

CHAPTER THREE

Forest Green, a longtime middle management advertising executive for the Los Angeles office of *Gladstone Magazine*, was looking over the three boxes that his assistant, Victoria, had prepared for him. He would take them to the hotel where the company's annual, industry-wide Christmas party would be held this evening.

It would be hard for one to believe that Forest was now a man in his sixties. He still possessed the look and energy of a much younger man. His assistant, Victoria, was an attractive woman in her early thirties.

The telephones had been ringing with some last-minute cancellations. With understanding, Forest would accept the apologies and promise to get together with the cancellers for lunch early in the New Year. When you deal with numbers of people, he knew, the unexpected always seemed to come up. However, fortuitously, people who hadn't RSVP'd earlier were also calling to ask if they could still come. They would take the place of those who suddenly couldn't.

"Hey Forest," Victoria said, "ever feel that this part of your job is demeaning?" she teased. "After all, aren't you supposed to be out selling advertising rather than being a party host?"

"Victoria," Forest said, "this party comes with the territory."

Forest and Victoria both knew they were very fortunate people. Victoria had worked with Forest for almost a decade, and Forest had worked for *Gladstone* for over thirty years. With just two people in an office, it certainly was devoid of politics. The New York City-based owners, Adam and Warren Gladstone, always treated them with respect. Forest's immediate boss, Bill Littlefield, the ad director, was a very

fair guy who was easy to work for. There were never any unrealistic advertising quotas. All the office was ever asked was to do the best it could do. In this type of relaxed environment, as a team, the Los Angeles office consistently delivered a great quantity of advertising for the magazine.

Forest was thinking to himself, *They trust us. It's certainly not like working for "big brother."* *For God's sake, they only come to Los Angeles three times a year, including this Christmas Party. As a matter of fact, given these circumstances, if I had to shovel manure one day a year, instead of arranging all the details of this party, I'd do that, too.*

"But Forest," Victoria said, "this Christmas party has so many details it does interfere with selling—and, you know, they certainly don't overpay the troops."

"Look, when you think of it, Victoria, having a party like this—the goodwill it creates—helps us reach our sales goals. As for our wages, they're certainly adequate," Forest said. "I'd rather have this arrangement without ulcers than work for a little more money elsewhere and get ulcers as a bonus. Wouldn't you?"

"I guess you're right," Victoria smiled. "But remember to bow low when you see Adam and Warren Gladstone," she teased.

Forest returned the smile.

They had a good working relationship, and both of them really appreciated working for the Gladstone Publishing Company. Adam and Warren Gladstone, the sons of the company's founder, Jeffrey, had always operated with their father's oft-repeated philosophy: "Take care of your loyal employees."

Forest looked through the three boxes Victoria had packed for him to take from their office in Century City up to the hotel off of Sunset Boulevard. They contained 250 nametags that had been artistically hand-lettered by a calligrapher; black flair pens; and blank nametags for those who would be substituting for some of the guests who couldn't come.

Word had gotten around about what great entertainment the annual *Gladstone Magazine* Christmas party was, so there would be some

uninvited guests slipping in, too. There would also be people who, because of their positions in the L.A. advertising industry, could not be turned away if they appeared unannounced.

Forest asked, “What about the list of the guests and their company affiliations? Victoria, are they packed in there, too?”

“Absolutely; it’s in box #3,” Victoria said.

“Good. The Gladstones and Bill Littlefield love to see who is coming. After all, they have a right. They’re paying for it.”

“Do you need any help getting this down to your car?”

“No, I’ll be fine with the dolly,” Forest said.

They put the boxes on the dolly, and Victoria said she would meet him at the hotel in time for the party, which would begin at seven. It was now three o’clock, and Forest was on his way.

As relaxed as Forest pretended to be, he was always a bit uptight before the party. This party was a big responsibility. He always worried about whether the myriad of details were being taken care of. One time, on his way to the party, he was so deep in thought about the party that he accidentally drove the wrong way out of the parking lot and punctured his car’s tires on the spikes at the parking lot entrance. Fortunately, he learned from this experience to simply concentrate on getting to the hotel where the party was to be held.

From Century City to the hotel required a bit of a circuitous route. On this day in December, Forest Green zigzagged north to Sunset Boulevard and then east on Sunset.

Just before he entered the hotel, he used his cell phone to call his wife, Ann Green, a longtime unpaid “employee” of *Gladstone Magazine*. Every year, she carefully selected toy animals that would go into the centerpieces for the event’s thirty tables. Forest would then deliver them to the florist, where each toy animal would be placed on a small sleigh that was decorated with pinecones and flowers. Ann, as the wife of this office’s manager, was the party’s hostess. She would always make sure that everyone was having a good time.

Now, over the phone, Forest said, “Ann, please be on time.”

“We promise we’ll be there on time.”

Forest always worried that Ann wouldn’t start out early enough. However, knowing that their son, Billy, was home on college vacation and that he would drive Ann and their two daughters, Alice and Alana, to the hotel gave him some comfort. *Billy is like me*, Forest thought. *He will get everybody here on time.*

“Tell the kids I love them,” Forest said.

Ann asked, “Did the Gladstones and Bill Littlefield arrive from New York all right?”

“Yes, they will be taking a cab from their hotel. When the party’s over, I’ll take them back to their hotel, so I’m glad Billy will be able to take all of you home.”

“That’ll work,” Ann said.

“I love you, honey. I’ll probably be very busy all evening, but I appreciate how much help you give me for this event.”

“Love you, too. I’ve got to hurry so we’ll be on time,” Ann said.

They hung up.