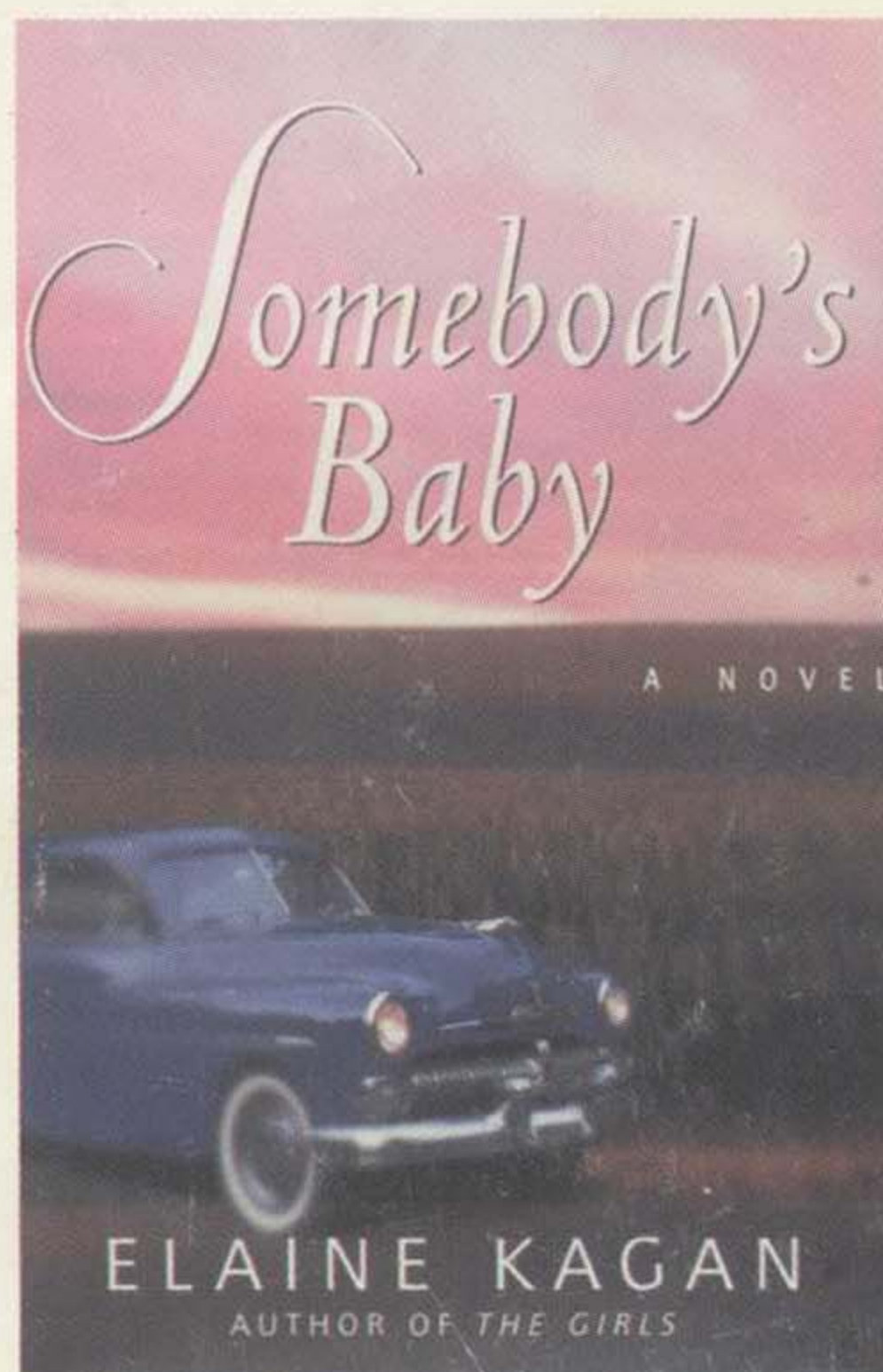
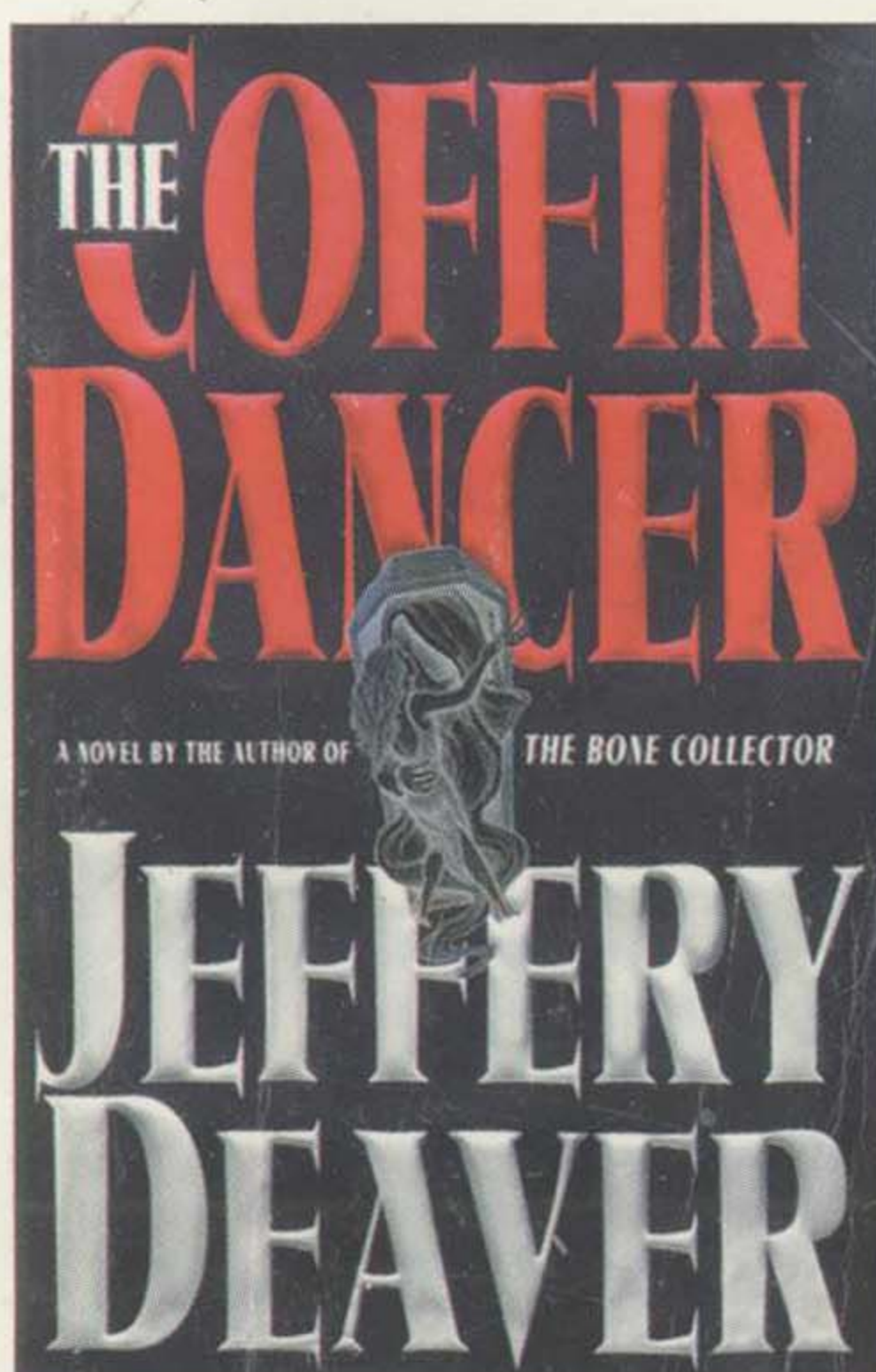
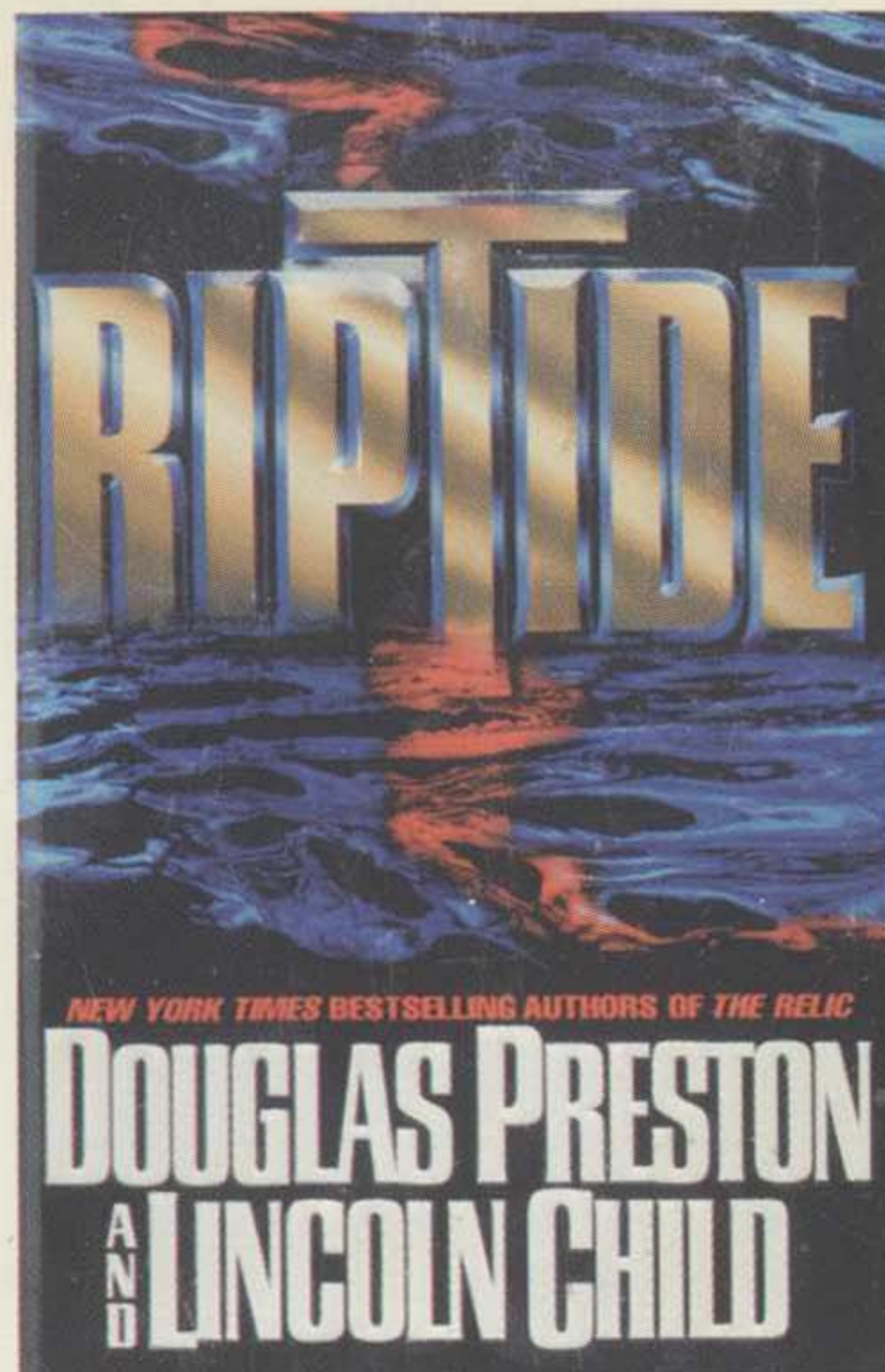


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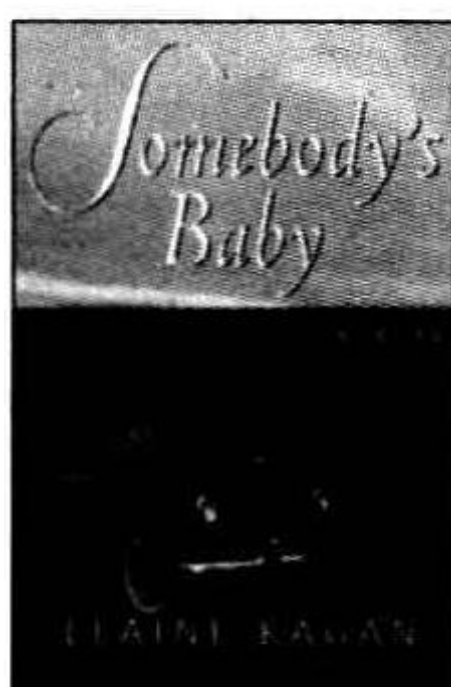


NO SAFE PLACE

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by Richard North Patterson

PUBLISHED BY ALFRED A. KNOPF

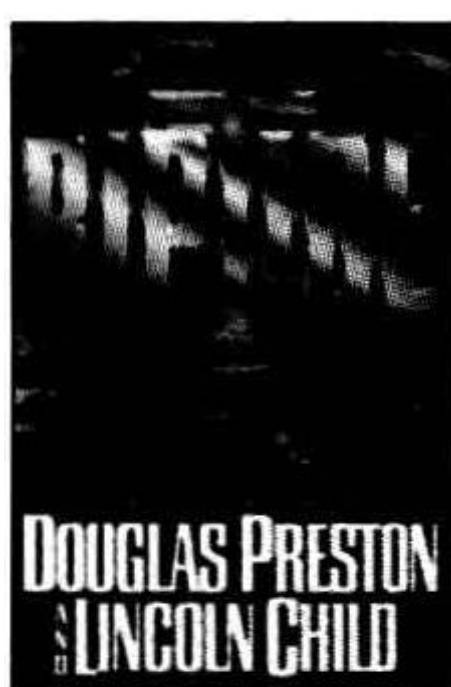


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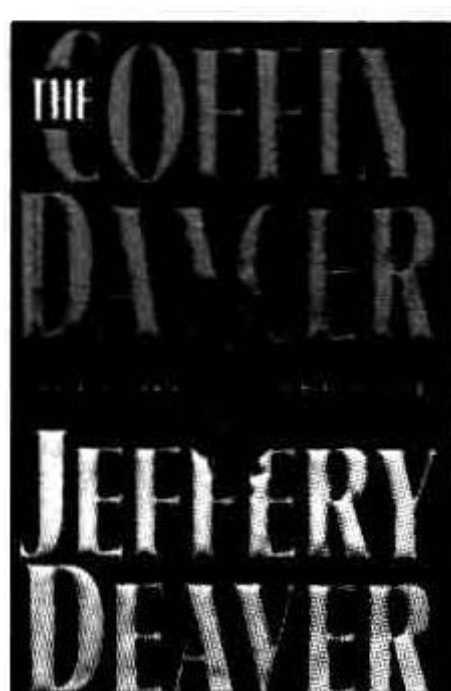


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**Richard
North
Patterson**

**NO SAFE
PLACE**

As a presidential hopeful, Kerry Kilcannon has enough courage and charisma to go all the way to the White House. The only thing that could stop him is a scandalous secret from his past. Or a desperate man bent on vengeance.

**Bad news for Kilcannon—
they're both out there.**

"A top-ranking thriller."

—Publishing News



THE CAMPAIGN

April, the year 2000

AT EIGHT in the morning of his last day in Boston, Sean Burke paced the corner of Kenmore Square, waiting for the abortionist, a 9-mm handgun in the pocket of his jacket.

Sean knew his enemy from the demonstrations—a slight man with hollow cheekbones and gray soulless eyes that ignored the pickets even when they cried out, “Don’t kill me, Mommy,” in the imagined voice of a fetus. Part of Sean prayed for him to come; another part, frightened and irresolute, hoped he would not. He encouraged himself by imagining the faces of the children he would save.

He passed forty minutes this way. And then the man was there, emerging from the subway.

Sean swallowed. His throat was dry, his mouth sour. Clumsily he reached a gloved hand into his left pocket and popped the last antacid pill into his mouth, teeth grinding it to chalk.

Dr. Bowe disappeared inside the building. It was an old brownstone hotel, converted to offices. Sean knew only that the clinic was on the first floor. A court order required pickets to stay outside and keep the walkway clear. The red carpet, the Operation Life activists had named it. But all their protests had not stopped the flow of blood.

The chalk in Sean’s mouth tasted bitter. If he acted, he would

have to leave all he knew behind—the church where he served as caretaker, his room above the parish offices, Father Brian, who worried, in his soft-voiced way, about Sean’s “intensity.” In the streets of Charlestown they would call Sean a murderer.

Let God be his judge, then. God and the children.

But Sean stood frozen, a slender man with lank black hair and pale blue eyes. Alone, as he had felt almost all his life, he watched the pageant of the city pass him by—workers rushing from the subway, students heading for Boston University. They did not notice him and would not have understood had they known.

Then he saw her—a young woman in a wool coat, knit cap pulled tight over her curly red hair, her face more Irish than Sean’s own. Pausing on the sidewalk, she gazed at the glass doors beneath the letters that spelled Kenmore Building.

She was there for the abortionist, he was certain. If she did not enter, perhaps he would grant the clinic a reprieve. Just for today.

“Please,” he murmured, “save your baby.”

With a shrug so small that Sean perhaps imagined it, the young woman walked toward the door. He felt the anger come. As he touched the gun in his pocket, his hand shook.

He was five feet from the door, then four feet. Damp with sweat, Sean paused in front of the door, taking a last deep breath.

He walked into the dim hallway, looking to both sides. He saw a travel agency, an accountant’s office. And then he found it. A green door with metal letters: THE BOSTON WOMEN’S CLINIC.

Sean took the wool cap from his inside pocket and pulled it over his head. He murmured a final prayer and opened the door.

The red-haired girl was there. She gazed up at him from behind her magazine, as if surprised.

“Yes?” the receptionist asked.

Sean turned to her. Softly he said, “I’m here for Dr. Bowe.”

Her skin was as pale as parchment. She stared up at him from her swivel chair, still but for her left hand. There was a panic button beneath her desk, someone had told him; the day the others had occupied the waiting room, she had used it to call security.

"Don't." Sean's voice was harsh now. The red-haired girl dropped her magazine.

The receptionist's throat moved in a convulsive swallow, choking her words. "What do you want?"

Sean took out his gun. "To stop you," he answered, and pulled the trigger.

There was a soft concussive sound, almost lost in the red-haired girl's cry. Sean watched in stupefaction as the woman died in front of him, blood trickling from her forehead. Only when she hit the carpet did Sean turn to the girl.

"Don't move." His voice came out panicky, too high. He stumbled down the hallway.

The abortionist was in the room where he did his work, bent over a file cabinet in the corner. He barely had time to peer sideways before Sean shot at his temple. He fell to his knees, pitching forward.

Sean heard a gasp behind him.

A nurse stood in the door, her mouth forming words that would not come. Sean did not want to kill her. She was a tool, like the receptionist. But he had no choice.

"I'm sorry," he murmured, and shot her in the chest. He stepped across her crumpled body and walked down the hallway in a trance. The young woman shivered on the couch, too frightened to move. Tears streamed down her face.

Sean knelt in front of her, giving comfort, seeking it. "I had to stop him. Your sympathy should be with your baby, the life I came to save."

Comprehension filled her eyes. "I'm not pregnant," she stammered. "I only came here for an IUD."

Sean felt the blood rush to his face. He stood. Humiliated and confused, he dropped his gun and ran from the building.

The feeling came to him. He was a small and lonely boy, terrified of his father, despairing of his mother's blank indifference. There was no safe place for him.

Two hours later a plane lifted into the air, and Sean Burke left Boston forever.

RAISING THE MAUSER, THE gunman stepped from backstage, bracing his wrist with his left hand. His target turned to smile at the woman beside him, sharing his applause with her.

"*Kil-can-non*," the crowd chanted, and then Senator James Kilcannon saw the assassin. His mouth fell open.

The gunman took one last step forward and fired. Jamie Kilcannon crumpled, falling onto his side, then his back. There was a pool of blood beneath his head.

"Kerry . . ."

Kerry Kilcannon snapped awake, staring at Clayton Slade.

The hotel bedroom was dark around them. "Kerry," Clayton repeated. His voice was quiet, but his full black face was intent. "What is it?"

Kerry realized he had bolted upright, gripped by fear. But Clayton was more than his campaign manager; he was Kerry's closest friend. There were no lies between them.

"My brother," Kerry answered. "It's the same, always."

Clayton exhaled softly. Amidst the deep disorientation of his dream Kerry could hear voices from the television in the other room. They were in a hotel suite in Portland, he remembered—another room in a four-month trail of hotels and motels.

Clayton braced Kerry's shoulders. "You've won, Kerry. We think Mason's conceding any minute."

Kerry gave himself a moment to recover. Rising, he walked into the sitting room in boxer shorts.

There were two others in the room, gazing at the television: Kit Pace, Kerry's press secretary, who in her intelligence and directness was an ideal reflection of his campaign, and Frank Wells, the gray-ing, elegant professional who was his media adviser. Turning, Kit gave Kerry's lean frame a sardonic once-over. "Not bad for forty-two," she said. "Heading for California, Dick Mason retains the lead in body fat."

Kerry raised both hands in a mock gesture of triumph.

On the television a pert newswoman stood in a ballroom filled with Kerry's supporters, trying to speak over the cheers. "Twelve

years after the assassination of James Kilcannon on the eve of the California primary," the woman began, "only that same primary would seem to stand between Senator Kerry Kilcannon and his late brother's goal—the Democratic nomination for President."

Frank Wells turned. "Congratulations, Kerry."

Kerry shook his head. "Seven days yet," he murmured.

"A few weeks ago," the newswoman was saying, "the conventional wisdom was that Kerry Kilcannon could not overtake a sitting Vice President. But Kilcannon has managed to persuade more and more voters to hold Dick Mason responsible for the President's recent misfortunes—a near recession, the collapse of welfare reform, and a series of revelations arising from apparently illegal campaign contributions."

Kerry heard a new voice, the anchorman's: "What can we expect in California, Kate?"

"Seven more days with no holds barred," the newswoman answered. "So far the base that Kilcannon has assembled has elements of the party's old coalition—particularly minorities—as well as women attracted by his proposals on education, day care, job training, and crime."

BUT it was far more than that, Clayton thought. Standing to Kerry's right, he watched him in the dim light of the television. After their fifteen years of friendship Kerry's profile was as familiar to Clayton as the profiles of his wife and daughters, as the painful memory of the son Clayton and Carlie had lost. Kerry's thin Irish face, at once boyish and angular, reminded Clayton of the impulsive lawyer he had first met in Newark. The wavy ginger hair was much the same, and, as always, Kerry's blue-green eyes reflected his quicksilver moods—sometimes cold, at other times deeply empathic or crinkled in amusement. But the man who had emerged from the cross-country gauntlet of primaries was changed.

The key was that Kerry had learned to touch people in ways Clayton had never seen from anyone before this. It had first struck him at the end of a long day in New Hampshire.

Kerry, speaking to a small gathering at a senior center, had asked for questions from his audience. An old woman stood, so thin that Clayton found it painful to look at her. She was poor, she said, her voice quavering with shame. At the end of every month she had to choose between food and medicine.

Then her voice broke, and the only sound in the deadly silence was her sobbing, muffled by the hands over her face. Kerry had stepped from behind the podium. He put his arms around the woman, seemingly oblivious to those around them, whispering words no one could hear.

Afterward Kerry had declined to repeat what he had said to her. It was the old woman who had told CBS. "I won't let that happen to you," Kerry had murmured. "I promise."

It was instinct, Clayton was sure—somehow Kerry could feel what it was to be someone else. The clip of him comforting the old woman ran on all three networks.

"Kilcannon's message," Clayton heard the CNN reporter summarize, "is that Dick Mason is too weak, too compromised, too mortgaged to special interests. Not even yesterday's slip of the tongue, in which Kilcannon opined that an unborn fetus was a life, seems to have affected his support among Oregon women."

KERRY leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes.

He had been tired yesterday. Cornered by a pro-life activist in a local TV audience, he had told the truth. As a matter of policy he was pro-choice, but it was his personal belief, as a Roman Catholic, that a fetus was the beginning of life. To claim that life did not exist until three months, or six months, was splitting moral hairs.

Watching the television, Frank Wells murmured, "You just can't say that. Women are too frightened."

Kerry opened his eyes. "I was tired," he said mildly. "Telling the truth is my own funny way of diverting Dick's attention."

Kit Pace leaned forward, her stocky frame radiating the intensity of her concern. "Kerry, please, eliminate the word life from your vocabulary. The idea that women are taking a life will inflame

the pro-choicers. Especially with that Boston thing this morning.”

Slowly Kerry nodded. “Insane,” he murmured. “Three dead people, their families. Who would do that?”

“God knows.” Kit paused, and then Dick Mason appeared on the screen.

The Vice President was flanked by Jeannie Mason and their three children—a girl and two boys, their faces as clean and unthreatening as their father’s. He was everyone’s favorite neighbor—friendly, a little overweight, always pleased to help. Mason’s smile for the crowd was broad, his chin tilted at a Rooseveltian angle of confidence and challenge.

Imagining the emptiness in Dick Mason’s stomach, the almost inconceivable prospect that a lifetime of striving might come to nothing, Kerry saw in his opponent’s smile an act of will. He wondered if what helped sustain Dick Mason was lingering disbelief.

“YOU can’t win,” the President had said to Kerry.

It had been five months ago, in the Oval Office. Above his thin smile the President’s eyes were keen. “You’ve got the virus. You looked around and decided you were better than anyone in sight. Including Dick and me.”

Kerry shrugged and smiled, waiting him out. As a child, he had learned the gift of watchful silence.

“That’s only the first step,” the President said at length. “The easiest and the most deluded. Later you find out that the demands of a presidential campaign are much greater than you imagined.” He paused, then finished softly. “It’s not enough that Jamie wanted it, Kerry. It all has to come from you.”

Kerry felt himself flush with anger. The President raised a hand. “That wasn’t meant as an insult. What I’m saying is that you’ve yet to face the realities of starting a campaign from scratch. Dick Mason understands because he’s been Vice President for eight years. And Dick’s the only one of you that’s been through the moral X ray our media friends reserve for someone on the national ticket, and survived it. You join this club at your peril, Kerry.”

On the eve of the New Hampshire primary the President had endorsed Dick Mason. It had cost Kerry the primary. But Kerry and Clayton would not give up. And then the surprises started—a breakthrough in Florida, a split in Illinois and Ohio, an outpouring of small contributions. Then came wins in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, and now Oregon. They had fought the opposition—a sitting Vice President—to a draw.

California, their final stop, would decide things. In the latest poll Dick Mason led by three percent.

But there was one historic fact that Dick could not avoid and no one else would ever forget: Kerry's brother had died there. Kerry was certain that James Kilcannon would have savored this irony.

BUTTONING his shirt, Kerry watched Dick Mason quiet his supporters.

On the television screen Dick's face was solemn now. "Before I congratulate Senator Kilcannon"—there were boos, and Dick raised a placatory hand—"I'd like to request a moment of silence for the three victims of the brutal act of terrorism committed this morning at the Boston Women's Clinic."

The Vice President bowed his head, and silence fell. When Dick looked up again, his mouth was a thin line of determination.

"I want to assure the victims' families that the perpetrator of this cowardly act will be brought to justice. And I want to assure everyone that we are unequivocal in our defense of every woman's right to choose, unmolested and unafraid."

Kerry stopped knotting his tie. "These Boston murders were made for him."

On the screen Mason raised his head, his hair a shiny silver-blond beneath the television lights. "To Senator Kilcannon," he continued, "I say two things. First, Kerry, congratulations on a hard-won victory. Second, I challenge you to a final debate in California about the future of our party and our nation—anytime, anywhere." Mason grinned, and then he shouted above the cheers of his supporters, "You may be running, Kerry, but you can't hide."