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Enid Powell
Breakthru Writing

COURTING KATHLEEN HANNIGAN

MARY HUTCHINGS REED

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It's all fiction and it's all true.

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MHR
July, 2007

DEDICATION

This novel is for every person
who has nurtured a creative spark wherever it was found,
and, in particular, for

my mother, Mary Jo Hutchings
and
my father, LeRoi Hutchings
and
my sister, Donna C. Steele
and
my career buddy, Christine Albright
and
my best friend and husband, William R. Reed

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime;
therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing which is true or beautiful or good
makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;
therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone;
therefore we must be saved by love."

Reinhold Niebuhr

ONE

The Oath

"To tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

What was the truth? Even after analyzing months of truth (re-remembered) and truth (half-forgotten), attorney Kathleen Hannigan could not be sure she knew the truth, the whole of it or nothing but. What did her version matter, anyway? Her own lawyers had suggested that her opinion might be irrelevant, especially if she insisted on saying what she really thought. It was a defense lawyer's twist on her mother's adage: If she couldn't say something helpful, then she shouldn't say anything at all.

"I do," she said. She had sworn as much fifteen years ago, when she had been admitted to the bar. It was, as to a marriage oath, the expected answer.

The case, pending before the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, was captioned *Ann Rose vs. Albright & Gill et al,* and Kathleen was one of three hundred and fifteen A&G partners listed as a defendant. She was the only A&G lawyer being called upon by Ann Rose to testify against her partners, in effect, against herself.

Just a year and a half ago, the plaintiff, Ann Rose, had been the law firm's star associate. Today, she was a public thorn irritating its venerable side. According to the allegations of the complaint, Kathleen and her law partners (all but fifteen of them men) had discriminated against Ann because of her sex. She claimed that they had not elected her to partnership because she didn't wear make-up or jewelry. The Firm said it was because they simply didn't like her that much. Kathleen herself couldn't stand the woman.

Kathleen Hannigan was seven years senior to Ann Rose and had been a partner for eight years. She'd served on two important Firm committees and had set her sights on ascending to Albright & Gill's all-male Management Committee. She persisted in

believing that members of that Committee had the power to change things, for women and for others. Conveniently, this allowed her personal ambition to masquerade as political cause. Until Ann Rose sued the Firm, she had been on track.

Now, with her right hand raised for the oath, Kathleen's career was on the line for the sake of a detestable woman who once had found a fellow A&G lawyer dead in his office and had billed her time with the paramedics to "Firm Administration." Apparently, Helen Bornstein, Ann Rose's attorney, was counting on Kathleen to put her feminist ideals above her petty animosities and personal ambitions. At the same time, Bornstein was taking a chain saw to the ladder of Kathleen's career.

"Louder, for the record."

"I do."

"You may be seated."

She sat in the black leather swivel chair in the elevated witness box and crossed her legs at the ankles, forcing her knees together in a ladylike but uncomfortable pose. In real life, she always crossed her right knee over her left, and when nervous rotated her right ankle until a little crack betrayed her age.

The courtroom looked bigger from the witness stand than it had a few months ago when she and Marshall Long had argued a case for Anthony, the single-named, legendary rock promoter who was Kathleen's most prestigious client. They had faced the judge from a podium twenty feet away from the bench, and, because the ceiling was twice as high as normal, he had been dwarfed by the great black iron seal of the federal court hanging on the wall over his head. It was not real cast iron, just as the courtroom's reddish-brown paneling was not real mahogany, but an obvious imitation. Since there were no windows, the room was like a very large cave laminated with the sticky paper Kathleen's mother used to line kitchen drawers.

According to the oversized silver-colored clock imbedded in the paneling at the back of the room, it was about ten. Kathleen smiled pleasantly at the jury, comfortably seated in red plush theater-style seats behind the railing below her and to her left.

Waiting for Helen Bornstein to attack, she knew she would be tempted to say something nice, like she had been taught, to please her audience. If she could think of just the right thing, perhaps she could salvage her career. *Just the right thing* would punish firms that discriminated against women, but would not require them to offer the plum of partnership to the wrong women, women like Ann Rose.

A surprising number of her partners at Albright & Gill, one of the city's oldest law firms, were scattered among the courtwatchers, even though Blake Mills, the Managing Partner, had urged them not to attend. It would be unseemly, he had suggested, to show too much interest in the proceedings, akin to attending the taping of a daytime talk show. Nevertheless, at least half a dozen had found a convenient pretense that morning to stop in Judge Jasper's courtroom. Most of them, Kathleen knew, were present out of morbid curiosity rather than a desire to be personally supportive, and so she was all the more disappointed not to see her best friend in the gallery.

Jill had warned her the night before that she was having nanny problems. Dumbfounded, but unwilling to risk a confrontation, Kathleen had merely said, "Oh." After all, they had been there for each other through all the ups and downs of the fifteen years of their careers. Perhaps they had drifted apart recently due to the changed particulars of their lives—Jill's life, with the baby, had changed the most—but surely she would be there, nanny problems or no.

Kathleen scanned the audience. No Jill.

For courage, she looked towards the defense table, where Marshall Long sat with Philip Darby, the Firm's attorney. Blake had asked Marshall to monitor the trial so that he himself could maintain a public distance from it. Blake probably wanted the jury to see Marshall's boyish face and mistakenly believe that they were all like him. In a skinny, intellectual sort of way, Marshall was quite handsome. He was in his mid-forties, but not yet graying, and his medium-length, brown hair had a friendly, windblown curl to it. Was it possible that while Jill had been busy

TWO

Q: *Ms. Hannigan, will you state your name for the record, please?*

At five to nine on the first Monday morning in June, 1976, the elevator was crowded, and when the doors to the forty-seventh floor opened, a chivalrous centrifugal force plastered the eight men in suits against its sides to let the five women out first. Kathleen Hannigan stepped out second, a Coach leather briefcase, not a nick on it, hanging from a long strap over her left shoulder, and a matching zippered purse, showing signs of more use, slung over her right.

Albright & Gill occupied six of the higher floors of what was called First National Plaza, a stone and granite building on Madison Street that swooped fifty-seven stories into the air from a great sunken plaza on its south side. It was in the very bulls-eye of the city, just one block west of State and Madison, zero-zero in the numbering system. Albright & Gill's main reception area was on forty-seven, where a young woman sat behind a dark wooden desk with a marble top, looking up whenever one of the eight elevators opened in the wide hall in front of her. To her left were two U-shaped groupings of leather sofas and chairs facing floor-to-ceiling windows; the high summer sun bounced off the city's largest boat harbor and obscured the tops of office buildings below. A young woman sat on the edge of a chair in the first grouping, nervously facing away from the view.

"Kathleen Hannigan for Mr. Farnsworth," Kitty announced to the receptionist, surprising herself with her adopted formality. When had she decided to change her everyday name? "Kathleen" had come out spontaneously, as if "Kitty" were too casual and flirtatious to be a proper name for a lawyer. The receptionist told her, in a civil but uninterested tone, to take a seat. Kathleen chose a chair opposite the woman she'd noticed earlier and immediately recognized a law-school interview suit. This one was navy, with a

blue, gold and white scarf tucked modestly into the V. It was moderately, but not outrageously, expensive, crisply-tailored. The woman's white knuckles betrayed another case of first-day jitters.

"Are you new, too?" Kathleen asked, trusting her instincts.

"Jill Alton," the woman said.

Kathleen asked her where she was from. "From," among law students, meant law school, not home, and law school was an instant indicator of rank. Jill was "from" Michigan, which, in Kathleen's book, was a top-five law school, but Yale, Kathleen's school, was number one. Before they could talk further, a plump, fortyish woman stood before them.

"Kitty?" she asked. "I'm Joyce, Chas's secretary. Good to see you. Come on in."

"Old nickname," Kathleen muttered to Jill, and followed Joyce.

On Kathleen's first day at Albright & Gill, Charles Farnsworth's desk was lined with vertical columns of papers on both sides, each document showing its identity only by its letterhead sticking out from the one on top of it. Charles Farnsworth was the head of a department, and therefore had a four-window office, which he was, at that level, entitled to decorate with his own furniture and to his own taste. When Kathleen had interviewed at the Firm, she had noticed that all the attorneys' offices, except the four-window and corner ones, had exactly the same wooden desks, credenzas and file cabinets of a recognizably early-American style. The only difference was the relative degree of order or chaos, reflecting the personality of the temporary resident. Every year or so, she had been told, the office manager would announce the office moves, the attorneys would box their things, and over a fall weekend, a moving crew would shuffle the new attorneys from interior, windowless offices to their first window, then two, then window-post-window, then window-window-post, then window-window-window, and then window-window-window-window, where all but the anointed few members of the Management Committee of the Firm (who would get a corner) would live out their time on this earth. Some of the

partners were stuck at window-window-window; all of the staff were stuck behind half-wall fabric dividers at metal desks. She had been told that A&G took a reverse pride in its comparative shabbiness. While other firms were gilded in South American mahogany, Albright & Gill tended toward the look of a prudent but smugly-prosperous insurance company.

Chas' desk was really a table and it was pointedly not early American. Instead, a heavy beveled glass straddled two oblong pillars of beige marble. Three modern, stubby green fabric chairs which looked as if they were meant for a living room were placed in front of it. His suit jacket was draped on the back of his black leather swivel chair. He stood up and absently ran his fingers through his thinning gray-brown hair before holding out his hand. She sat in the chair closest to his windows.

"Would you like some coffee, Kitty?" Joyce offered.

"Great," Chas said.

"Thanks," Kathleen said, and caught herself before she stood to get it herself. She was surprised that a secretary had *volunteered* to get the coffee, and not quite sure if she should let her, but Joyce seemed more friendly than servile, and Kathleen decided, despite her feminist ideals, to follow along, at least this once. She was, after all, an attorney now, and would have to watch carefully how attorneys were supposed to act. Like an immigrant, she would need to learn the local customs before she could change them.

Chas—he never used Charles—fumbled shyly for small talk. How was Yale these days? How many girls—women—were there undergrad, now? For the head of a group, Charles Farnsworth seemed to Kathleen to be not quite sure of himself, like the red-hot lover the morning after. She knew there had never been a woman in his group, but she couldn't imagine that that was an issue. Wouldn't a male and a female attorney be treated exactly the same way on the first day?

"Isn't there an orientation or something?" he asked hopefully, although he could have been expected to know that. With twenty-four new lawyers—six of them women—joining the Firm that day, it was a reasonable assumption.

There were currently two hundred and thirty-six attorneys—seven of them women—in the Chicago office, and on this particular Monday in June, even the office manager would profess not to know the precise number in the Firm, counting all four of its offices. One thing was clear: her class would nearly double the number of women in Albright & Gill. How that might change an institution that referred to itself, as if there were no other, as "the Firm," remained to be seen. In fact, many of the women, whose parents, like Kathleen's, were not lawyers or financiers, did not know themselves what to expect. Like a feeder lot, law school had pushed its best and brightest to the most prestigious of the country's law firms, but it had not introduced them to the day-to-day practice of law. The least Kathleen expected was to be treated like every other first-year.

"I think the orientation's at ten thirty," Kathleen answered. "Is Brian in? I'd love to say hello again." She had met Brian Weissbord, the senior associate in the group, when she had interviewed last fall.

Chas brightened. Kathleen knew she'd helped him out and they strolled down the long gray-carpeted hallway to a spacious window-window office. Brian was on the phone, his feet propped on his desk, a bit of white skin showing just above the ankle. His red club tie was inexplicably askew, the long part tossed over his right shoulder as if he were about to dig into a plate of spaghetti, and his forehead shone under the fluorescent office lighting. Brian was in his early thirties, but his hairline had already receded considerably. The phone was cradled between his neck and his shoulder, leaving his hands free. He twiddled his thumbs. Kathleen almost laughed out loud—Brian actually looked physically uncomfortable in his overdone caricature of "the boss." She knew from law school gossip that most first-year lawyers found themselves not working for the big names—like Charles Farnsworth—that had attracted them to their firms in the first place, but for lieutenants, like Brian Weissbord, who were, collectively, an anxious group teetering on the brink of partnership. A slip-up by a junior associate like herself—not