

Robert B. Parker's Big Shot

Chapter 1

The car parked on the side of the road was worth more than Jesse Stone had once paid for a house.

There was a lot of money in Paradise, Massachusetts, the seaside town where he'd been Chief of Police for years now. On a per-capita basis, Paradise was probably richer than some European nations.

But for the most part, the longtime residents here still tended to shy away from big displays of wealth.

Jesse was on night traffic patrol. In an 11-person department, everyone had to take a shift sooner or later, even the chief. Jesse actually appreciated working nights when his turn came around. Most of the time, it was quiet.

The car was a McLaren. Jesse wasn't sure of the exact model number. All he knew about them was that they were expensive and they went fast. It looked like a spaceship that had come in for a landing.

He was a little surprised to see something that expensive this late in the season. Summer was over, and the tourists and the summer people had mostly left. The air was getting cooler at night, and the big parties had all ended. It had been a peaceful few months, for a change. There were the usual drunken idiots (Jesse knew about being a drunken idiot), some bar fights, a couple

overdoses, and one high-dollar burglary at a summer rental, but nothing too violent or unusual. Jesse appreciated that. He'd learned to take the quiet moments when he could.

He pulled his department-issue Explorer behind the sports car.

As he stepped out of the Explorer, he saw someone in the driver's seat, head resting against the window. He reached back into the SUV and pressed his siren to give a little whoop.

The man woke up with a start.

Jesse felt relief. He'd found too many bodies in his career. He didn't need another one.

Jesse grabbed the mike of the Explorer's PA system. "Sir, I need you to stay in your seat and put your hands on the wheel where I can see them."

Instead, the man turned around and stared into the glare of Jesse's headlights. White guy. Forties or so. His hair was mussed, and his face looked red and creased. He hadn't shaved in some time.

"Sir..." Jesse began again.

But the man either didn't hear or didn't care. He scrabbled at the latch for a moment and then the gull-wing door came up and he half-stepped, half-fell out of the McLaren.

He popped up quickly, brushing gravel from his palms, and stared back at Jesse and the Explorer.

"The hell do you want?" he said.

Standing, Jesse could see the man was big, with a barrel chest and thick arms. Could probably bench press a lot in the gym. He wore a crumpled Oxford shirt unbuttoned to his belly, and shorts. No shoes. Not even sandals.

On his bare chest, just below his throat, there was a tattoo. In an Old English font, the words: Cui Bono.

“Sir,” Jesse said. “Sit back down in the car. Please.”

The man spat. Then fixed his bleary gaze on Jesse.

“Look. I’m just trying to get home. Why don’t you just get back in your little Tonka truck and leave me alone, okay?”

Jesse walked forward.

“Have you been drinking tonight, sir?”

Jesse stood about an arm’s length away from the man. The man frowned. He took a step closer, swaying.

The man gave Jesse a big grin. “I have the right to remain silent. So listen to this.”

He closed his mouth with a solid click.

“So that would be a ‘yes’ on the drinking then,” Jesse said.

Even from a couple of feet, Jesse could smell the alcohol on the man. It was on his breath, in his sweat, in his clothing.

Jesse knew that stink better than he’d like. He’d been a drunk for a long time. Now every day was another step away from being that guy again.

Fortunately, sometimes there were people like this man to remind him what he’d looked like.

Jesse tried for reasonable one more time. “Sir,” he said. “I’m going to need you to take a breathalyzer test, but I think we both know what it’s going to show. Come with me. I’ll get you a place to sleep for the night, and we can deal with the rest in the morning.”

That was probably the best possible offer this man would get from any cop.

But he didn’t take it that way.

“You think I’m going to jail?” he said, as if he found that hilarious. “No. Absolutely not.”

“It’s not really up to you at this point, sir.”

The man’s grin grew even wider. “Nah. See, I don’t do jail. Believe me, bigger guys than you have tried.”

He laughed suddenly, nearly doubling himself over with his own wit.

Jesse let him. The world was a pretty grim place. Someone might as well find it funny.

“Okay,” Jesse said, after he was done. “Time to go. Turn around and put your hands behind your back.”

The man spat again, then took another step closer to Jesse. “Make me.”

Jesse sighed, and waited.

The punch came like a fat, slow softball thrown at a church picnic. Jesse, who’d been on track for the majors until a career-ending injury, caught it easily in one hand. There was a loud thwack that echoed through the night.

The man looked stung. He probably thought he’d been pretty clever. Drunks usually thought they were pretty clever.

He tried to pull his hand away. Jesse didn’t let him.

The man frowned. Then scowled. He yanked harder, pulling back with both feet.

Jesse applied a little more pressure, squeezing the bones of the man’s hand together.

He yowled, his face crumpling like a toddler’s after dropping a cookie. “Son of a bitch!” he screamed. “That really hurts!”

Jesse spun him and put him against the McLaren, then got out his cuffs.

“You have the right to remain silent,” Jesse said, beginning the drill.

The Miranda warning was drowned out by the man’s sudden string of obscenities. “You think I’m going to jail? I am not going to any goddamn jail!”

“Well,” Jesse said. “You say that...”

Jesse rifled through the man’s pockets. No wallet. No license.

“Any chance you want to tell me your name? It generally makes things easier. You know, paperwork.”

Throughout the whole confrontation, Jesse had never raised his voice once.

“Fuck off,” the man snapped.

“Funny, I run into a lot of people with that same name,” Jesse said.

Jesse got him into the back of the Explorer, where he thrashed around a little more, but quickly gave up struggling. Breathing heavily, he settled back into the seat.

Jesse picked up the radio again. “Don’t worry. I’m going to call someone to tow your car. They’ll be careful.”

The man sneered at Jesse in the rear-view mirror. “Like I give a shit,” he said. “Leave it. I’ll just buy another one.”

Jesse shrugged, then pulled away from the side of the road, heading toward the station.

The man spoke up again from the backseat. “You just made a huge mistake, buddy. Huge.”

“Wouldn’t be the first time,” Jesse said.

The man glared and his voice grew low and mean.

“I promise you,” he said. “You’re going to regret this.”

“That’s exactly what the last guy named Fuckoff told me,” Jesse said. “You sure you’re not related?”

Chapter 2

Jesse got to the station at a little after ten-thirty. One of the few perks of being chief, after being on the night shift. He got almost five whole hours of sleep that way.

Molly Crane, his deputy chief, was already at her desk. “Hey, look who brought in a celebrity last night.”

Jesse went straight for the coffeemaker. “I did what now?”

“Of course you don’t know. Don’t you ever pay attention to the news?”

“I read the sports section.”

Molly rolled her eyes at him. “The guy you brought in for drunk and disorderly. Last night.”

“I do remember that much. Jesus.”

“You’re so grumpy before your coffee.”

“I’ve had two cups already.”

“Have another. You’ll need it. The guy? The one still cooling his heels in cell three?”

Jesse drank more coffee. It did not make him more patient. “Yes. We’ve established that.”

“You really don’t know who he is?”

“Our conversation didn’t get that far. He took a swing. Didn’t give me his name, didn’t have any ID. I printed him and put him in the cell. He was passed out when Gabe came by to relieve me at four.”

“It’s Ramsey Devlin.”

Jesse took another sip of coffee.

Molly shook her head. “I’m going to spare you the embarrassment of admitting you have no idea who that is.”

“I’m not embarrassed.”

“You should be,” Molly said. “The hedge fund manager? The federal fraud case? In New York?”

Now it rang a bell. Jesse remembered Molly being outraged about that. But then, Molly was outraged by a lot of things. They blended together.

“The feds brought him up on wire fraud, right? He got off?”

“You *were* listening,” she said. “Yes, the jury acquitted him. And the feds let him go, and he moved out of Manhattan and came straight to...”

“Let me guess: Paradise’s newest citizen.”

“Correct.”

Now Jesse remembered. For the last six months, the biggest point of controversy in town had been the new house built on Seaside Drive. Someone had snuck in and bought two of the old, classic Cape Cods that stood on the high point above the ocean. Then the construction crews knocked them down and dug a new foundation before anyone could object.

Jesse had gotten a lot of calls, and he’d patiently explained to the older residents of Paradise that construction permits were not part of his job. As far as he knew, everything was in order.

Although he agreed the house was a massive eyesore. It rose like a concrete shoebox over the Atlantic, sitting atop a fake lawn and an Olympic-sized pool.

The whole thing had gone up incredibly fast. Many people said someone had greased the process along, which Jesse did not think was an outlandish theory.

In the past week or two, Jesse knew there were moving vans at the big ugly house. It was hard to do anything without people noticing in Paradise. It was still a small town in that way.

“So that’s the guy who built the house. Huh,” Jesse said. “Well, it matches his car.”

“Yeah, where is the car?”

“Still on the road, as far as I know.”

“What?” Molly looked at the paperwork on her desk again. “Jesse, that’s a McLaren 720s.”

“Yup.”

“And you left it there? Even in Paradise, you can’t just leave a car like that out there.”

Jesse shrugged. “He said he didn’t want it towed.”

“So you chose to listen to a drunk who told you to abandon a car worth a half-million dollars?”

“I figured he didn’t want to get it scratched.”

Molly gave him a look. Jesse was used to that look. It didn’t scare him anymore. Much.

“Yeah, I bet that’s what you figured,” she said.

“It’s his car,” Jesse said. “He made his decision.”

“Well, you can explain it to the lawyer.”

“He’s already got a lawyer?”

“Devlin’s lawyer was here when I got in. Wanted to see you, wanted his client released immediately. They won’t stand for this kind of harassment. He said some shitty things to me.”

Jesse raised his eyebrows. “He did?”

“Nothing I couldn’t handle. He’s going to have my job for this, I’m going to rue the day, I’m just a stupid bitch who shouldn’t be a cop. You know. The whole routine.”

“I could sing it by heart,” Jesse said. “Where is he now?”

“Bothering Ellis, I believe,” Molly said, referring to Ellis Munroe, the District Attorney.

“I told him we don’t handle bail here. I made him Ellis’s problem.”

“Way to delegate,” Jesse said.

“It’s one of my many gifts. But he’ll be back soon.”

“Did he really say ‘rue the day?’”

“That was the nicest thing he said,” Molly said. She took out her phone. “Look, I found this on YouTube about Devlin. To give you an idea of who we’re dealing with, here.”

She pulled up the video and turned the phone toward Jesse. It was an interview on one of the financial channels. Jesse didn’t really follow business news. His 401(k) went up and down, and that’s as much as he knew about the market.

Devlin, looking a little more polished and smooth onscreen, sat in a chair facing a brunette anchorwoman. He didn’t wear a tie with his power suit and his blinding white shirt was open at the neck, revealing his tattoo.

“Oh, you like that,” he said to the anchorwoman, opening the shirt a little more to reveal his bare chest. “That’s my firm’s motto. It’s Latin. Cui Bono,” he said, pronouncing it qwee bo-no. “It means, ‘Who Benefits.’ That’s our mantra, our guiding philosophy at the Devlin Fund.”

“And who benefits?” the anchorwoman asked.

Devlin grinned, showing sharp white teeth. “*Me*,” he said. “I always benefit. And that’s how our clients benefit too. I always make sure I make a profit. All I do is win. They get to come along for the ride.”

Molly turned off the phone. “Well,” Jesse said. “He seems like a real addition to the town.”

“I thought we were full up on assholes, but he decided we could use one more,” Molly said.

Jesse looked at the bottom of his coffee cup and sighed. “Is there any chance he’s going to just take the lesson and move on?”

Molly looked at Jesse for a moment. And then laughed out loud.

“Yeah,” Jesse said. “Didn’t think so.”

Chapter 3

“Look, Sheriff Stone, this small-town intimidation bullshit might work on the yokels, but I assure you, we are not impressed.”

Jesse thought, *Sheriff?*

And then he thought, *yokels?*

But Devlin’s lawyer, Gordon Wilkes, a man with a Satanic goatee and curly dark hair, was only getting started.

He’d walked into the station smiling and laughing with Ellis. Jesse didn’t trust anyone who warmed up to people that quickly, especially not a lawyer. But he’d hoped it meant they could process Devlin’s bail quickly.

He was wrong. He’d invited both Ellis and Wilkes into his office and closed the door, and Wilkes began lecturing before Jesse could even take his seat.

“Frankly, I would expect this sort of penny-ante corruption from someone in the middle of nowhere, not a police department within minutes of Boston. Did you really think we’d just roll over and let you do this?”

Jesse sat back and put his feet up on the desk. He thought he’d get comfortable until the lawyer wound himself down.

Wilkes saw this, and frowned.

“Are you done?” Jesse asked.

The lawyer smirked. “I’m just getting warmed up, Sheriff.”

“Sure,” Jesse said. He took his feet off the desk and sat up. Then he said, “First of all, it’s Chief Stone, not Sheriff Stone.”

“Sorry,” Wilkes said. “It’s just such a nasty little trick, pulling someone in on a phony drunk-driving charge. I figured you for a small-town sheriff.”

Jesse ignored that and continued. “Second, it’s Jesse. To most people. And third, I found your client passed out on the side of the road. He was clearly inebriated. For his safety and the safety of the general public, we let him sleep it off here.”

Wilkes snorted. “You expect me to believe that?”

“I don’t really know what you might believe, since we’ve just met. But that’s what happened.”

“So you deny that the feds are giving you orders?”

“I suppose I’d deny it if I knew what you were talking about,” Jesse said.

Ellis laughed, a short bark like a seal. Both Wilkes and Jesse looked at him.

“Sorry,” Ellis said. “I was just trying to imagine a federal agent giving you orders, Jesse.”

Wilkes looked a little more annoyed. “I’m glad you find this funny, Mr. Munroe. You know your whole town is on the hook for this man’s actions.”

Jesse turned to Ellis. “Do you know what he means? Because I am lost.”

“Don’t you ignore me — ”

Ellis rubbed his eyes. “Jesse, what I think Mr. Wilkes is trying to say is — ”

“You are doing the feds’ dirty work for them,” Wilkes interrupted. “You’re harassing Ramsey Devlin because they’re embarrassed they lost their case, and now you’re trying to make his life miserable as payback.”

“Oh,” Jesse said. “Is that what you think is going on?”

“I know exactly what’s going on here.”

“Because I thought we were here to bail your client out of jail.”

“He shouldn’t have been arrested at all!”

“No, he definitely should have,” Jesse said. “You are lucky I didn’t include assaulting an officer to the charges.”

Ellis looked concerned. “He took a swing at you?”

“If you could call it that.”

“And he’s not in the hospital?”

“Very funny, Ellis,” Jesse said. “I barely touched him. I put the cuffs on him. He was passed out by the time I left the cells.”

“You see,” Wilkes said, as if Jesse had just agreed with him. “You were trying to bait my client into a physical altercation. You admit it.”

“Wow,” Jesse said, after a moment. “I would love to get a translation program for whatever it is that’s coming out of your mouth.”

Wilkes’s face turned red. He opened his mouth to speak, but Ellis cut him off.

“Okay, hold on,” Ellis said. “Let’s just lower the temperature here. Okay? Mr. Wilkes here was explaining to me that Mr. Devlin might feel a little persecuted after his run-in with the federal government.”

“Yeah, I got that much.”

“So he and I were talking about this. We were wondering if you might agree to dropping the charges. Seeing as how Mr. Devlin is new in town.”

Now it was Jesse’s turn to laugh. “Because he’d never heard of drunk driving laws in New York?”

Ellis managed a tight smile. “Because you’ve let people sleep it off without charging them before.”

“True,” Jesse said. “But they didn’t throw a punch at me.”

“I’m pretty sure some of them did.”

“Fair point,” Jesse said. “But then they didn’t get a lawyer to come and insult my deputy chief first thing in the morning.”

Ellis looked at Wilkes. “You insulted Molly?”

“Who the hell is Molly?”

“I wouldn’t say he insulted me,” Molly called from outside the office. She was always listening. “More like harassed.”

“That was a mistake,” Ellis said.

Wilkes pursed his lips. “I may have said some things.”

“Was one of those things the word ‘bitch’?” Jesse said, staring right into the man’s eyes.

“I don’t recall,” Wilkes said, but looked away.

“How about ‘rue the day’? You remember that?”

“What?”

“Never mind,” Jesse said. “You want to apologize?”

Wilkes sat up straight in his chair. “I will not apologize for being passionate on behalf of my client. I’m sorry if that upsets your backwater customs.”

Jesse looked at Wilkes. “Seriously,” he said. “Where the hell do you think you are?”

Wilkes flinched again, but only got louder. “I am still a lawyer in the United States of America — ”

“Oh-kay,” Jesse said, standing up. “Ellis, you can do what you want with the charges. I am willing to call no harm, no foul on the punch. But he was drunk behind the wheel. We’re sticking with the OUI.”

Ellis shrugged and looked at Wilkes as if to say he'd tried. "Well. That's it, then."

Wilkes smirked again. "Oh, I don't think so," he said. Jesse was really beginning to dislike this guy.

He opened his briefcase and withdrew a thick manila file folder, then tossed it onto Jesse's desk. It landed with a heavy thud.

"This is a short record of all the violence you've been involved in," Wilkes said to Jesse. "It only took my office a couple hours to gather all that. Think how much we could find if we really started digging."

Jesse looked at the folder without touching it. "I'm not sure what point you're trying to make."

"You're a dangerous man, Chief Stone. And I'm not going to let you intimidate my client on behalf of the federal government. If you insist on this witch hunt, we'll file suit for wrongful arrest and malicious prosecution. All your dirty secrets will come out in open court. I am prepared to file *today* if you do not drop all charges against my client and apologize to him immediately."

Jesse yawned. He didn't mean to, but he couldn't deny it was great timing.

"Well, you do what you have to do," Jesse said. "I believe you can discuss bail with Ellis here. I'll go get your client."

Wilkes looked nettled. He slid the papers back into his briefcase. It clearly didn't have the terrifying effect he'd hoped.

"Just one more thing," Wilkes said. "Where is my client's car? That is a high-value luxury sports car. I don't want your cops joyriding around in it."

Jesse smiled at the man for the first time since he'd entered the station. "I have some good news for you, counselor," he said. "I can promise you that not a single one of my people has touched that car."

