



John Feinstein

The NEW YORK TIMES Bestselling Author of LAST SHOT

COVER-UP

Mystery at the Super Bowl

Keep reading for a sneak peek . . .

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“What do you want me to do exactly?” Stevie asked.

“I’m not a hundred percent sure,” McManus said. “I’d like to have a crew with you during the time players and coaches are available. See what you find. If nothing else, we could have Dick interview you about what it’s like to be a fourteen-year-old reporter at the Super Bowl.”

He knew Dick was Dick Enberg, the longtime play-by-play man who would be hosting the late-night show for CBS this week.

“Well,” Stevie said, “if my dad’s okay with it, I’m willing to give it a try. I’d rather find the stories than be the story, but I hope you aren’t expecting too much. There’s a lot of media out there.”

“I have no expectations,” McManus said. “But I know your work pretty well. I have very high hopes.” He reached into his desk, pulled out a credential, and slid it across to him. Stevie picked it up and did a double take. It had his name and picture on it, but instead of having the word MEDIA across the top in black letters, it had CBS in the network’s trademark blue and gold.

“I wanted to be prepared if things worked out,” he said. “The NFL PR office had your photo already, so it was pretty easy to get it done quickly.”

He pointed at the credential around Stevie’s neck. “That will get you a lot of places,” he said. “Ours will get you almost anywhere—including being able to come and go back here

without checking in at reception or anything like that.”

Stevie was putting the new credential around his neck when McManus stood up and put his hand out. “I’m looking forward to this, Steve,” he said. “I have two goals: one, for people to say I’m a genius for signing you up for the week, and two—more important—for you to tell me when the week’s over that you’re glad you did it.”

Stevie stood and shook his hand. “I’ll try to make you happy you did it too, Mr. McManus,” he said.

“Everyone who works for me calls me Sean,” McManus said. “Go on and get out there. You are about to witness the greatest media circus of your young life.”



As soon as he walked through the revolving doors that led to the field area, Stevie knew McManus wasn’t exaggerating. He had been in the Superdome in New Orleans, but the new Hoosier Dome—negotiations to stick a corporate name on the building were apparently still ongoing—made the Superdome look like a high school gym.

Stevie had read that it seated 82,000 people, but there were so many corporate boxes about a third of the way up in the stands that the upper deck appeared to be above several clouds. There was a wide expanse of turf between the first row of seats and the field. They were cleverly raised high enough so that spectators could see over the heads of the players on the sidelines. But even in the front row, fans were pretty far from the action. And in the upper deck? Stevie wasn’t sure if they could even see one of the JumboTron screens.

The place was *massive*.

It was also, he noticed, kind of cold out on the field. He knew the game-day temperature would be seventy-two degrees inside, but that would be with 82,000 people in the place. Now, with a couple thousand people milling around on the field and no one in the stands, it was considerably cooler. Since only a few of the lights were turned on, the floor of the Dome felt almost bleak. It was chilly and overcast—not much different from the weather outside.

Everywhere Stevie looked there were people with microphones, tape recorders, and TV cameras. He had done some research when he thought he was going to be doing a daily TV show from the Super Bowl, and he knew that the NFL credentialed more than 2,000 media members for the game. Doing the math, Stevie realized that meant there were about forty media members for each of the fifty-three players from each team. The numbers got a little worse when you figured that only forty-five of the fifty-three players on the roster would actually be in uniform for the game.

Platforms had been set up for some of the Ravens' bigger names—Coach Brian Billick; Ray Lewis, the star linebacker; Steve McNair, the starting quarterback; and Todd Heap, the tight end. Other players were in roped-off areas while some others—the nonstars—were seated at tables with name cards in front of them. Stevie was trying to figure out exactly where he should start when he heard a familiar voice behind him.

“Why, Stevie Thomas, look at you with not one but *two* credentials. You *really* are a star!”

It was, predictably, Susan Carol. Only she wasn't alone.

In fact, she had what amounted to an entourage. There was a cameraman, a guy carrying sound equipment, someone he didn't recognize in a suit, a makeup woman, a couple of large men he guessed were bodyguards of some sort, and, walking with a young woman he guessed was *another* PR person, someone who could only be Jamie Whitsitt. He was about six feet tall, and had sandy blond hair, blue eyes that Stevie figured most girls would consider dreamy, and a bored look on his face.

Turning to face Susan Carol and company, Stevie smiled. "At least I work alone," he said.

She twirled his CBS credential to get a better look and laughed. "Not if you're working for these guys, you won't be," she said. "I guess you said yes."

"They made me an offer I couldn't refuse," he said. "I don't start till tomorrow, though."

"Susan Carol, I'm sorry, but we need to get you guys to work here," the suit said.

"Right," Susan Carol said. She turned toward Whitsitt and said, "Jamie, I want to introduce you to my friend Steve Thomas."

Whitsitt didn't look all that eager to meet Stevie, but he walked over, hand extended. "Hey, dude, no hard feelings, I hope," he said.

At least, Stevie thought, he knows who he replaced. "None where you're concerned," Stevie said, accepting the handshake. "Just make sure you're nice to Susan Carol."

Whitsitt grinned. "I don't think that will be too painful, huh, dude?"

Stevie wondered if Whitsitt could complete a sentence without the word *dude*. He was tempted to keep the conversation going to find out, but the suit was frowning and the PR person was waving at someone upfield to get their attention.

“Gotta go, kids,” the PR guy said, unwilling or unable to look at or acknowledge Stevie.

“Hey, nice talking to you too,” Stevie said to the PR guy and the suit, who looked at him blankly and started walking.

“I’ll talk to you later,” Susan Carol said quietly.

“Oh yeah, absolutely, dude,” Stevie said.

She half made a face at him. “He’s not a bad guy.”

That surprised—and disappointed—Stevie. “Yeah, he’s great. But, dude, are you sure English is his native language?”

“Don’t be mean, Stevie,” she said. “This isn’t his fault and he really *is* nice.”

Stevie watched her jogging to catch up with her posse. All of a sudden, surrounded by several thousand people, he felt entirely alone.