

NO WHITE LIES

Chapter One

Clank! The cast-iron weights banged together and echoed through the Son Light Power Gym on Sale Street, the busiest of all the leisurely boulevards in the small town of Tuscola, Illinois. “Eight!” boasted 65-year old Jack Freeman as he adjusted his grip on the hand bars of the bench press on the Universal machine.

Sweating through his t-shirt, he prepared to thrust the 180 pounds upward again by inhaling the stuffy gymnasium air through his nose and into his lungs. The perspiration also rolled off his face from the workout which, at his age, gave him much pleasure to complete four times each week.

Jack shoved the weight toward the ceiling, keeping his feet firmly planted on the floor. He exhaled as he drove the bars confidently into the air. His arms extended and his elbows locked at the apex. He brought the bar down just as confidently and barked, “Nine!”

“One more,” encouraged Jack’s son, David, who broke through the old warrior’s concentration, and was now standing near Jack’s feet. Holding on to both ends of a towel hanging around his neck, David was dressed and ready for his “nearly daily” 30 minutes on the stationary bicycle.

Jack took a deep breath and shot the bar toward the ceiling with a heartfelt growl. He exhaled and brought the bar back down with authority and another *clank*. “Ten,” he whispered through his clenched teeth. He sat up and took a couple of cleansing breaths in through his nose and out through his mouth.

David tossed the clean towel on Jack’s knee. “Good job, Dad,” he said.

“Three sets of ten reps at 180 pounds,” Jack responded.

“You’re a hoss,” David countered.

“An *old* hoss. A *tired* old hoss,” Jack sighed as he wiped his face and arms with the towel.

David climbed on the stationary bike like a cowboy mounting his aging trusty horse and pushed the squares on the flat panel to program his regular 30-minute workout into the computer which would start when David began pedaling.

“You gonna loosen up on that bike before you start your *real* workout?” Jack questioned.

“Thirty minutes on the bike *is* my workout today, Dad.”

“I did twenty minutes on that thing just to warm up,” Jack said facetiously. He’d really only done ten minutes at most.

David smiled as his dad poked fun at him. He fit his feet into the straps and began pedaling the bike. The lights on the computer board in front of him started flashing, giving David his progress with each spin of the pedals. “You do your regular workout today?” he asked his dad.

“The Big Six. Ten reps. Three sets. Seventy percent of my maximums. Not bad for an old man,” Jack bragged.

“Not bad for *any* man,” David said.

Jack stood up from the bench and walked toward his son. He patted David on the back. “I’m done. Gotta go home and take my morning nap.”

David chuckled as he kept his legs moving. “Retirement’s tough, eh?”

“Gotta get my rest. Mom’s got stuff for me to do to get ready for the long weekend. When are you and Joani comin’ over on Thursday?”

“I’m working late Wednesday. Joani has to work late, too. I’m on duty Thursday, but just in the morning.”

Jack interrupted, “On Thanksgiving? That much crime in Tuscola?”

“There’s not *that* much crime, but it’s not that big of a police force either. We take turns during the holidays. Thursday morning is *my* turn. We’ll be over in the afternoon. It’ll be great. The four of us.”

“Four of us,” Jack muttered disgustedly. “I’m retired now. When are you guys going to come up with some grandkids for Mom and me?”

“These things take time, ya know,” said David.

“Time? I’ll give ya time. Besides, I’m not the one who’s all wild about grandkids. It’s your mother who’s been droppin’ the hints.”

“We’ll work on it, okay?”

“You need any pointers, just give me a call,” Jack said with a wry smile.

David shook his head and smiled back. He was beginning to breathe harder as he pumped the pedals of the bike. Sweat was already forming on his forehead, chest, and legs. He was getting loose and enjoying the start of the burn.

Jack put his hand on David’s shoulder. He smiled at his son, the police officer. Then, he scowled. “You need to do some sit-ups. You’re startin’ to get a gut. Whole town’s talkin’.” Then he smiled and proudly pounded his own hard-muscled stomach several times with his fists.

“You need to take a nap, you snarly old coot,” David barked.

“I’ll see you tomorrow. I love you, Son.”

“I love you, too, Dad.”

Jack walked victoriously to the shower room as David continued his work on the bike and pondered his police duties for the rest of the day.

Okay, what have I got to do today? Make sure to check the Christmas schedule. I’ve got to get that speech on drug awareness ready to give at the high school next week. I wonder how many of those pamphlets I’m going to need. Gotta call the school.

David continued his rhythmic pumping on the pedals of the stationary bicycle. Several drops of sweat dripped down his face and onto his thick cotton sweat pants.

I’m accepting a load of comfort bears the middle school kids collected on Wednesday afternoon, the last part of the school day. Got to call the paper and make sure they have a photographer over there.

Jack Freeman walked through the gym carrying his bag of sweaty clothes in one hand and a white towel in the other. His gym shoes’ laces were tied together and the shoes were draped over his shoulder. He wiped his face with the towel. “I’ll see ya,” Jack said.

“See ya later, Dad. Don’t work too hard.”

“If you say so,” he chuckled. “Four quarters,” he barked.

“Leave it on the field,” David responded as Jack opened the front door and walked to his car.

Working on Thursday ‘til noon. I may not get to watch the early football game with Dad on Thanksgiving.

David kept the pedals moving at a quick and steady pace. The sweat was rolling off his face. He flexed his grip on the hand bars and adjusted his seating position, pushing down hard with his feet. *Four quarters. Leave it all on the field.* That was the mantra his high school football coach had drummed into him during his three years on the varsity team. That phrase still echoed in his mind every time he worked out, encouraging him to go the distance and complete the task at hand. His mind went back to his “to do” list.

I’ve got to work on Friday, but I got Saturday off. Mom’ll probably want us all to go to church on Sunday.

He cringed when he thought of going to church. He always cringed when he thought of going to *that* place. David had a well-constructed, solid knowledge of the things of God, but he had grown to dislike church ever since the blow-up that the assistant pastor had caused a year ago. *I get all the politics I need with my job,* he thought. *Why would I want to deal with that in church?* He paused in his thinking. *One hour a week can’t hurt me, I guess.*

He had been so preoccupied with organizing his work duties that the time had flown by. The clock on the bike’s computer was now counting down the seconds he had left in his thirty minutes. Thirty seconds. Twenty-nine. Twenty-eight.

Push harder... faster.

Nineteen. Eighteen. Seventeen.

Faster! Four quarters.

Nine. Eight. Seven.

Leave it all on the field.

Two. One.

The lights flashed, indicating his thirty minutes was up, and David relaxed. His feet kept moving as the pedals slowed down. He was breathing hard, but smiling at the satisfaction of putting a great effort into his workout and completing it with a flurry. He knew the time had done him some good.

David stood up and flexed his knees. He glanced at the Universal machine and thought, *Maybe I should... naw, not today.* The hard thirty minutes on the bike was good enough. He pinched the skin on his side just over his hips. He was in good shape for a forty-year old man, but he still grabbed more than was there when he was in his best shape ever as a college athlete twenty years ago. *Maybe Dad was right.* He paused for a second. *Naw, this town’s got more important things to talk about than a police officer with love handles.*

David walked to the dressing room for a hot shower before he headed to the police station in the Tuscola City Hall.