

The Governor's Appointment

by

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Chapter 26

A FedEx truck drove up to Town Hall entrance, and the driver bounced out with a large flat envelope in his hand. He stepped inside the door and handed it to the receptionist. No signature was required. The package was addressed to Russell Johnson from the Law Firm of Baines, Polk, Carter, and Schiffer, PC. The receptionist took the envelope to Janet, the mayor's secretary. She immediately took it into the mayor and placed it on his desk while he was talking on the phone.

Okay, that's fine—I can handle that. Give me a few days, and I can get that info to your office. No, it's in my wife's name. That's right. Okay, thanks. Thanks; I'll get it to you. Goodbye. . .Mrs. Janet, what's this?

It's from a Law Firm, sir.

Yes, I can see that. Okay, let me just open the darn thing up to see. . .what it's. . .all about. . .Well, I'll be damned! That female filed a suit against me, of all people. I can't believe this, Mrs. Janet. What is she suing me for? That--that crazy female has lost her mind.

You know Mayor Johnson; anybody can file a suit against anybody these days--and for no good reason. I don't understand it.

Well, this letter says they want to depose me. I guess that means they want me to answer a bunch of questions about how I got appointed as acting mayor. What the hell? I'll take this to Attorney Patton. It's all a waste of time and money. I don't know what they expect to get from me, anyway. Mrs. Janet, do you know if she is suing Gloster?

No, sir--I don't.

You will have to wait to have that conversation with Attorney, Patton, sir. He is researching another case he's working on privately, in Liberty.

That's alright. I'll discuss this with Attorney Crabtree tonight.

Yes, sir. Did you want him to call you later?

Please have him do that when he can. Thanks, Mrs. Janet.

Yes, sir.

By four o'clock, Russell had completed his brief meeting with Glosters Maintenance Department. He assured the workers they would be getting a long-awaited raise, as soon as he got any new monies in from the State.

The weather forecast was for moderate rain coming in the area around five fifteen, and lasting until around nine. Russell decided to go to the Madison House--he named it for the late mayor--and prepare the facility for the meeting attendees. He called his wife to determine when she planned on arriving.

Actually, I was about to call you to tell you I was headed over there now. Did you need me for anything?

Yes, honey, I could use your smiling face in the place, that's all.

Uh, huh, sure. You didn't say that last night when you went to bed early and went to sleep.

Now, baby, you know how tired I was last night. However, I'm willing to make it up to you this weekend. I'm gonna be all yours for whatever you want to do. How's that?

Okay, good. I want you to help me find another car in New Orleans. This rent-a-car is too small. I need my Buick SUV.

Okay, okay, we'll find you a replacement this weekend. But you want to go to New Orleans to find it? Why not go to Liberty, or Centerville, or Crosby?

Nope, I want to look for one in Louisiana. Besides, it will allow Quince to visit the Aquarium there.

Done! How far away are you from here?

I'm five minutes away.

That'll work. I can use your expertise in moving around the seating for the meeting. I got the feeling between Mrs. Crabtree and Mr. Sandoval; this meeting is going to be explosive.

Honey, the only caution I have for you is; do not let anybody talk you into doing anything that you don't want to do. If it doesn't feel right, don't accept it. You know I'm gonna be listening carefully.

No, you should not worry about that. I'm feeling a lot more comfortable about all this. I have a clearer picture of where we want to go, and how far. I just need you to hang in there with me, babes. I'm not going to do anything that's going to jeopardize my family's safety and security.

Okay?

Okay, I'm here now. I'll see you inside.

By five o'clock, all the invited participants were present to start the meeting. The Reverend offered to start the meeting off with a prayer. At the conclusion, Mr. Sandoval took over the agenda.

Good evening, all. It's a pleasure to have everybody present for this meeting which I deem to be a historic one. I want to thank State Representative, Edith Crabtree; Mayor Russell Johnson & wife, Janice; Reverend Peter Collins & wife, Charlette, My wife, Nichole, and I'm Harper Sandoval.

You all know the gist of why we're here tonight. However, I want to lay out some facts that I know you are all aware of. First, let's be clear on the genesis of our efforts going forward. Our Representative wrote a paper when she was a senior in high school, concerning how the minority-majority can legally control the political, financial, and social agenda in thirty percent of the small towns in Mississippi. When she graduated from Jackson State as an Under Graduate and started work on her Masters, she expanded on that thesis and made it relevant to the 21st Century.

Now, with that as an introduction, I will turn the floor over to Representative Edith Crabtree to expound on her ground-breaking proposal. . .Edith. . .

Thank you, Mr. Sandoval, and thank you all for being here tonight. We all know each other. So, I want to get comfortable and take off my shoes, because my feet are yelling at me since I been on them all day.

Just as Edith was getting ready to get into her presentation, the doorbell rang.

Who in the world is that, asked Russell? . . .oh, it's Janet from The Café. Why don't we help her get everything in place before we get started? I can appreciate that she agreed to cook for us at the last minute.

That sounds like a plan, mayor, responded Reverend Collins.

Meanwhile, back at the Governor's Office, another phone call came in from an anonymous source, advising him that he should come to Gloster because something is going on there that should interest him.

Mrs. Beecher, were you able to determine who that person was who left this message for me?

No, sir, they didn't want to leave their name but, I could hear a noise in the background that sounded as if they were in the woods. I could hear sounds that an owl would make.

That don't tell me much. The whole damn town is in the woods over there. Where is the mayor? Where is Representative Crabtree? Can you get hold of him or her?

Yes, sir—I can try to call her again.

Representative Crabtree had turned off her phone, as did all the rest who gathered for the meeting. They were not to be interrupted while discussing such serious business. Getting back to business after their meal had ended, Sandoval spoke again.

Alright, in light of the interruption, I think we need to give you a shortened version of the background for The Plan and get into the nuts and bolts of why we're all here. So, let me say this; our research has shown that the ideas espoused in Representative's thesis back in High School, and developed in College, is sound if properly funded and supported. The Plan she is about to describe to you is solid as a rock and must be agreed to and supported by each us. Every one of us must be willing to swear to an Oath, that we will fight for the implementation of the plan when it is explained to you, so help us, God.

The Reverend and his wife showed a surprised look on their faces, as did Janet.

How are we supposed to agree that we can swear to something that we do not know about and understand? I'll be honest with you—this sounds like it is serious. So, what are y'all proposing to do--kill somebody?

Yeah, that's what I want to know as well. I understand all about getting everybody registered to vote and all that but, the way you put it, Mr. Sandoval, you make it sound like a take-over of the whole State of Mississippi, said Janet. Are you understanding this, Russell?

Just let Edith continue with the explanation, honey. It's alright. Let her finish.

Okay, listen. I know this may affect y'all in a negative way because it's something you never envisioned before. But I can assure you that when this country was founded, there were meetings just like this, that took place by the founding fathers to come up with their ideas for becoming the United States. So, I understand your reticence. So, let me go forward and hopefully, you can understand where we are coming from and where we are going. Okay?

Okay, go on, responded The Reverend.

So, here we are in Gloster, Mississippi. This is a town that has less than a thousand residents. The highest you ever had, as permanent residents, were 1,500. The demographics show that over 70%

of the residents are of African-American descent. Now, your town is managed by 99% Anglo-Saxons. There is one person of color in the management of your town, and so far, he is missing.

Now, this town was founded back in the mid-1800, and it has never had a person of color in any management position until now. Think about that—not one person of color, until now. Russell Johnson, here, represents a whole new paradigm, when it comes to people of color having power. Having power means controlling your own destiny. Controlling your own destiny means deciding for yourselves what is a priority and what is not.

Russell Johnson was appointed by the Governor to be the temporary mayor because ‘I persuaded him to do so.’ Do you understand that, Reverend? Do you understand what I’m talking about, Mrs. Collins?

Yes, we do. We understand what that means. Said the Reverend.

Now, he could have chosen Mr. Stallworth; Mr. Sessions; Ms. Whitfield, or Mr. Walters. They’re all white and have been there for decades, but out of nowhere comes this forty-something black man, who has no previous experience. Mayor Johnson is smart, energetic, strong, and he’s a leader. He happens to be in the perfect position to be elected as your next mayor, and having achieved that status; he will be a pioneer for the rest of the small towns in Mississippi. Let me correct that—he will be a pioneer for the small towns as well as small cities in Mississippi.

Allow me to say something, Edith, may I?

Yes, of course, Mr. Sandoval.

This may come as news to even Mayor Johnson but, if you look at even a small number of towns with less than 1,000 residents within two hundred miles, either way, they have an African-American population average of 70.4%. Look at the numbers—you got eight towns that average about 500 residents that are 70% people of color. Do you know what that says? That says there is potential in those numbers.

He’s right. It’s potential until they get registered to vote, and then if they do; they get the power, explained Edith.

Give us an idea of the other towns you’re talking about, asked Russell.

Sure—Roxie, Benoit, Weir, Gunnison, Shubuta, Artesia, Marigold, and Duncan. They have over 70% African-American.

I had not thought about those towns having that amount of black populations before.

I know, but I have. The Representative has too. Right, Edith?

For a long time, I have. But there’s something else—there are some larger towns in Mississippi, where there are minority populations of over 60%.

Which ones are you speaking of, Harper, asked his wife?

Vicksburg, Natchez, Holly Springs, Canton, and Cleveland is right at 50%. You should know there are about 130 towns in Mississippi that are classified as small.

Okay, you get the drift, right, everyone, asked Edith? Now, a couple of those towns have black mayors, but the rest of the administration is run by white people. So, they are limited in what they can do if they get outvoted. . .you understand that kind of situation? So, in that event, where there

is a black in charge, and (he/she) the mayor, sets the agenda, it makes no difference if he has a majority of antagonists who might vote against him or her, you see?

Edith and Mr. Sandoval, I get your drift. And I think my wife see what you're saying, right honey?

Yes, I do now. I can see a bigger picture.

Okay, let me continue. . .as, the mayor of Gloster, I want to do something for the people to demonstrate that I, as a black man, can govern. Now, right now, I'm short on the Board by two people. I can't have a quorum with that few. I need to make some appointments myself, which is part of governing. I'm at a standstill because of it.

Why? Why are you at a standstill?

I need two more to make a quorum.

But you can appoint the two people to fill the slots. You don't have to wait for an election. Pick somebody.

Are you saying, Representative, that I have the authority to do that as an Appointed mayor?

That's exactly what I'm saying.

I didn't know that.

Yes, there is business that needs to be taken care of, and the Governor expects you to carry out the duties of that position. Find someone to fill the positions and get moving.

Honey, do you have somebody in mind?

Sure, I do. I can appoint anyone I chose as long as it's not family, right?

Yes, that's right.

Well, I met a man and his wife today, who wanted to help me move the town forward. The only thing is; he's a white man.

Did I hear you say you met a man, who is white, who wanted to help you move the town forward, mayor?

Yes, a Mr. Frank Garrison. His wife is named Lucille. He stopped me in the street earlier today and told me he knew I would need some help in moving the town forward, and he and his wife wanted to help. I think he would make a great appointment. What do you think?

Listen, I think if you were comfortable with him, and he was serious about helping, I say you should bring him on. It's a temporary appointment, so what's the harm? Said Reverend Collins.

I agree, mayor. You got to remember; there are good people on both sides now. Some white people in the south believe in equality, and justice for all--am I right, Harper?

Yes, I believe that. You just have to find them, and then test them. Around here, that's not going to be easy.

But, I'm willing to try. I can see things changing for the better now. I need to replace the female, Whitfield and add Mr. Garrison, and we'll be alright. I can work with the other whites on the Board. I can get that done right away.

What about replacing Whitfield with Nate Burton? Nate is in this District, and I heard he might be interested in politics.

That is a great suggestion, Reverend. I'll follow-up on that tomorrow.

Okay, now that that's settled, let me get back to The Plan, said Mrs. Crabtree.

That's what I want to hear, responded Russell. Where do we go from here?

From here, we look at the economics of the areas we're targeting. As we mentioned to you some time ago, Russell, there are seventeen towns we're highlighting, with Gloster being the tip of the spear.

With Gloster suffering from a lack of jobs for its residents who can and want to work, we need to focus on getting jobs in here to replace the loss of GP. Now, all of the targeted towns are suffering from the same lack of quality employment for its residents. But with Gloster, we want to get a jump start with the Governor giving you a huge grant to get the GP site cleaned up, and having extra money to go into your budget.

Is that a done deal? Will we be getting anywhere near the three million you requested, asked Russell?

I'm not promising that you'll get three million. I'll just say it's looking favorable that he will authorize some monies for clean-up and there should be funds left over. I expect you will demand that whoever gets the contract, many of your unemployed residents must be part of the effort, am I right?

Absolutely!

Okay, so that's a start. Now, I got word from my Sorority sister, in Philadelphia, that her constituent wants to meet with you in Gloster, in the coming month, to visit the town with his family.

That's great. We can show him around. How long do they want to stay?

I would think no more than a couple of days.

You know, since we have this house, we can let them stay here as our guests. This could be our own "Guest Residence" for anyone who wants to come on business. How about that, asked Janet?

Oh, wow, that's a great idea. What do you think about that, Mr. Sandoval?

Since you mentioned that, I think the town ought to have a big clean-up; paint-up; fix-up, and a rally before they come. What you think, Reverend?

That sounds like a great idea. We should be able to get the churches involved in the idea. We can have a competition among the different communities to get things cleaned up for our new mayor and all the things that are about to happen here in Gloster. What do you think, my First Lady?

We can sure use a lifting. Let's get some of these young people involved. Let them have a baseball game and competition in the three towns. Get the schools to have a competition of some kind for a trophy. We need to celebrate to lift the spirits of everybody around here. I'm all for it.

Okay, so, let's see what we have, so far. Y'all want to have a get-together and invite several communities to a friendly competition. What about getting hold of some of the movie celebrities who were born in Mississippi, suggested Russell.

Let me address that, Russell, said Edith. Bringing in some of the famous Mississippians is part of our Phase2 Plan. This is going to be a major initiative to be able to do that.

Well, maybe not. I happen to know Freeman's cousin, who has a good relationship with him. Said Sandoval.

You mean you have connections for Morgan Freeman, Mr. Sandoval, asked Janice?

That's right, I do. I got his cousin's number right here in my phone. Also, I know the aunt of Danny Glover, who was born in Gloster.

That's it, y'all. That would be the draw we would need to get everybody to come to a celebration, Edith. Said Russell.

Yes, sir, it would. But let's do something else besides having them just show up—and this is part of our Phase2 Plan. We want to offer them to become a part of our Investment Group.

Investment Group, Edith! What's that all about, asked Russell?

Let me get ahead of myself and dive into Phase2 now. Mr. Sandoval, I'll let you take the first part.

Alright, everyone needs to get refreshed with some iced tea and get comfortable. I want no notes taken on any of this, to preclude any of it getting out before we're ready. However, here it is: