?”

“No, I’m already into you for those Colt-Eagle tickets at the Hoosier Dome. You want me to have to buy the hotdogs too?”

“Hotdogs and suds are on me, my friend. Hey, why not go after the guy on accusation? If he is such a truthful guy, then he’d hafta come clean, lest you make him out a liar, ‘cause he doesn’t know what you have or haven’t found out about him. And if he doesn’t have a dark spot in his past, then you haven’t lost a thing.”

“Everyone has something, Marty. I just have to find it in this guy. I have several sources trying to find out for me, even people in high places. We’ll bring him down, and I’ll sell some papers along the way, too.”

“That’s the bottom line in our game. You’re not going to attack him yourself, are you?”

“You know me better than that, Marty. I’ve got people on the committee that will do that. I’ll just report the tragic news. Hey, thanks buddy. I’d say I owed you one, but I’m buying the tickets.”

“The Colts got a chance at the Super Bowl this year?”

“If we could manipulate pro football like we do the State House, they’d have a great chance.”

Laughter came from both ends of the line.

“Keep in touch, Marty.”

“You keep me posted on the outcome, Joe.”

“I’m afraid the outcome is already decided. ‘Bye.’”

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Two hours in the law library after an hours drive, with nothing to show for it except sore eyes and sore feet, a frustrated lee Jackson sat at his study table staring at his empty note pad. Never before had a library made him feel so ignorant. Two hours of walking around, and looking in books which sent you to other books by way of unfamiliar abbreviations, had a way of making a person feel like a Kindergartner taking Calculus. The crowning glory of his defeatist attitude came when he opened a red volume of Shepard’s Citations for Statutes and then closed it immediately. Right then he had thanked God that he did not follow his mother’s wishes and go to law school. The librarians were even a different breed from the helpful ones in public libraries. These book-keepers were rude, indignant, and downright nasty. “This library is for law students,” one had told him. “We don’t have time to help every Tom, Dick, and Harry that wanders in off the street.” Lee thought an appropriate law firm to help him sue the library would be Thomas, Richard and Harold, Esq.

Realizing the magnitude of the crisis at the church brought the discouragement of finding nothing even more heavily upon his shoulders. Removing his glasses and placing them on his briefcase, Lee bowed his head and offered a prayer for help.

“Dear God, the Bible says that you’re not the author of confusion, proving that you had nothing to do with putting this library together. Lord, I need you’re strength and wisdom in this time of my frustration, and I need help so that I may be of help to one of Your churches. Please help me, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

As he looked up, he saw a maroon briefcase being placed down across from his on the study table he occupied.

“Mind if I sit here? All the other tables are taken.” The pleasant voice came from a person standing directly across the table in front of him.

“Not if you don’t mind seeing a grown man cry,” he said with a wry, half smile, half frown as he looked up and saw a young lady dressed in a black pleated skirt, with a green blazer over a white blouse.

Upon being seated, the smiling eyes of the young woman looked down upon his empty pad as she stated, “You must be first year.”

Sarcastically, he replied, “No, in my first year, my Mom did everything for me, including burping, bathing and powdering.”

Her high sounding giggle brought a fuller smile to his lips. Not to be outdone, she replied, “I thought I saw her over at the copy machine when I came in. Is she an old lady with a blue dress and diaper bag?”

“No, that’s my Grandma. My Mom died at a very young age...five.”

“No doubt she died laughing at one of your jokes.”

“How did you know? It was the one: ‘What’cha got when you have six lawyers up to their necks in sand?’”

“I don’t know.”

“Not enough sand.”

Bursting out with laughter brought angry stares from study tables in the immediate area. “Shhh! You’ll get us thrown out of here; an I have work to do.”

“You made all the noise. Besides the librarians all avoid me like the plague. My guess is that they’ve all heard about how my Mom died.”

“And my guess is, they’ve all sat across a study table from you before.”

“Well, I’d move, but my Grandma would have a hard time finding me in this place.”

A nearby “Ahem!” from a librarian lowered their voices to a whisper.

“My name’s Laura.” She held out her hand over her briefcase.

“Lee Jackson,” he replied in like manner, reaching out and shaking her hand.

“Your Father must have been a die-hard Confederate. Is you middle name Stonewall?”

“You have heard of me.” He faked the excitement in his whispering voice.

“Yes. I read your obituary in this morning’s paper. You may not have realized it yet, but you’re dead.”

“No, I realize it. It’s a similar joke to the one my Mom died of. It goes, ‘What’s the difference between a lawyer and a skunk getting run over?’”

“What?”

“There are skid marks in front of the skunk.”

She laughed again.

“Actually, this joke disease has been passed down in my family for generation. I fear my children will even catch it.”

“You have a wife?”

“No, she died even before I met her.”

“Lucky woman.”

That brought a smile to his lips.

“That’s a fine thing to say to a dead person.”

“I figured it couldn’t hurt your feelings now.”

Lee studied the smile across the table and matched it with his own. What had started out as a disastrous day suddenly seemed lighter. However much bandying he did with Laura still did not solve the dilemma he and his church was in. His smile vanished.

“May I ask you a serious question?”

“Probably not...” Upon seeing his discouraged face, she added, “But go ahead and try.”

“I have to find out some laws about Day Care regulation. How do you find anything in this library?”

“I take it you’re not a law student.”

“No, but up until today I thought I was a pretty good researcher.” Lee sighed and rolled his eyes around toward the rows and rows of books.

“Well, this is a totally different library than the ones you are used to then.”

“I spent two hours finding that out.”

“Come on. I’ll give you the quick tour, especially in the Indiana section where you’ll find Day Care legislation. Let’s move to a table at the other end of the building where you won’t be recognized as a loudmouth.”

Lee grabbed his briefcase and followed his new guide, adding, “You were the one making all the noise laughing.”

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“Pastor Hancock... so happy to meet you. I’m sorry for the wait. Busy day, you know. Please have a seat.”

“Thank you Tom.” The preacher looked around the supervisor’s office, noticing the expensive furniture, lamps and paintings gracing this rather large office. He realized, having been a carpenter before answering the call to preach, that this office had been remodeled to include another office and had twice as much room as the previous supervisor enjoyed.

Boyd smiled at the man of God. “Now, Pastor, how may I be of help to you?”

“Camille Johnson, one of your workers, came to my church yesterday, and I wanted to find out from you as to the purpose of the visit.”

“Well, let me see.” Pressing the intercom button, he waited.

“Yes, Mr. Boyd?”

“Susan, is Camille around?” There was a brief pause.

“No sir, this is her day off.”

“That’s right. I forgot. Thank you.” He pressed the button again. “I’m sorry, Pastor. She’s not in today.”

“I’ll come back tomorrow, Tom, when we can both question her.”

“No need to inconvenience yourself, Pastor. Probably what happened was standard procedure. Anytime a caseworker hears of a Day Care opening in the county, it is standard procedure to check it out. Do you have a complaint of her actions, or is it something else?”

Hancock could easily see beyond the fake bureaucratic smile, but had not taken into consideration Camille being unavailable. Now he knew something was rotten, but

finding out what would have to take a few more days of persistence. "I was just inquiring to see if you had any knowledge of her visit."

"Pastor, this is a very busy place, as you can imagine. I have ten caseworkers under me. It would be very difficult for me to keep up with all of their cases, unless they go to court. Then they come across my desk, and I evaluate with the prosecutor which ones to prosecute. I'll tell you what I'll do for you, though. I'll have a chat with Ms. Johnson, and if there is anything to her visit that you should know about, or she intends to press matters in the future, then I'll get back to you. How does that sound?"

Hancock knew Boyd had won this round. The Welfare man had the smarts to delay the pastor's inquiries until a future date. Very little else could be said. "That's fine with me."

"Don't worry about it. I'll take care of it." Boyd stood, reaching out his hand to the pastor and letting him know that the interview was over. "Thank you so much for coming."

The pastor stood. "And thank you for your time, Tom."

As the pastor left Boyd's office, the Welfare man picked up his phone and pushed seven buttons.

"Camille? Your favorite Pastor just left my office. How did Ms. Switzer do?"

"Gayle enrolled her daughter this morning. They took her with no problems at all. How about the warrants?"

"Judge Hoffman said there would be no problem, just show some suspicion. He'll give us the search warrant whenever we want it. The Sheriff's Deputies and State Police will both accompany you. All we need now is probable cause."

"That's Gayle's middle name."

"Stay in touch, Camille. Enjoy your vacation. When I call, we roll. Got it?"

"Yes sir."

As Boyd hung up his telephone, he wondered how much more money a year he would be making on the state Welfare payroll.