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Richard Fairfield called Bob from Jefferson City about a week after the television debate. "I hear that the Bickel camp has their first post-debate poll. It shows you with 54%; Barbara with 42%; and only 4% undecided. This could be a landslide, but don't let up."

"Don't worry about that, Richard. I learned all about the dangers of over-confidence back when I ran for the state Senate."

The Bickel-Hill race had become a real problem for the national news media. Through August and September, they had given the race heavy coverage, expecting Bickel to win, and preparing to feature the race as proof of the popularity of the pro-abortion cause. But by the end of September, national news coverage was declining noticeably, and after the television debate, it stopped almost completely. It was obvious that the reporters and editors now believed that Robert Hill would be the winner, and they were having trouble finding an ex-

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planation that would not give credit to the pro-life cause. Had Bob been white, and Barbara Bickel black, they would have been quick to blame Barbara's defeat on white racism. But, since the reverse was true, the issue of race had not been mentioned in the national coverage. A few stories were beginning to appear, to the effect that this was a fundamentalist "Bible-Belt" district and was not representative of the overwhelming majority of the American people.

Through October, Bob continued his exhaustive pace. He was able to spend most nights at home, but usually was gone by 6 a.m., and rarely returned before 9 or 10 p.m. He had put his law practice completely on hold. He had campaigned several times in every county in the district, and had spent a great deal of time in Senator Bickel's home town of New Dresden. Since the debate, his crowds had picked up noticeably and their response had become more enthusiastic. Also, the debate had encouraged and inspired the pro-life organizations, and they were campaigning for Bob with increased zeal. It was obvious to all observers that the race was going Bob's way.

On Tuesday, one week before the election, Bob campaigned all day through the small towns in the southern part of the district. He didn't have a speaking engagement that evening, so he was able to start for home about 5:45 p.m., expecting to be home before 8 for a late supper. He was tired, and had turned on a Chicago station with easy listening music, and thus did not hear the local news.

When Maria opened the front door, it was obvious to Bob that something was terribly wrong. She said, "Honey, I know it isn't true."

"What, Maria, what on earth has happened?"

"Oh, Honey, you haven't heard the news. The Jeff City television carried an interview on their 5 o'clock news with a

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young woman who claimed she had to give up her job at the state Capitol because of sexual harassment by you. She says she is going to sue you.”

“Who is she? Who made this claim?”

“Her name is Debbie Johnson, and she worked in some office there in the Capitol building. She says you kept after her with improper proposals until finally she was forced to quit.”

Bob sat down heavily. “Debbie Johnson, I can’t even remember who she is. She’s lying, Maria. I love you too much to even look at another woman.”

“I know that, Bob, I didn’t believe it for one minute.”

The phone rang. It was Richard Fairfield. “Bob, I am here in Jeff City. This Johnson woman worked for a few months in legislative research. She quit about 6 months ago and now is a clerk at a discount store. Her roommate came home just before 5 and saw Johnson leaving with a suitcase. She said she would be back in a few days. She got in a car with another woman and drove away. The roommate didn’t recognize the other woman.”

“Richard, her story is completely false. I can’t even remember who she is. I want to confront her, but if she is represented by an attorney, I guess that would be unethical.”

Richard replied, “Nobody knows where she is. She didn’t go to work today — called in sick. The interview was conducted at her apartment. Apparently someone called the television reporter to come to the apartment with her camera. This was done in mid-afternoon and was shown on the 5 o’clock news. Johnson left her apartment just before the news broke, and hasn’t been seen since. Another significant item — Johnson read a written statement to the camera and refused to answer any questions.”

Bob said, “It seems obvious that whoever is behind this has hidden her out and will keep her hidden until after the

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election. They can't risk letting anyone talk to her."

"Bob, everyone who knows you knows the Johnson woman is lying. But the general public won't know this. This thing is dynamite. Your greatest asset is your strong pro-family image. This hits at the very heart of that. And there is the ugly racism this will bring out. The black man mistreating a white woman thing. Whoever planned this knows how to hurt you in the very worst way."

Bob said, "Richard, I do not believe that Barbara Bickel has done this. I know she doesn't like me, and I know she wants to win, but she wouldn't stoop to something like this. Nor do I believe that anyone in the Democratic organization is responsible. Most likely it is some offshoot pro-abortion outfit. Maybe even someone who owns a big abortion clinic. But I don't blame Barbara, and I plan to say so publically."

"Well, you are probably right," Richard said. "But Barbara knows this Johnson woman's charges are not true. Let's see if she says that publically. Bob, how are you going to handle this whole thing?"

"Richard, I am not going to quit. I will cancel my regular schedule for tomorrow, and instead visit every newspaper, radio station, and television station in the district. I will tell them that Debbie Johnson's charges are completely false and will challenge her to come out of hiding and face the press. The weekly papers all come out on Thursday or Friday, so if I get to them tomorrow, I should get in this week's paper. Next week will be too late. I am scheduled for a speech in New Dresden tomorrow night, and I will keep that commitment. Thursday I will go back to my regular campaign schedule. With the Lord's help, I may win this yet."

"I admire your spirit, Bob," Richard said. "In the meantime I will do all I can up here. Good-bye and good luck."

Bob turned to Maria. "Honey, it is clearly a put-up job.

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Somebody has this Johnson woman hidden out. I intend to pound on that point and I will fight this all the way. I am sorry for what it puts you through. Have you talked to Mom and Dad?"

"Yes. Of course they are upset, but they know it isn't true. I have talked to Sherman too. He is furious, and said to call on him for anything he can do to help."

Bob dialed Catherine McFadden's home number in Jefferson City. "You have heard the news, of course, do I know this Johnson woman?"

Catherine said, "She is about 27, average size, not ugly, but not pretty, just plain looking. She has a college degree in political science. How she got it, I don't know. They hired her in legislative research, hoping to use her in research and drafting, but she couldn't handle it, so she ended up running errands. She used to bring documents up to our office, maybe once or twice a week. You rarely saw her. She finally got discouraged with her job and quit. They didn't want to fire her, but were glad when she quit. It was common knowledge among the women in the Capitol that Debbie had a crush on you, but, of course, you didn't have the faintest idea what was going on. It may be that she has started believing some of her own fantasies."

"Catherine, someone has put her up to all this. They have her hidden out somewhere. A woman was seen driving her away just before 5 p.m."

"Debbie would be easily led. She is definitely a follower. I will find out everything I can and let you know."

Bob left before daylight the next morning and was at the far corner of the district, waiting when the newspaper opened. He then worked his way back north toward New Dresden where he was scheduled for an evening speech. He could have contacted the newspapers and radio stations by

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telephone, but he knew that his denials would get better coverage if they were delivered face to face. At the television stations, by appearing in person, he was able to get on camera.

It was nearly ten when he got home that night. Maria could see weariness and discouragement in his face. "Honey, you got good coverage all day. I think your statement came across well and should convince a lot of people. The Adamsville paper has a wonderful article supporting you."

"I really appreciate the home town support I have received. I heard some of the radio statements, and I thought they were okay. The local news outlets in this district have been very fair with me. Right now I need all the help I can get."

"How did your speech go?"

Bob shook his head. "Not good at all. The crowd was only about half what we expected. And I had some hecklers. They kept shouting things like, 'Hey, nigger, tell us what a good family man you are.'"

"Oh Bob, I am so sorry you have to face that. I could scratch that Johnson woman's eyes out."

Bob laughed and put his arm around her. "Honey, I am glad I have you to stand up for me. But we must not feel too bad toward Debbie Johnson. She is just a dumb little thing who is being used by the real villain. But I am just sick about the racism that has come into this race. I wanted so much to prove that a black man can run in a white district, just like any other American. I didn't want any favors because of my race, nor did I want my race to be an obstacle. I wanted this to be a completely color blind campaign. Now all that seems to be out the window."

Maria said, "Honey, there are still thousands of people in this district who are taking you for just what you are — a fine,

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American gentleman. The racists are still a small minority, and you can rise above them and show them up for what they really are."

"Thank you, Maria. I feel better. I am going to campaign as hard as I can for three days, then spend Sunday with you and the boys, hit the campaign trail again on Monday, and then come home and leave it in the hands of God."

Bob spent Thursday in the northern part of the district where he had speeches scheduled before ladies groups and a noon Chamber of Commerce meeting. At every stop, he strongly affirmed that the charges made against him were false; that they had been made just one week before the election for obvious political reasons; and that Ms. Johnson was in hiding and would not come out to answer any questions about her claims. He always stated, however, that he did not believe that Senator Bickel had anything to do with the false charges. Bob believed that most of the people who heard him in person were convinced that he had been falsely accused. But for every person who heard him in person, there were at least fifty who did not. He hoped to reach some of these with several television spots and a fifteen minute speech scheduled for Friday evening.

David Mullins had called Bob late Wednesday evening to say that he knew that Debbie Johnson's charges were false, and to assure Bob that no one connected with the Democratic Party had anything to do with those charges. Bob stated that he was fully convinced that the Democratic organization had played no part in this, and thanked David for calling. David promised to call Barbara Bickel and suggest that she make a public statement that she believed the charges were false. So far, however, Barbara had made no mention of the Debbie Johnson affair.

When Bob got home Thursday night the house was empty.

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He found a note on the table. "We couldn't reach you by phone. Catherine has found Debbie. I have gone to Columbia to meet her. Pray for us and watch the 10 o'clock news on my old station. The boys are at your parents for the night. Much love, Maria."

It was only nine, so Bob went over to his parents' house so they could watch together. The boys were already in bed. Bob said, "Can anybody tell me what has happened?"

Matthew laughed. "Catherine, bless her heart, kept working on the Capitol grapevine until she found that the Johnson girl was in an apartment over at Columbia. Apparently the girl had gotten bored and made a call to one of her friends at the Capitol. I don't know how Catherine was able to worm it out of her. Anyway, Catherine closed your office and went to Columbia. Again I don't know how she did it, but somehow Catherine got the girl to break down and admit that she had lied. Then she didn't know what to do. She wanted it on the television cameras so everyone would know and so there would be no backing out. But she was afraid to call any of the stations because she didn't know who to trust. If it was leaked to the wrong persons, they might come and spirit Debbie away again before she could make a public confession."

Bob smiled. "Catherine is wonderful. She always thinks of all the angles."

"Well, Catherine called Maria. They couldn't locate you, so, at this point your sweet little wife took charge. She called one of her friends from the Columbia station, told her she had a really hot story for her, and arranged for her to bring her camera and meet her at the student union. We got the boys, Maria took off for Columbia, and I guess we must turn on our set for the final chapter of this real life 'who-dun-it'."

The Debbie Johnson story was the lead item on the local news. The announcer summarized the charges which Debbie

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had made; referred to Bob's denial; stated that Debbie had been located in a Columbia apartment; and then put on Debbie's filmed statement. The tearful girl stated that a woman with dark hair, whom she knew only as Martha, had come to her several days earlier, and told her that Senator Hill was trying to take away women's rights. She said that if Debbie would stop him, she would be doing a favor for all the women of America. Debbie wrote out the statement for the news in her own hand writing but the woman told her what to write. The woman told her not to answer any questions. The woman told her she would have to stay over at Columbia for a while, otherwise people would be bothering her with questions. She admitted that the charges she had made against Senator Hill were not true. Debbie denied getting any money for what she did other than the wages she lost and the rent for the apartment. She said she hadn't seen the woman since she came to Columbia. She said she was sorry for what she had done.

With tears in her eyes, Hannah hugged her son. "Bob, the Good Lord has seen us through this. This just teaches us once more that we can always trust Him."

Bob said, "I don't doubt that He has been with Catherine and Maria in all they have done. I want to call Catherine right now. Okay if I use your phone?"

"Of course, and be sure and give Catherine our love. And check on Maria."

Catherine answered at her home. Bob said, "How can I ever thank you enough, I don't know how you did it, but you are better than any private eye in the whole country. Catherine, you have saved my campaign, but more than that, you have stopped the ugly cancer of racism that was starting to grow in this district. A lot of people owe a lot to you for that. I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

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Catherine said, "My years of cultivating the Capitol grapevine have finally paid off. I am just glad I was in a position to help. Bob, do you plan to take any action against Debbie Johnson?"

"No, it appears to me that she was just a pawn in this whole thing."

"Well, I think there was a little of the 'woman scorned' element in this. She went along with the scheme partly because she was miffed because you never paid any attention to her."

"Nevertheless," Bob replied, "she is not the real culprit. If we could find this Martha person and whoever is behind her, then I would take legal action. But I am not going to worry about that now. Has Maria started home?"

"She started home about an hour ago, without waiting to see the broadcast. She should be there around midnight."

"Thanks again, Catherine, and good night. Oh yes, and Mom sends her love."

The rest of the campaign was anticlimactic. Bob continued his vigorous schedule through Monday. On Tuesday, he voted, and then spent the rest of the day behind his desk at the law office. He and Maria had decided against attending a big election night party in Jefferson City. Instead, they waited for the returns at home, in company with only Sherman and Bob's parents.

As the returns came in, it was soon apparent that Bob was winning easily. He lost New Dresden by a narrow margin, but carried several of the smaller counties in Barbara Bickel's senatorial district. Bob's own senatorial district went heavily in his favor. By midnight it was clear that Bob had carried the congressional district with about 56% of the vote — a truly remarkable victory for a Republican in that district.

Maria said, "Honey, you gave up a sure seat in Congress when you voted for HB 160. But God works in wonderful

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ways. You did what you knew to be right, and here you are in Congress anyway.”

Hannah said, “Son, I think of those words on the wall of your Senate chamber, ‘Nothing Is Politically Right That Is Morally Wrong.’ Jesus said it this way. ‘But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.’ ”

The End