

## Chapter 16

Chris felt like he was buried in paperwork. He was assisting Ben Johnson on a criminal case and good ol' Ben loved to file motions. His defense strategy was to bury the prosecution in so much paper that they didn't have time to build a coherent case against his client. Easy for Ben because Chris had to do all of the work. He knew damned good and well that the judge would toss ninety percent of the motions he filed out. This was nothing more than a delaying tactic.

He knew that he had to pay his dues. There would be many endless nights doing this kind of bull shit paperwork, endless hours of investigation and research before he got a real case of his own. He knew that it would all be worthwhile, once he got there. But man, was it a pain in the ass getting there.

"Hey Chris, you been on Facebook today?"

Chris looked up to see his step-mom in the door to his office.

"Candace." Chris couldn't look at the gorgeous woman without having to gasp for breath. She had that affect on men. "I would think you had better things to do than hang out on Facebook all day."

"I must have a little more clout than you do. At least the senior partners don't bury me with meaningless paper."

"It's just that you're in a new part of the practice. We don't have any senior partners in medial law, so there's no one to dump on you."

Candace moved a chair from in front of Chris's desk to beside him. "Be that as it may, I think you should see this."

"What?"

"Open Facebook."

Chris did as told.

"Okay, now search for Clayton Johnson-White."

“Oh no. What’s the little bastard done now?” Chris groaned.

Chris type Clayton’s name in the search box at the top of the page.

“Hello? What’s this?” Chris saw several links drop down below the search box.

“Click on the ‘I Love Clayton’ link,” Candace said.

Chris couldn’t believe it. The picture at the top of the page was Clayton’s Fly Away Dr. Seuss bird. Beneath the bird was his catch phrase, “Catch me if you Can”, and below that the phrase “Fly Away Bandit.” In the left corner was a picture of Clayton himself, slouched back in an overstuffed chair with a defiant look in his eye.

“Nice, huh?” Candace said. “It’s a fan page. Put up by a group of girls from Camano Island High.”

“Crap. Look at these pictures. This is the most incriminating stuff I’ve ever seen.” Chris clicked on the photo link. A couple of dozen pictures of Clayton in various poses popped up on his screen.

He clicked on the back button.

Back on the main page, he noticed that it had more than seventy-seven thousand likes.

“I think I better call Ted.”

Chris picked up the phone and dialed. His phone beeped and chirped a minute, then Ted answered.

“Flaherty & Associates, Investigations. Ted Higuera speaking.”

“Hey, *amigo*,” he said into the phone. “I have a little problem.”

“What’s up?” his friend asked.

“Candace is here. I’m going to put you on speaker.”

“Hi, Candace. Long time no see.”

“Hi Ted. I hear you have a new squeeze.”

“Yeah, Maria’s great.”

“Sorry, you two,” Chris cut in. “You can catch up on your own time. I have a little problem I need some help with now.”

“Super-Teddy at your service. What can I do?”

Chris turned back to his monitor. “Clayton Johnson-White. You remember I told you about him?”

“Yeah, the kid in trouble up on Camano Island.”

“Right. Well, he’s digging himself a pretty deep hole. He has a fan page on Facebook. Can you find it?”

“Is this going to be billable?” Ted asked.

Chris chuckled. “We’re not there yet. Just asking for a little IT advice.”

Chris heard Ted clacking away on his key board.

“Just a minute. Okay, Facebook. Clayton Johs . . . Whoa. What’s this? It really is a fan page.”

“Ted, can you tell who’s seen this?”

Ted tapped away for an instant before replying. “It would be easier to tell you who hasn’t seen it.”

“What? That bad?”

“Your boy’s a hit. This page has gone viral. There’s over a million hits on it.”

“Jesus. Is there any way to take it down?”

“That ship has sailed. It’s been liked and shared so many times, you’d never be able to find all the references.”

“Well, Chris,” Candace said. “It looks like your client is a folk hero.”

“Yeah,” Ted said. “A real modern-day Bonnie and Clyde.”

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“You’ve got to try Gas Works Park,” Maria’s TA told her. “It’s the coolest park in Seattle.”

He was right. Maria strolled through the acres of green grass and rolling hills in the heart of the city with Popo by her side. Every few minutes someone would come up to her, man, woman or child and ask the same questions over and over again.

“What kind of dog is he?”

“How much does he weigh?”

“How old is he?”

The “Does he bite?” question seemed sheer folly to Maria. Anyone could see that her giant dog was a cream puff. Getting bitten by a Great Dane? They had a better chance of being struck by lightning.

Then there were the people who were amazed at their own wit.

“Is that a dog or a horse?”

“Do you have a saddle for him?”

“Can I ride him?”

She had heard all of the big dog jokes so many times she could repeat them in her sleep.

She made her way over the hill and down the slope to the edge of Lake Union. Across the blue waters of the lake, she saw the shining towers of downtown Seattle. To her right, the Space Needle and Queen Anne filled the vista. The scene to her left was dominated by the I-5 Bridge across the ship canal.

What could be better than this? A sunny fall afternoon in a gorgeous park with her dog. She reached in her purse and pulled out a green tennis ball.

Gas Works Park didn’t have an off-leash area, but her dog friends told her that no one would object if she let Popo run free. Everybody else did.

“Popo, fetch, *mijo*,” she said, tossing the ball down the slope.

Popo took off like he was being chased by demons. She loved to watch him run. Danes were originally bred from Irish Wolfhounds, English Mastiffs and greyhounds. The greyhound heritage was evident in the form of her dog, but she never saw it so much as when Popo ran. He took long, elegant strides that covered the distance in an instant. He was on the ball so fast, she hardly had time to pull her arm back before he was dashing back to her with his prize.

Popo was back, tennis ball in his giant jaws. Maria grabbed at it, Popo pulled away. They played an extended game of hide and seek until Maria feigned disinterest and Popo dropped the ball. Maria pounced. She grabbed the ball, tossed it as far as she could and the game started all over again.

It seemed that Popo was tireless. He could go on for hours. Maria wearied of the game long before her dog.

A tall, elegant old man with a Siberian Husky came over the hill. Popo instantly lost interest in the ball and went over to meet the new dog. A chance to play with a dog his own size? Well, close to his size. That didn't happen too often.

"He's beautiful," the man said to Maria. "What's his name?"

"Popo. He's a big cream puff."

"I love Danes. We had one when I was growing up."

Maria had been part of this conversation numerous times. It seems that someone at any dog park she visited had Great Dane stories to tell.

"What's your dog's name?" she asked.

"King. I named him for Sergeant Preston's dog, Yukon King."

"Sergeant Preston?" Maria asked.

"An old TV show when I was a kid," the old man said. "Way before your time."

Popo and King dashed off down to the edge of the lake.

"I need to get his ball back. Excuse me." Maria politely waved to the man and headed towards the ugly old pile of machinery from which the park gets its name.

A century earlier, it was a coal gasification plant on the edge of the lake. This structure, made from rusting iron, still dominated the park. Now surrounded by chain link fence it looked like something out of a steam punk novel. Riveted boilers, chimneys and giant fly wheels seemed to be thrown together in a Rube Goldberg designed nightmare.

As Maria got closer to the big pile of iron, she realized that it was getting dark. The days seemed so short here in the Northwest.

Where did her ball go? She walked around the perimeter of the plant, looking for a green ball in green grass in the growing darkness.

"Hey, sweetheart, didn't your mama tell you not to hang out in the park after dark?"

Maria grabbed at her throat, startled by the young man standing in front of her.

"There's all kinds of dangerous people hanging out here," he said.

"Yeah." Maria heard a voice behind her. "Like us."

"Let's see what we got here." The first man approached Maria, walked slowly around her, eyed her up and down.

Maria pulled her jacket tighter around her throat. "Popo!" she screamed.

"No need to get excited little mama," the man said. "You're gonna enjoy this."

He grabbed her purse and tossed it to his accomplice. He pulled a swing knife from his pocket and flipped out the blade.

"A pretty mama like you, out here by yourself. You should know better." He ran the knuckles of his left hand down her cheek.

Then it happened. A hundred and ninety pound bolt of lightning came from out of the darkness. The man never knew what hit him.

Popo leapt and hit the man square in the chest with his front paws. The man went sprawling, taking Marina with him, the breath knocked out of him.

Popo turned to face the other man, his front legs planted stiffly on the ground, spread apart, his chest thrown out. The expression on his face said “don’t mess with me.” His ears pointed straight up. A low growl emitted from his throat, drool dripped down his lips as his eyes drilled into his quarry.

The man froze. A wet spot spread down the front of his pants.

The giant dog took a slow, menacing step in his direction.

GRRR . . . Popo slowly advanced on the man.

The man panicked. He turned and ran.

“Popo!” Maria shouted. “Stay.”

Popo looked longingly at the fleeing man, nothing was more fun than pursuing running quarry, then turned to his mistress.

The other man recovered his breath. He sprang to his feet and beat a hasty retreat.

“Popo, you big goof.” Maria threw her arms around Popo’s neck, tears streaming down her cheeks. “You’re my hero.”

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Dick Jr. didn’t know why Weinstein wanted to see him. That old shyster’s secretary gave nothing away on the phone.

Of course, there was no where to park anywhere near Weinstein’s office. Junior had to park in a lot, at exorbitant prices, and walk six blocks. Why couldn’t the old bastard have an office in a building with parking?

And the crappy parking garage he found? It was made for miniature little toys. Matchbox cars. His Ford F-350 pickup with dual rear wheels wouldn't fit into a "compact" parking spot under any circumstances. He cursed under his breath, found a place with two spots open, and parked in both of them. *Take that, tree huggers.*

Junior had been around the block. He spent a couple of tours in Iraq as an MP at the Tallil Air Base in Nasiriyah, Iraq. He'd seen the world. Why did he have so much trouble fitting back into civilian life?

Working for his dad? C'mon. He was a grown man. He should be able to make it on his own. And now this, his dad's old lady trying to take the business away from him.

Hell, he'd practically been running it by himself anyway. His dad spent so much time flying down to LA to see some little chippy there that Junior was The Man.

Surely, that shyster Weinstein could figure it out for him. Get rid of Karen. Let him get on with his life.

"Dick Randall to see Mr. Weinstein," Junior said as he entered the door to Weinstein and Associates, Attorneys at Law.

"Good morning, Mr. Randall. Please have a seat. I'll see if Mr. Weinstein can see you now." Rose smiled her best official smile. "Would you like coffee?"

"No thanks. I just want to see what Weinstein wanted."

In a moment, Rose was back. "Mr. Weinstein will see you now." She led Junior to Weinstein's office.

"Richard, good to see you." Abe Weinstein pulled his decrepit old bones out of his chair and extended his hand.

"Abe." Junior took his hand, then sat in one of the chairs in front of his desk. "What's up? Why did you need to see me?"



Weinstein fumbled around with a stack of papers on his desk. "Just a minute. I had it right here. Where did it go? Rose," he shouted. "Oh, here it is. Never mind," he shouted towards his office door.

He pulled a manila file folder from the pile on his desk. "Let's see. Yes, this is it." He put the folder down on the blotter in front of him.

"I'm afraid this isn't too good for you, Richard."

"Yeah?" Junior leaned forward. "What isn't?"

"I have here a last will and testament for your father. And a signed, notarized power of attorney. Karen delivered them to me yesterday afternoon."

"So, we got a copy of his will. What's the big deal?"

"You're not going to like this, Richard. This is a new will . . . It leaves everything to Karen."

"No. That's not right. Dad wouldn't do that." Junior shot out of his chair and leaned across Weinstein's desk. "I'm his only heir. He always told me that. I've been working for him for years, running his business, because I knew it was going to be mine."

"Well, Richard, I'm afraid this is all legal. The will is dated a month ago. Signed by your father. Witnessed and notarized. If it turns out that your father is dead, then this will be the will of record. "

Junior slumped back into the chair.

"I can't believe it."

"And the power of attorney. That gives Karen the right to run the businesses as she sees fit. She can sell any property your dad owns, buy anything she wants in his name."

"That's not right. Dad wouldn't do that. He knew that I was running the business. Why would he do that?"

"Who knows why anyone does anything?"

“He didn’t even love her anymore. Hell, he lived in Seattle and she lived in Vegas. He was going to divorce her, you know. That’s why he made all the trips to LA. He had a hottie down there he was going to hook up with. A nurse or something.”

“Well, these documents are legal. She has the right to enforce them.”

“It’s a forgery.” Junior sat up straight as the thought hit him. “She forged it, them. She’s a master forger. She forged my name on Bobby’s adoption papers. I know for a fact that she forged dad’s divorce papers.”

Junior jumped to his feet and started pacing. “She found out. . . She knew that Dad was going to dump her. That she would get nothing. That’s why she forged those papers. That’s why she killed him. The woman has no conscious. She’s a demon.”

“That’s a pretty heavy charge. Can you prove these are forgeries?” Weinstein handed the folder to Junior.

“It’s pretty convenient, don’t you think? That a will and a power of attorney show up right after dad disappears? Why didn’t we see this sooner? Why didn’t dad say anything about it to you? You’re his lawyer. Who drew up this will anyway? I saw him every day. He never said anything to me.”

“All very good questions. But can you prove that these are forgeries? I checked the signatures. I sure can’t tell that they aren’t your fathers.”

“Aren’t there some kind of experts we can hire? You see that kind of thing on TV all the time.”

“I have an investigator I can engage. He doesn’t work cheap. He can run these down. Find out when they were printed. When they were signed. He can investigate the notary. Was your dad there when they were signed? Who was the witness? He can have an expert take a look at them, but if it goes to court, they’ll have an expert who will say they are legit. You know Karen will have her witness all lined up.”

“Get him. I don’t care what it costs. I’m not going to stand by and watch that bitch steal my legacy”