

Deadline

Synopsis

In a prologue set in 1993 in tiny Amos, Alabama, we meet African-American teenagers Wallace Sampson and Vanessa Brown, whose innocent love for each other is shattered by a gunshot.

Flash forward to present day. Matt Harper, whose career as a young newspaper reporter is going nowhere, is dispatched from Nashville to cover the murder of the police chief in Amos. As a result, he meets Trey Hall, a beautiful 21-year-old blue blood who lives on her family's hunting plantation in Amos. Trey wants Matt to investigate another unsolved killing in the town – that of Wallace Sampson, almost twenty years before. Matt latches onto the story hoping that it will jump-start his career. Unfortunately, his preoccupation causes him to forget another appointment related to his upcoming wedding, leading his fiancée Delana Calhoun to call off the engagement.

Matt asks his editor Walker Burns to let him look into the Sampson murder. Walker notes that Matt's already on the publisher's "Most Wanted" list over a lack of productivity, but he gives Matt some time to investigate – provided that grizzled, gun-toting, politically incorrect reporter Ronnie Bullock goes along. Matt protests, but has no choice. This odd couple plus Trey discover old police files which point to a Klansman who operated The Store near where the shooting occurred. Days before, someone had attempted to firebomb The Store during a civil rights protest. Just as the reporters are making some headway, Delana contacts Matt and tells him his father, the beloved publisher emeritus at the newspaper, is dying of cancer. With the paper's publisher already upset that the reporters have been off in Alabama, Trey discovers a fact that kills their story. Matt's career is teetering.

Matt and Delana visit Matt's father, a stern, aloof man who's never provided career help to Matt. Delana is suspicious of Matt's motives in pursuing the case, given the beautiful Trey's involvement. Delana becomes even more upset when she learns that Matt hasn't told his father about the broken engagement and because Matt is openly critical of his dying father.

Matt and Bullock decide to continue investigating without their publisher's knowledge. When one of the sources – Wallace's mother Mary Pell Sampson – is reluctant to talk to them, Matt begs Delana to help him by speaking to Mary Pell, even though their engagement is over. Delana finally agrees. Mary Pell tells Delana that The Store was firebombed because it was a front for prostitution.

The publisher discovers that Matt and Bullock are continuing to work on the story against his wishes. After a public confrontation in which Matt stands up to the publisher, Matt seeks his father's help and comes to understand why he's never before received it.

Using his father's advice, Matt and Bullock subvert the publisher and renew the investigation. They ask Delana to help with the interview of Wallace Sampson's girlfriend and Delana again becomes part of the team. Wallace's girlfriend Vanessa reveals a crucial clue about someone running from the scene. Bullock's beloved car is defaced. Trey discovers that Judge Buchanan owned the store that was firebombed. There's a nasty confrontation when they ask him about it.

A mystery car tries to run Delana off the road when she leaves Amos but she escapes. Matt realizes how much she means to him and rushes to comfort her. He delivers a full and complete apology for his self-centered behavior.

Matt and Bullock, who've gradually come to respect each other, track down the man running from the scene, 'Possum' Baker. They learn he's an anti-Klan informer and is still undercover but is dying and thus now willing to come forward to tell what happened. Just as they publish the story, Matt's father dies. But Matt arrives in time to make his peace and to hear the words of approval he's always craved. When Matt has to choose between doing the right thing and doing the professional thing, he makes the right choice. Delana falls back in love with him.

Matt and Bullock's story leads to indictments. The reporters foil an attempt on Possum's life the night before a hearing where Mary Pell reveals a final shocking truth about the killer that leaves everyone gasping. The reporter's investigation ends up solving the police chief's murder as well.

The reporters receive a prize for investigative reporting. The town of Amos is transformed. Matt Harper has become a reporter with a conscience, and someone who finally deserves Delana.