The Colour of Law

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PROLOGUE

Clark McCall was thirty years old and the sole heir to his father's $800 million fortune. He was also a major-league screwup. Or so his father often said, usually right before threatening to cut Clark out of his will. Usually because of nights like this—drinking, drugs, and girls.

It was Saturday night and Clark, drunk on whiskey and wired on cocaine, was trolling for a hooker in his father's Mercedes-Benz. He had driven south on Harry Hines almost to downtown without luck. There were plenty of working girls; he just hadn't found the right one. He was now stopped at a light and staring up at the Dallas skyline rising above him: shadowy structures outlined in white and blue and green lights visible for forty miles in the night sky. Looking up like that made him feel a little woozy, so he fumbled for the power switch and lowered his window. He leaned his head out and caught the summer breeze, warm on his face. He inhaled the night air, the sweet scent of sex for sale.

He closed his eyes and might have fallen asleep right

there, except a cowboy in the pickup behind him hit his horn like a bugler sounding charge. Which startled Clark. His eyes snapped open—the light had changed. He punched the accelerator and yanked the wheel hard to make a U-turn, but he gave it too much gas and now he couldn't find the fucking brake pedal so he swung across three lanes and one tire of the Mercedes climbed up onto the curb and he almost clipped a street sign. *What the hell was it doing there?* The vehicle bounced hard coming back down.

No sooner had Clark gotten the big German sedan traveling mostly in one lane when he spotted her—a nice girl from the black neighborhoods south of downtown out for a slow stroll on a warm night with her girlfriend. She was just the kind he liked—a slim black babe in a blonde wig, a hot pink miniskirt, matching high heels, and a white tube top, swinging her little pink purse back and forth in perfect tempo with the exaggerated side-to-side movement of her round ass. Her body was fit, her legs lean, her entire essence so sensual and seductive that he knew she was the one—a black hooker from South Dallas specializing in white men from North Dallas.

She would be his date this Saturday night.

Not that Clark couldn't get a date with one of the many gorgeous single white girls seeking husbands in Dallas. He was handsome and his father was rich. In Dallas, rich was required; handsome was optional. Being both, Clark McCall had recently been named one of the city's most eligible bachelors. But he preferred prostitutes for female companionship. Hookers did what they

were told and did not file police complaints afterward, and he knew up front how much the relationship would cost his father.

Clark steered the Mercedes over to the curb and slowed alongside the two South Dallas debutantes. He lowered the passenger window and yelled, "Blondie!"

They stopped, so he stopped. The black girl in the blonde wig sauntered over to the car with the kind of sassy attitude he liked in a hooker. She leaned down and stuck half her body through the window. Her skin was smooth and light, more tan than black, and her face was angular with sharp features, more white than black. Her lips and fingernails were painted a shiny red; her pushed-up breasts were round and full and looked real; and her scent was more intoxicating than anything he had ingested that night. She was beautiful, she was sexy, and he wanted her.

"How much?"

"What you want?"

"All you got, honey."

"Two hundred."

"A thousand. All night."

She smiled. "Show me the money."

Clark pulled out a wad of hundreds and waved it at her like candy to a kid. She got in and slid down the slick leather seat and her pink leather skirt crawled up so high he could see her black panties tight in her crotch, and he felt the heat come over him. He hit the accelerator and turned the sedan toward home.

But his thoughts turned to his father, as they often

did in times like this. Clark McCall was a political liability to his father and always had been—the drinking, the drugs, the girls. Oh, if the senior senator from Texas could see his only son now, drunk and high, buying a black hooker with *his* money and driving her in *his* Mercedes to *his* mansion in Highland Park! Of course, his father's first thought would be political, not paternal: What damage would be done to his campaign if the press got wind of his son's latest indiscretion?

Clark laughed loudly and the hooker looked at him like he was crazy. At least he came home to Dallas to be indiscreet. Still, if his father found out that he had flown back home again, there would be more angry threats of disinheritance; but Clark would be back in Washington before the honorable senator knew he was gone. He laughed again, but he felt the rage rising inside him, as it always did when he thought of his father, a man who wanted the White House more than he had ever wanted a son.

United States Senator Mack McCall looked over at his second wife and thought what a handsome first couple they would make.

They were sitting in the leather wing chairs, enjoying a quiet Sunday afternoon in their Georgetown town house. Across from them on the sofa sat the two men who would get them into the White House. Their political consultant and pollster were poring over the latest poll results and focus group studies and staking out

McCall's positions on the political issues of the day—positions carefully crafted to appease every identifiable voting bloc in America, whether based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender, geography, age, socioeconomic standing, or sexual orientation—anyone who could cast a vote for Senator Mack McCall. The senior senator from Texas held a commanding lead in the preprimary polls.

Mack McCall's lifelong ambition was finally within his grasp. He glanced down at his hands, still strong and calloused from years of working the rigs. He still had the hands of a roughneck and the determination of a wildcatter. And he was determined, as always, that nothing and no one would stand in his way. He would officially announce his candidacy on Monday.

Then he would spend $100 million or $200 million or whatever it took of his own money to win the White House. He had learned long ago that with enough money a man can buy anything and anyone he wants, be it an election or a younger woman. Mack McCall had enough money to buy both. He turned his eyes to his wife again and admired her beauty as if for the first time. He was filled with a sense of proprietorship, the same as years ago when he had gone out into the oil fields and admired his wells, knowing that he owned what other men coveted.

McCall was sixty; Jean was forty. He had been a senator for two decades now, and she had been his aide since she graduated from law school fifteen years ago. She was a savvy, articulate, and photogenic asset to his political career. They had been married ten years now, long

enough for the messy divorce not to be a negative in his polls.

She had no children and wanted none. He had a son, Clark, from his first marriage—the consummate ne'er-do-well offspring of wealth, a thirty-year-old adolescent. Six months ago, thinking a steady job might bring maturity to the boy's life, and to get him out of Dallas, McCall had pulled some strings and got Clark appointed chairman of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. But the boy kept sneaking back home to do God knows what with God knows whom in their Dallas mansion. His son was not a political asset.

"Senator?"

Bradford, the butler, appeared in the arched entry to the living room, holding a portable phone and wearing a dazed expression.

"It's Clark, sir."

McCall waved him off. "Tell him I'm busy."

"No, sir, it's the FBI, from Dallas, calling about Clark."

"The *FBI*? Jesus Christ, what the hell did he do this time?"

"Nothing, sir. He's dead."

ONE

"What's the difference between a rattlesnake lying dead in the middle of a highway and a lawyer lying dead in the middle of a highway?" He paused. "There are skid marks in front of the snake."

His bar association audience responded with polite laughter and diplomatic smiles.

"Why did New Jersey get all the toxic waste dumps and California get all the lawyers?" He paused again. "Because New Jersey had first choice."

Less laughter, fewer smiles, a scattering of nervous coughs: diplomacy was failing fast.

"What do lawyers and sperm have in common?" He did not pause this time. "Both have a one-in-a-million chance of turning out human."

All efforts at diplomacy had ended. His audience had fallen deathly silent; a sea of stone faces stared back at him. The lawyers on the dais focused on their lunches, embarrassed by their guest speaker's ill-advised attempt at humor. He looked around the crowded room, as if stunned. He turned his palms up.

"Why aren't you laughing? Aren't those jokes funny? The public sure thinks those jokes are funny, damn funny. I can't go to a cocktail party or the country club without someone telling me a stupid lawyer joke. My friends, we are the butt of America's favorite jokes!"

He adjusted the microphone so his deep sigh was audible, but he maintained steady eye contact with the audience.

"I don't think those jokes are funny, either. I didn't go to law school to be the butt of cruel jokes. I went to law school to be another Atticus Finch. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was my mother's favorite book and my bedtime story. She'd read a chapter each night, and when we came to the end, she'd go back to the beginning and start over. 'Scotty,' she'd say, 'be like Atticus. Be a lawyer. Do good.'

"And that, my fellow members of the bar, is the fundamental question we must ask ourselves: Are we really doing good, or are we just doing really well? Are we noble guardians of the rule of law fighting for justice in America, or are we just greedy parasites using the law to suck every last dollar from society like leeches on a dying man? Are we making the world a better place, or are we just making ourselves filthy rich?

"We must ask ourselves these questions, my friends, because the public is asking the same questions of us. They're questioning us, they're pointing their fingers at us, they're blaming us. Well, I've asked myself these questions, and I have answers, for myself, for you, and for the public: Yes, we are doing good! Yes, we are fighting

for justice! Yes, we are making the world a better place!

"And ladies and gentlemen, if you elect me the next president of the state bar of Texas, I will tell the people exactly that! I will remind them that we wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, that we fought for civil rights, that we protect the poor, defend the innocent, free the oppressed. That we stand up for their inalienable rights. That we are all that stands between freedom and oppression, right and wrong, innocence and guilt, life and death. And I will tell the people that I am proud, *damn proud*, to be a lawyer . . . because lawyers—do—good!"

Now, some might blame the Texas summer heat, but the audience, lawyers all—lawyers who had never protected the poor or defended the innocent or freed the oppressed, lawyers who stood up for the rights of multinational corporations—*believed* his words, like children who were old enough to know the truth about Santa Claus but who clung desperately to the myth anyway. They rose as one from their seats in the main dining room of the Belo Mansion in downtown Dallas and, with great enthusiasm, applauded the tall thirty-six-year-old speaker, who removed his tortoise-shell glasses, pushed his thick blond hair off his tanned face, and flashed his movie-star smile. He took his seat on the dais behind a nameplate that read A. SCOTT FENNEY, ESQ., FORD STEVENS LLP.

As the applause grew louder, the corporate tax lawyer whom Scott was campaigning to succeed as the next state bar president leaned in close and whispered, "You know,

Scotty, you've got an impressive line of bullshit. Now I see why half the coeds at SMU dropped their drawers for you."

Scott squeezed the knot of his silk tie, smoothed his $2,000 suit, and whispered back through brilliant white teeth, "Henry, you don't get laid or elected telling the truth."

He then turned and again acknowledged his fellow members of the bar, all standing and applauding him.

Except for one lawyer. Sitting alone in the back of the dining room, at his usual table, was an older gentleman. His thick white hair fell onto his forehead. His bright eyes remained sharp at long distances, but he wore the black reading glasses to eat. He was not a tall man, and his slightly hunched posture made him appear almost short. Even so, he was a lawyer the other lawyers either avoided outright or approached with great caution, like vassals to their lordship, waiting patiently for him to look up from his chicken-fried steak, mashed potatoes, and pecan pie and acknowledge them with a nod or, on the best of days, a brief handshake. But never did he stand. Come hell or high water, United States District Court Judge Samuel Buford remained seated until he was through eating. Today, though, as he dwelled on the young lawyer's speech, a slight smile crossed his face.

A. Scott Fenney, Esq., had just made a tough judicial decision easy.

TWO

THE FORD STEVENS LAW firm occupied floors fifty-five through sixty-three in Dibrell Tower in downtown Dallas. The firm's remarkable financial success was predicated on its two hundred lawyers billing an average of two hundred hours a month at an average of $250 an hour, grossing an average of $120 million a year, and racking up average profits per partner of $1.5 million, putting the Dallas firm on a par with Wall Street firms. Scott Fenney had been a partner for four years now; he pulled down $750,000 a year. He was shooting to double that by the time he was forty.

One of fifty partners, his perks were many: a personal secretary, two paralegals, and four associates working under him; reserved parking in the underground garage; dining, athletic, and country club memberships; and an enormous corner office on the sixty-second floor facing due north—the only direction worth facing in downtown Dallas. He especially loved his office, the wood-paneled walls, the mahogany desk, the leather furniture, the genuine Persian rug imported from Iran on

the hardwood floor, and on the wall, the five-foot-square framed field-level blowup of himself, number 22 on the SMU Mustangs, running for 193 yards against the Texas Longhorns the day Scott Fenney became a local football legend. Keeping all these coveted perks required only that Scott serve the firm's corporate clients with the same devotion the disciples showed Jesus Christ.

It was an hour after his bar association speech, and Scott was standing on his Persian rug and admiring Missy, a twenty-seven-year-old ex-Dallas Cowboy cheerleader who ran the firm's summer clerkship program. In the fall of each year, Ford Stevens lawyers fanned out across the country to interview the best second-year students at the best law schools in the nation. The firm hired forty of the top candidates and brought them to Dallas the following summer to work as summer clerks for $2,500 a week plus room and board, parties, alcohol, and at some firms, women. Most partners in large law firms had been frat rats in college, so most summer clerkship programs had all the markings of fraternity rush. Ford Stevens's program was no exception.

Thus the first Monday of June brought the invasion of forty summer clerks, like Bob here, each trying to catch the eye of powerful partners, the partners in turn trying to divine if these budding legal eagles were the Ford Stevens type. Bob was. From the look on the face of the law student standing next to Missy, he was dreaming of having just such an office one day. Which meant he would bill two hundred hours a month for the next eight years without complaint or contempt, at which time the

firm would show him the door—the odds of a new associate making partner at Ford Stevens being one in twenty. But the ambitious students still signed on because, as Scott himself told them, "You want odds, go to Vegas. You want a chance to get filthy rich by the time you're forty, hire on with Ford Stevens."

"Mr. Fenney?"

Scott pulled his eyes off Missy and turned to his frumpy middle-aged secretary standing in the door.

"Yes, Sue?"

"Four calls are holding—your wife, Stan Taylor, George Parker, and Tom Dibrell."

Scott turned back to Missy and the student and shrugged.

"Duty calls." He shook hands with the pale, homely, top-of-his-class student and slapped him on the shoulder. "Bob—"

"Rob."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Now, Rob, my Fourth of July bash, that's mandatory attendance."

"Yes, sir, I've already heard about it."

To Missy: "You bringing some girls over this year?"

"Ten."

"Ten?" Scott whistled. "Ten ex-Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders." The firm paid each girl $500 to spend a few hours in bikinis acting interested in law students. "Bob—"

"Rob."

"Right. You'd better work on your tan, Rob, if you want to snare one of those cheerleaders."

Rob grinned even though he had about as much chance of getting a date with an ex-Dallas Cowboy cheerleader as a one-legged man had winning a butt-kicking contest.

"Mr. Fenney," Rob said, "your speech at the bar luncheon, it was truly inspiring."

First day on the job and the boy was already brown-nosing like an experienced associate. Could he possibly be sincere?

"Thanks, Bob."

Missy winked. Scott didn't know if the wink was because she knew his speech was bullshit or if she was flirting again. Like all good-looking single girls in Dallas, Missy had made flirting an art form, always managing to catch his eye when crossing her long lean legs or brush against him in the elevator or just look at him in a way that made him feel as if they were on the brink of an affair. Of course, every male at the firm felt that way about Missy, but Scott was annually voted the best-looking male lawyer at Ford Stevens by the firm's female support staff, not that it was much of a contest. Scott had been a star football player in college; most lawyers were star chess players. Like Bob here.

"Rob."

"Right."

Missy and Bob departed, and Scott went around behind his desk and sat in his high-backed leather chair. His eyes found the phone; four lines were blinking. Without conscious thought, his trained mind instantly prioritized the calls: Tom, Stan, George, wife. Tom had

paid the firm $3 million last year, Stan $150,000, George $50,000, and his wife nothing.

Scott picked up the phone and punched Tom's line.

"Mr. Fenney!"

Scott was waiting impatiently for the elevator in the lobby of the sixty-second floor, on his way to see Tom Dibrell on the sixty-ninth floor. He could not restrain a smile. He was blessed with the kind of rich client lawyers dream about: a real-estate developer addicted to the deal; a client who habitually borrowed, bought, built, leased, sold, sued, and got sued, and, most important, who possessed an uncanny knack for getting himself into one precarious legal predicament after another, extrication from which always requiring the very expensive legal services of A. Scott Fenney, Esq.

Sue arrived, her face flushed from running after him.

"Mr. Fenney, you have the partnership meeting at two."

Scott checked his watch: 1:45.

"I can't make it. Tom needs me. What's on the agenda?"

Sue handed him the partnership meeting agenda. Only one item required his vote: the termination of John Walker as a partner in the firm. Unlike Scott, John was no longer a blessed lawyer. His rich client had just been bought out by a New York company, which meant his client would no longer be paying legal fees to Ford Stevens; and which now meant John Walker would no

longer be employed at Ford Stevens. His $800,000 salary had just become an unnecessary expense to the firm. John was a brilliant lawyer, and he and Scott played hoops together twice a week, but this was business: brilliant lawyers without rich clients were worthless to a large law firm.

The elevator doors opened just as Scott reached into his coat for his pen. He stepped inside and Sue followed. Attached to the agenda was a partnership ballot: TERMINATION OF JOHN WALKER. The only partner in the firm who didn't know John Walker would be fired today was John Walker. Dan Ford believed surprise was critical when firing a partner; otherwise that partner might walk out the door with a few of the firm's clients. So in fifteen minutes John Walker would walk into Dan's office, be unceremoniously fired after twelve years with the firm, and then be escorted from the building by security guards. The firm had never lost a single client to a terminated lawyer.

Sue turned and offered her back; Scott put the ballot against her back and his pen to the ballot and started to sign *A. Scott Fenney*—but he froze. He felt guilty, even though his vote was a mere formality, a nod to the illusion that the Ford Stevens law firm was a partnership of equal lawyers. In fact, Dan Ford owned the firm and every lawyer, office, desk, and book in the firm; and Dan had already decided to fire John Walker. Scott could either rubber-stamp Dan's decision or refuse and . . . *what?* . . . join John in the unemployment line? He sighed and signed the ballot in the FOR column, then

handed the ballot back to Sue and said, "Give that to Dan."

She stared at the ballot like it was a death warrant and then said, almost in a whisper: "His wife has breast cancer."

"Dan's?"

"No. John Walker's wife. His secretary said it's in her lymph nodes."

"You're kidding? Jesus, she's young."

Scott's mother had been young, too, only forty-three, when the same cancer had killed her. Scott had watched helplessly as she lost her breasts, her hair, and her life. He now thought of John's wife and of John, who would soon be standing on the street outside this building, coat and career in hand, cursing his partners for abandoning him and God for abandoning his wife, just as Scott had cursed God as the cancer consumed his mother's body ounce by ounce until she felt like a feather pillow when he lifted her from the bed and carried her to the bathroom.

"Damn."

He could do no more for John's wife than he could for his mother, and no more for John than all the other lawyers Dan Ford had fired without warning . . . but still. Scott stared at himself in the mirrored wall until the elevator eased to a smooth stop and the doors opened on the sixty-ninth floor. The elevator chime snapped him out of his thoughts like a referee's whistle after an injury time-out. He stepped out. The elevator doors closed behind him, and he entered the domain of Dibrell Property Company, the firm's landlord and his most

important client, accounting for over ninety percent of the legal fees he generated each year, fees that had bought everything Scott Fenney owned in life, from the bed he slept in to the shoes on his feet.

Eleven years ago almost to the day, Scott, at the time a new associate at Ford Stevens, had been in one of the elevators of this building when the doors opened and in stepped Thomas J. Dibrell. Scott recognized him immediately. Everyone in Dallas knew of Tom Dibrell: an SMU alum and rabid football booster, he had been implicated in the play-for-pay scandal with the governor that resulted in the NCAA giving SMU the death penalty in 1987; he had built the lavish Dibrell Tower with $300 million borrowed from a New York pension fund during the real-estate boom of the '80s; and he had somehow survived bankruptcy in the '90s, a fate so many other developers had suffered when the Texas real-estate market went bust. In fact, how Tom Dibrell had managed to hold on to his skyscraper while all the other big developers lost theirs to foreclosure remained the second greatest mystery of Dallas, right after *Did Oswald act alone?*

But just as Scott recognized him in the elevator that day, Dibrell recognized Scott. His face got that look Scott had witnessed so many times when a grown man had a close encounter with a football hero: it's a child's face on Christmas morning. They introduced themselves, Scott told Dibrell that he was a lawyer at Ford Stevens, and Dibrell invited him to lunch upstairs at the Downtown Club. Over a steak, Dibrell explained that the Dallas

real-estate market was in the tank, his company was on life support, and his lawyers—the disloyal bastards he had paid millions during the boom years—had just abandoned him for the Yankee banks that had taken over the insolvent local banks, the ones holding many of his defaulted notes. After lunch, Dibrell bit down on a big cigar, leaned back in his chair, and asked Scott Fenney, local football legend, to be his new lawyer.

A. Scott Fenney, Esq., had his first client.

The rest was history. Eleven years later, the Dallas real-estate market was booming again, Dibrell Property Company was on top of the world, and Tom Dibrell was again a trophy client in Dallas, a client who endows his lawyer with instant respect and social status when the lawyer announces, "I'm Scott Fenney, Tom Dibrell's lawyer." And Scott remained his loyal lawyer to the tune of $3 million a year in fees.

Scott's heels clicked against the mahogany and marble floor until he arrived at the wide entryway. Directly under a longhorn chandelier sat a round wood table on which was perched a two-foot-tall bronze sculpture of an anatomically correct calf on its side, hog-tied and held down by two cowboys, about to lose its masculinity at the hands of a third cowboy wielding a weapon that looked like a giant two-handed toenail clipper. SPRING ROUNDUP was etched in the silver plate attached to the base.

Whenever Scott entered the expansive reception area of Dibrell Property Company, he always felt like he was walking into a western museum. Frederic Remington sculptures

sat atop pedestal tables. G. Harvey paintings of cowboys on horses hung on the walls, fine art with names like *When Bankers Wore Boots*, *Rio Grande Crossing*, and *The Good Lord Willin' and the Creek Don't Rise.* The furnishings were straight out of *Giant*—diamond-tufted leather couches and matching chairs with brass studs and dark wood from floor to ceiling. On the wall above the reception desk hung the museum's masterpiece, a huge portrait of Tom Dibrell astride a big black stallion. He looked like a kid whose parents had forced him to sit on the pony at a petting zoo. It was, in fact, the only time Tom had ever been on a horse. But Tom loved all things cowboy, even though no one in Dallas or Houston or Texas for that matter was ever really a cowboy. Still, it was fun to pretend.

Scott's eyes dropped from Roy Rogers Jr. to perhaps the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen, at least since the last time he had stood here. A blonde, blue-eyed beauty was sitting behind the reception desk and painting her nails over the morning newspaper. Tom Dibrell always said he firmly believed in hiring bean-counters from Harvard Business and receptionists from Hooters. Problem was, the receptionists' career path always led from this desk to Tom's office couch, which in turn led to a substantial settlement to avoid litigation.

"God, he was handsome," she said.

She didn't mean Tom. Her blue eyes were focused on the newspaper and a black-and-white photo of a young man under the headlines, "Clark McCall Murdered" . . . "Prostitute Charged" . . . "Senator McCall 'Devastated' " . . . "Presidential Campaign Delayed."

"That's a mug shot," Scott said, "from when he was busted for dope. He was always in trouble."

She shrugged. "He was rich."

"His daddy's rich."

"That's good enough for me."

"Well, then, he should've picked you up Saturday night instead of that hooker."

"Oh, I would've cost him a lot more than her. But then, I don't carry a gun."

"Girl, from where I'm standing, you're sure packing some heat."

She gave him a coy smile then dropped her eyes back to the newspaper. She shook her head slowly as if pondering a great mystery.

"Rich and handsome. Why would he want a black prostitute when he could have any white girl in town?"

"Cheaper, like you said."

Scott always enjoyed flirting with Dibrell's girls, but he had tired of this conversation. The murder of a senator's son did not concern him this afternoon. He was here to make money. So he said, "Scott Fenney, to see Tom."

The receptionist put down her polish, blew on her nails, and picked up the phone. She held the receiver carefully with the inside pads of her fingers so as not to scuff her fresh paint job, punched a button with the eraser end of a pencil, and said, "Mr. Fenney is here." She hung up, rearranged herself in her chair so as to show off her impressive upper body, and said, "So, are you married?"

Scott held up his left hand to display his wedding ring.

"Eleven years."

"Too bad." She blew on her nails again and said, "Go right back, Mr. Fenney. And call me if that changes . . . or even if it don't."

Grammar skills notwithstanding, she was a fine example of what Texas men wanted most—a gorgeous Texas girl. Texas myths were many, but one was no myth: the most gorgeous girls in the world were found in Texas. Dallas, Texas. Girls like her, they graduate from high school or maybe junior college, and from small towns all across Texas they head straight to Dallas like moths to light. They come for the jobs, they come for the nightlife, they come for the single men making lots of money, the kind of money that buys big homes and fancy cars and fashionable clothes and glittery jewelry guaranteed to bring a smile to any Texas girl's face. Girl wants to marry a refinery worker and live in a doublewide, she moves to Houston; girl wants to marry money and live in a mansion, she moves to Dallas.

Scott walked through the reception area and down a gallery filled with more cowboy art and remembered to put on his glasses. He was slightly farsighted and needed the glasses only when reading in poor light, but he made it a practice to wear them in front of clients because clients like lawyers who look smart. He arrived at Tom's office suite, which consisted of a secretarial area, a private bathroom, a study with a fake fireplace, and Tom's inner sanctum.

Marlene, Tom's middle-aged secretary, looked up from the McCall story, smiled, and waved him in. He

found Tom on the far side of the vast space, his head buried in his hands, looking small behind the massive desk under the ten-foot-high ceiling. Scott walked toward his rich client, weaving his way around more leather furniture and a fancy silver-inlaid Mexican saddle on a stand and past photographs of Tom with governors and senators and presidents, and, on the coffee table, the hard hat with DIBRELL stenciled across the front, and the rolled-up blueprints he used as props at groundbreakings, even though Tom Dibrell had never held a construction job in his life.

"We're meeting downstairs on the land deal," Scott said to the top of Tom's head. "Should have it closed soon."

Tom's head started shaking slowly back and forth.

"I didn't call you about that."

Tom was fifty-five, nearly bald so he had recently gone to a comb-over, he stood five seven in his trademark cowboy boots, and he was a pudgy bastard, but for $3 million a year, Scott described him as stocky. He had been married four times to progressively younger women; the current Mrs. Dibrell was twenty-nine. Tom raised his head and Scott instantly knew it was a female problem. He sighed. His best client couldn't keep his hands off the help.

"Who was it this time, Tom?"

"Nadine."

Scott shook his head; he didn't recall a Nadine.

"Brunette, tall, built? Jesus, Scott, she's got hips like a boy!" He paused, and his eyes glazed over, as if reliving

the moment. Then: "She's threatening to sue, sexual harassment." Tom held out a letter. "She's got a fucking lawyer!"

Scott grabbed the paper; his eyes went straight to the letterhead: *Franklin Turner, Esq.*, famous plaintiffs' lawyer. Scott exhaled heavily. "Shit." Twenty thousand lawyers in Dallas and she finds Frank Turner.

Scott skimmed the letter. Frank Turner was threatening to file a lawsuit against Dibrell Property Company and Thomas J. Dibrell individually on behalf of his client, Nadine Johnson, unless a financial settlement was reached within ten days.

Tom said, "Is Turner as tough as they say?"

"Yeah, he's a real hard-ass."

Scott said it with a grave tone, much as a doctor might say, *Yes, you have cancer.* It was always best to make the client sweat a little: a worried client will pay more fees with less bitching. So he put a frown on his face and stepped over to the bay window Tom had specially designed for his office just so he could enjoy a panoramic view of Dallas, so he could stand right there and gaze out on the city and breathe it in and think, *God, what a depressing sight!* Gray and dull, like you're watching an old black-and-white TV. A concrete-and-steel landscape as far as the eye can see, all the way to the brown haze of pollution that perpetually rings the city above the loop, treeless and barren, the city's master plan obvious—to pave over every square inch of green in the whole goddamned city. Which might explain Dallas's ranking as the ugliest major city in America. Other than women,

Dallas has no natural beauty whatsoever. No ocean or lake or water of any kind except the Trinity River running west of downtown, used for decades as a natural sewage system and today as a big drainage ditch. No Central Park, no Rocky Mountains, and no Miami Beach. No wonderful weather. Nothing other great cities have. All Dallas has is a white X on Elm Street marking the exact spot where an American president was killed. But then, you don't live in Dallas for any of that; you live in Dallas to make a lot of money fast.

"Scott?"

Tom's voice sounded like a child's pleading. Scott turned to his very worried client.

"Tom, going up against Frank Turner, I'll be lucky to hold this one to twice what the last one cost."

Tom shook his head. "I don't care, Scott. Pay two million if you have to, just take care of it. And keep it quiet, I don't want to lose Babs over this. I really like her."

Babs was wife number four.

"I'll take care of it, Tom, just like I took care of the others."

Tom looked like he was going to cry.

"I'll never forget this, Scott. Never."

Scott headed to the door, saying over his shoulder, "Just don't forget it when I send you my bill."

Scott maintained his serious expression past Marlene and back through the cowboy museum—he did give the receptionist a little wink—and into the elevator lobby. But once safely aboard and alone in the elevator, he broke

into a broad grin and said to his image in the mirrored wall: "How can one man get himself into so many legal cracks? The guy's fucking uncanny."

In the privacy of an elevator or his thoughts, Scott Fenney regarded his rich client as all lawyers regard the rich clients who subsidize their lives: they're creatures of lesser intelligence who, by the grace of God, have inherited, stolen, swindled, connived, cheated, or simply lucked their way into enormous wealth. So, to restore balance to the natural order, the lawyers are duty bound to relieve their clients of as much of their wealth as possible in legal fees.

A. Scott Fenney, Esq., had always done his duty with respect to Tom Dibrell.