

Chapter 1

The rules of the New Haven Youth League required that each kid play at least ten minutes in each game. Exceptions were allowed for players who had upset their coaches by skipping practice or violating other rules. In such cases, a coach could file a report before the game and inform the scorekeeper that so-and-so wouldn't play much, if at all, because of some infraction. This was frowned on by the league; it was, after all, much more recreational than competitive.

With four minutes left in the game, Coach Kyle looked down the bench, nodded at a somber and pouting little boy named Marquis, and said, 'Do you want to play?' Without responding, Marquis walked to the scorers' table and waited for a whistle. His violations were numerous – skipping practice, skipping school, bad grades, losing his uniform, foul language. In fact, after ten weeks and fifteen games, Marquis had broken every one of the few rules his coach

tried to enforce. Coach Kyle had long since realized that any new rule would be immediately violated by his star, and for that reason he trimmed his list and fought the temptation to add new regulations. It wasn't working. Trying to control ten inner-city kids with a soft touch had put the Red Knights in last place in the 12 and Under division of the winter league.

Marquis was only eleven, but clearly the best player on the court. He preferred shooting and scoring over passing and defending, and within two minutes he'd slashed through the lane, around and through and over much larger players, and scored six points. His average was fourteen, and if allowed to play more than half a game, he could probably score thirty. In his own young opinion, he really didn't need to practice.

In spite of the one-man show, the game was out of reach. Kyle McAvoy sat quietly on the bench, watching the game and waiting for the clock to wind down. One game to go and the season would be over, his last as a basketball coach. In two years he'd won a dozen, lost two dozen, and asked himself how any person in his right mind would willingly coach at any level. He was doing it for the kids, he'd said to himself a thousand times, kids with no fathers, kids from bad homes, kids in need of a positive male influence. And he still believed it, but after two years of babysitting, and arguing with parents when they bothered to show up, and hassling with other coaches who were not above cheating,

and trying to ignore teenage referees who didn't know a block from a charge, he was fed up. He'd done his community service, in this town anyway.

He watched the game and waited, yelling occasionally because that's what coaches are supposed to do. He looked around the empty gym, an old brick building in downtown New Haven, home to the youth league for fifty years. A handful of parents were scattered through the bleachers, all waiting for the final horn. Marquis scored again. No one applauded. The Red Knights were down by twelve with two minutes to go.

At the far end of the court, just under the ancient scoreboard, a man in a dark suit walked through the door and leaned against the retractable bleachers. He was noticeable because he was white. There were no white players on either team. He stood out because he wore a suit that was either black or navy, with a white shirt and a burgundy tie, all under a trench coat that announced the presence of an agent or a cop of some variety.

Coach Kyle happened to see the man when he entered the gym, and he thought to himself that the guy was out of place. Probably a detective of some sort, maybe a narc looking for a dealer. It would not be the first arrest in or around the gym.

After the agent/cop leaned against the bleachers, he cast a long suspicious look at the

Red Knights' bench, and his eyes seemed to settle on Coach Kyle, who returned the stare for a second before it became uncomfortable. Marquis let one fly from near mid-court, air ball, and Coach Kyle jumped to his feet, spread his hands wide, shook his head as if to ask, 'Why?' Marquis ignored him as he loafed back on defense. A dumb foul stopped the clock and prolonged the misery. While looking at the free-throw shooter, Kyle glanced beyond him, and in the background was the agent/cop, still staring, not at the action but at the coach.

For a twenty-five-year-old law student with no criminal record and no illegal habits or proclivities, the presence and the attention of a man who gave all indications of being employed by some branch of law enforcement should have caused no concern whatsoever. But it never worked that way with Kyle McAvoy. Street cops and state troopers didn't particularly bother him. They were paid to simply react. But the guys in dark suits, the investigators and agents, the ones trained to dig deep and discover secrets – those types still unnerved him.

Thirty seconds to go and Marquis was arguing with a referee. He'd thrown an F-bomb at a ref two weeks earlier and was suspended for a game. Coach Kyle yelled at his star, who never listened. He quickly scanned the gym to see if agent/cop No. 1 was alone or was now accompanied by agent/cop No. 2. No, he was not.

Another dumb foul, and Kyle yelled at the

referee to just let it slide. He sat down and ran his finger over the side of his neck, then flicked off the perspiration. It was early February, and the gym was, as always, quite chilly.

Why was he sweating?

The agent/cop hadn't moved an inch; in fact he seemed to enjoy staring at Kyle.

The decrepit old horn finally squawked. The game was mercifully over. One team cheered, and one team really didn't care. Both lined up for the obligatory high fives and 'Good game, good game,' as meaningless to twelve-year-olds as it is to college players. As Kyle congratulated the opposing coach, he glanced down the court. The white man was gone.

What were the odds he was waiting outside? Of course it was paranoia, but paranoia had settled into Kyle's life so long ago that he now simply acknowledged it, coped with it, and moved on.

The Red Knights regrouped in the visitors' locker room, a cramped little space under the sagging and permanent stands on the home side. There Coach Kyle said all the right things – nice effort, good hustle, our game is improving in certain areas, let's finish on a high note this Saturday. The boys were changing clothes and hardly listening. They were tired of basketball because they were tired of losing, and of course all blame was heaped upon the coach. He was too young, too white, too much of an Ivy Leaguer.

The few parents who were there waited outside the locker room, and it was those tense moments when the team came out that Kyle hated most about his community service. There would be the usual complaints about playing time. Marquis had an uncle, a twenty-two-year-old former all-state player with a big mouth and a fondness for bitching about Coach Kyle's unfair treatment of the 'best player in the league.'

From the locker room, there was another door that led to a dark narrow hallway that ran behind the home stands and finally gave way to an outside door that opened into an alley. Kyle was not the first coach to discover this escape route, and on this night he wanted to avoid not only the families and their complaints but also the agent/cop. He said a quick goodbye to his boys, and as they fled the locker room, he made his escape. In a matter of seconds he was outside, in the alley, then walking quickly along a frozen sidewalk. Heavy snow had been plowed, and the sidewalk was icy and barely passable. The temperature was somewhere far below freezing. It was 8:30 on a Wednesday, and he was headed for the law journal offices at the Yale Law School, where he would work until midnight at least.

He didn't make it.

The agent was leaning against the fender of a red Jeep Cherokee that was parked parallel on the street. The vehicle was titled to one John

McAvoy of York, Pennsylvania, but for the past six years it had been the reliable companion of his son, Kyle, the true owner.

Though his feet suddenly felt like bricks and his knees were weak, Kyle managed to trudge on as if nothing were wrong. Not only did they find me, he said to himself as he tried to think clearly, but they've done their homework and found my Jeep. Not exactly high-level research. I have done nothing wrong, he said again and again.

'Tough game, Coach,' the agent said when Kyle was ten feet away and slowing down.

Kyle stopped and took in the thick young man with red cheeks and red bangs who'd been watching him in the gym. 'Can I help you?' he said, and immediately saw the shadow of No. 2 dart across the street. They always worked in pairs.

No. 1 reached into a pocket, and as he said 'That's exactly what you can do,' he pulled out a leather wallet and flipped it open. 'Bob Plant, FBI.'

'A real pleasure,' Kyle said as all the blood left his brain and he couldn't help but flinch.

No. 2 wedged himself into the frame. He was much thinner and ten years older with gray around the temples. He, too, had a pocketful, and he performed the well-rehearsed badge presentation with ease. 'Nelson Ginyard, FBI,' he said.

Bob and Nelson. Both Irish. Both north-eastern.

‘Anybody else?’ Kyle asked.

‘No. Got a minute to talk?’

‘Not really.’

‘You might want to,’ Ginyard said. ‘It could be very productive.’

‘I doubt that.’

‘If you leave, we’ll just follow,’ Plant said as he stood from his slouch position and took a step closer. ‘You don’t want us on campus, do you?’

‘Are you threatening me?’ Kyle asked. The sweat was back, now in the pits of his arms, and despite the arctic air a bead or two ran down his ribs.

‘Not yet,’ Plant said with a smirk.

‘Look, let’s spend ten minutes together, over coffee,’ Ginyard was saying. ‘There’s a sandwich shop just around the corner. I’m sure it’s warmer there.’

‘Do I need a lawyer?’

‘No.’

‘That’s what you always say. My father is a lawyer and I grew up in his office. I know your tricks.’

‘No tricks, Kyle, I swear,’ Ginyard said, and he at least sounded genuine. ‘Just give us ten minutes. I promise you won’t regret it.’

‘What’s on the agenda?’

‘Ten minutes. That’s all we ask.’

‘Give me a clue or the answer is no.’

Bob and Nelson looked at each other. Both shrugged. Why not? We’ll have to tell him sooner or later. Ginyard turned and looked down the

street and spoke into the wind. ‘Duquesne University. Five years ago. Drunk frat boys and a girl.’

Kyle’s body and mind had different reactions. His body conceded – a quick slump of the shoulders, a slight gasp, a noticeable jerk in the legs. But his mind fought back instantly. ‘That’s bullshit!’ he said, then spat on the sidewalk. ‘I’ve already been through this. Nothing happened and you know it.’

There was a long pause as Ginyard continued to stare down the street while Plant watched their subject’s every move. Kyle’s mind was spinning. Why was the FBI involved in an alleged state crime? In second-year Criminal Procedure they had studied the new laws regarding FBI interrogation. It was now an indictable offense to simply lie to an agent in this very situation. Should he shut up? Should he call his father? No, under no circumstances would he call his father.

Ginyard turned, took three steps closer, clenched his jaw like a bad actor, and tried to hiss his tough-guy words. ‘Let’s cut to the chase, Mr. McAvoy, because I’m freezing. There’s an indictment out of Pittsburgh, okay. Rape. If you want to play the hard-ass smart-ass brilliant law student and run get a lawyer, or even call your old man, then the indictment comes down tomorrow and the life you have planned is pretty much shot to shit. However, if you give us ten minutes of your valuable time, right now, in the sandwich shop around the corner, then the

indictment will be put on hold, if not forgotten altogether.'

'You can walk away from it,' Plant said from the side. 'Without a word.'

'Why should I trust you?' Kyle managed to say with a very dry mouth.

'Ten minutes.'

'You got a tape recorder?'

'Sure.'

'I want it on the table, okay? I want every word recorded because I don't trust you.'

'Fair enough.'

They jammed their hands deep into the pockets of their matching trench coats and stomped away. Kyle unlocked his Jeep and got inside. He started the engine, turned the heat on high, and thought about driving away.

Chapter 2

Buster's Deli was long and narrow with red vinyl booths along the wall to the right. To the left was a bar and a grill behind a counter, and a row of pinball machines. All manner of Yale memorabilia was tacked haphazardly on the walls. Kyle had eaten there a few times during his first year in law school, many months ago.

The last two booths were properly secured by the federal government. Yet another trench coat stood at the last table, chatting with Plant and Ginyard, waiting. When Kyle made his slow approach, the agent glanced at him, then offered the standard smirk before sitting in the next booth. No. 4 was waiting there, sipping coffee. Plant and Ginyard had ordered sandwich platters with subs and fries and pickles, all of it untouched. The table was covered with food and cups of coffee. Plant climbed to his feet and moved around to the other side so that both agents could watch their victim. They were

shoulder to shoulder, still in trench coats. Kyle slid into the booth.

The lighting was old and bad; the back corner was dark. Pinball racket mixed with a loud game on ESPN from the bartender's flat screen.

'It takes four?' Kyle asked, nodding over his shoulder at the booth behind him.

'That's just what you can see,' Ginyard said.

'Would you like a sandwich?' Plant asked.

'No.' An hour earlier he had been famished. Now his digestive system and his excretory system and his nervous system were on the verge of a meltdown. He was struggling to breathe normally as he desperately tried to appear unfazed. He removed a disposable pen and a note card, and with all the nerve he could summon, he said, 'I'd like to see those badges again.'

The responses were identical – disbelief, insulted, then oh-what-the-hell as they slowly reached into their pockets and extracted their most prized possessions. They laid them on the table, and Kyle selected Ginyard's first. He wrote down the full name – Nelson Edward Ginyard – then his agent number. He squeezed the pen hard and recorded the information carefully. His hand shook, but he thought it wasn't noticeable. He rubbed the brass emblem carefully, not sure what he was looking for but still taking his time. 'Could I see a photo ID?' he asked.

'What the hell?' Ginyard growled.

'Photo ID, please.'

‘No.’

‘I’m not talking until I finish the preliminaries. Just show me your driver’s license. I’ll show you mine.’

‘We already have a copy of yours.’

‘Whatever. Let’s have it.’

Ginyard rolled his eyes as he reached for his back pocket. From a battered billfold he produced a Connecticut license with an ominous snapshot of himself. Kyle examined it and jotted down the birth date and license data. ‘That’s worse than a passport photo,’ he said.

‘You wanna see my wife and kids?’ Ginyard said as he removed a color photo and tossed it on the table.

‘No, thanks. Which office are you guys from?’

‘Hartford,’ Ginyard said. He nodded at the next booth and said, ‘They’re from Pittsburgh.’

‘Nice.’

Kyle then examined Plant’s badge and driver’s license, and when he had finished, he pulled out his cell phone and began pecking.

‘What are you doing?’ Ginyard asked.

‘I’m going online to check you out.’

‘You think we’re posted on some nice little FBI Web site?’ Plant said with a flash of anger. Both found it humorous. Neither seemed concerned.

‘I know which site to check,’ Kyle said as he entered the address of a little-known federal directory.

‘You won’t find us,’ Ginyard said.

‘This will take a minute. Where’s that tape recorder?’

Plant produced a slender digital recorder the size of an electric toothbrush and flipped it on.

‘Please give the date, time, and place,’ Kyle said with an air of confidence that surprised even him. ‘And please state that the interrogation has yet to begin and that no statements have been made before now.’

‘Yes, sir. I love law students,’ Plant said.

‘You watch too much television,’ Ginyard said.

‘Go ahead.’

Plant situated the recorder in the center of the table, a pastrami and cheddar on one side and a smoked tuna on the other. He aimed his words at it and announced the preliminaries. Kyle was watching his phone, and when the Web site appeared, he entered the name of Nelson Edward Ginyard. A few seconds passed, and to the surprise of no one Agent Ginyard was confirmed as a field agent, FBI, Hartford. ‘You wanna see it?’ Kyle asked, holding up the tiny screen.

‘Congratulations,’ Ginyard shot back. ‘Are you satisfied now?’

‘No. I’d prefer not to be here.’

‘You can leave anytime you want,’ Plant said.

‘You asked for ten minutes.’ Kyle glanced at his wristwatch.

Both agents leaned forward, all four elbows in a row, the booth suddenly smaller. ‘You

remember a guy named Bennie Wright, chief investigator, sex crimes, Pittsburgh PD?’ Ginyard was talking, both were staring, watching every nervous twitch of Kyle’s eyelids.

‘No.’

‘You didn’t meet him five years ago during the investigation?’

‘I don’t remember meeting a Bennie Wright. Could have, but I don’t remember that name. It has been, after all, five years since the nonevent did not happen.’

They absorbed this, mulled it over slowly while maintaining eye contact. It appeared to Kyle as if both wanted to say, ‘You’re lying.’

Instead, Ginyard said, ‘Well, Detective Wright is here in town, and he’d like to meet with you in about an hour.’

‘Another meeting?’

‘If you don’t mind. It won’t take long, and there’s a good chance you can head off the indictment.’

‘Indictment for what, exactly?’

‘Rape.’

‘There was no rape. The Pittsburgh police made that decision five years ago.’

‘Well, it looks like the girl is back,’ Ginyard said. ‘She’s put her life back together, gone through some extensive therapy, and, best of all, she’s got herself a lawyer now.’

Since Ginyard stopped without a question, there was no need for a response. Kyle couldn’t help but sink an inch or two. He glanced over at

the counter, at the empty stools. He glanced over at the flat-screen television. It was a college game, the stands full of screaming students, and he asked himself why he was sitting where he was sitting.

Keep talking, he said to himself, but don't say anything.

'Can I ask a question?' he asked.

'Sure.'

'If the indictment has been issued, how can it be stopped? Why are we talking?'

'It's under seal, by court order,' Ginyard said. 'According to Detective Wright, the prosecutor has a deal for you, one that the victim's lawyer cooked up, one that will allow you to walk away from this mess. You play ball, and the indictment against you will never see the light of day.'

'I'm still confused. Maybe I should call my father.'

'That's up to you, but if you're smart, you'll wait until you chat with Detective Wright.'

'You guys didn't advise me of my *Miranda* rights.'

'This is not an interrogation,' Plant finally said. 'It's not an investigation.' Then he reached into the smoked-tuna basket and pulled out a greasy fry.

'What the hell is it?'

'A meeting.'

Ginyard cleared his throat, leaned back a few inches, and proceeded. 'It's a state crime, Kyle,

we all know that. Normally we wouldn't be involved, but since you're here in Connecticut and the indictment is in Pennsylvania, the boys in Pittsburgh asked us to help arrange the next meeting. After that, we'll step aside.'

'I'm still confused.'

'Come on. Bright legal mind like you. Surely you're not that thick.'

There was a long pause as all three considered the next move. Plant chomped on his second fry, but his eyes never left Kyle. Ginyard took a sip of coffee, frowned at the taste, and continued staring. The pinball machines were silent. The deli was empty except for the four FBI agents, a bartender absorbed in the game, and Kyle.

Finally, Kyle leaned forward on his elbows, and with the recorder just inches away he said, 'There was no rape, no crime. I did nothing wrong.'

'Fine, talk to Wright.'

'And where is he?'

'At ten o'clock, he'll be at the Holiday Inn on Saw Mill Road, room 222.'

'This is a bad idea. I need a lawyer.'

'Maybe you do, maybe you don't,' Ginyard said, leaning in so that their heads were a foot apart. 'Look, I know you don't trust us, but please believe it when we say you should talk to Wright before you talk to anyone else. Hell, you can call a lawyer, or your father, at midnight. Or tomorrow. If you overreact now, the outcome could be a disaster.'

‘I’m leaving. Conversation over. Turn off the recorder.’

Neither made any move toward the recorder. Kyle looked at it, then leaned down and said, very clearly, ‘This is Kyle McAvoy. The time is 8:50 p.m. I have nothing else to say. I have made no statements, and I am leaving Buster’s Deli right now.’ He scooted off the bench and was almost out of the booth when Plant blurted, ‘He’s got the video.’

A horse kick to the groin could not have hit harder. Kyle clutched the red vinyl and looked as though he might faint. Slowly, he sat down again. Slowly, he reached for a plastic cup and took a long sip of water. His lips and tongue were parched, and the water did little to help.

The video. A fraternity brother, one of the drunks at the little party, had allegedly recorded something with his cell phone. Supposedly, there were images of the girl, naked on a sofa, too drunk to move, and admiring her were three or four or five Beta brothers, all naked, too, or in the process of undressing. Kyle vaguely remembered the scene, but he’d never seen the video. It had been destroyed, according to Beta legend. The cops in Pittsburgh had searched but never found it. It was gone, forgotten, buried deep in the secrecy of Beta brotherhood.

Plant and Ginyard were elbow to elbow again, all four eyes focused and unblinking.

‘What video?’ Kyle managed to ask, but it was

so lame and so unconvincing that he didn't believe himself.

'The one you boys hid from the cops,' Plant said, barely moving his lips. 'The one that places you at the scene of the crime. The one that will destroy your life and send you away for twenty years.'

Oh, that video.

'I don't know what you're talking about,' Kyle said, then drank some more water. Waves of nausea crashed through his stomach and head, and he thought about vomiting.

'Oh, I think you do,' Ginyard said.

'Have you seen this video?' Kyle asked.

Both nodded.

'Then you know I didn't touch the girl.'

'Maybe, maybe not. But you were there,' Ginyard said. 'You were an accessory.'

To keep from throwing up, Kyle closed his eyes and began rubbing his temples. The girl was a wild little thing who'd spent more time in the Beta house than in her dorm room. A groupie, a clinger, a party animal with an abundant supply of Daddy's cash. The brothers of Beta passed her around. When she cried rape, the brothers had instantly gone mute and solidified into an impenetrable wall of denial and innocence. The cops eventually gave up when she proved too unreliable with the details. No charges were filed. She later left Duquesne and mercifully disappeared. The great miracle of the ugly little episode was that it had been

kept quiet. No additional lives were ruined.

‘The indictment names you and three others,’ Ginyard said.

‘There was no rape,’ Kyle said as he continued to rub his temples. ‘If she had sex, I promise you it was by consent.’

‘Not if she blacked out,’ Ginyard said.

‘We’re not here to argue, Kyle,’ Plant said. ‘That’s what lawyers are for. We’re here to help cut a deal. If you’ll cooperate, then this will all go away, at least your part of it.’

‘What kind of deal?’

‘Detective Wright will handle that.’

Kyle slowly sat back and tapped his head on the red vinyl bench behind him. He wanted to plead, to beg, to explain that this wasn’t fair, that he was about to graduate and pass the bar and start a career. His future held so much promise. His past was unblemished. Almost.

But they already knew that, didn’t they? He glanced at the tape recorder and decided to give them nothing. ‘All right, all right,’ he said. ‘I’ll be there.’

Ginyard leaned even closer and said, ‘You have one hour. If you make a phone call, we’ll know it. If you try to run, we’ll follow, okay? No funny stuff, Kyle. You’re making the right decision here, I swear it. Just keep it up, and this will all go away.’

‘I don’t believe you.’

‘You’ll see.’

Kyle left them there with their cold

sandwiches and bitter coffee. He made it to his Jeep, then drove to his apartment three blocks from campus. He rummaged through his roommate's bathroom, found a Valium, then locked his bedroom door, turned off the light, and stretched out on the floor.

Chapter 3

It was an old Holiday Inn, built in the 1960s, when motels and fast-food chains raced to build along the highways and frontage roads. Kyle had passed it a hundred times and never seen it. Behind it was a pancake house, and next door was a large discount appliance store.

The parking lot was dark and one-third full when he backed the red Jeep into a space next to a minivan from Indiana. He turned off the lights but left the engine running and the heater on. A light snow was falling. Why couldn't there be a blizzard, or a flood or earthquake, an invasion, anything to interrupt this awful scenario? Why, exactly, was he sleepwalking through their little plan?

The video.

In the past hour he'd thought of calling his father, but that conversation would take far too long. John McAvoy would provide sound legal advice, and quickly, but the backstory had many

complications. He'd thought of calling Professor Bart Mallory, his adviser, his friend, his brilliant teacher of criminal procedure, a former judge who would know exactly what to do. But again, there were too many blanks to fill in and not enough time. He'd thought of calling two of his Beta brothers from Duquesne, but why bother? Any advice they might give would be as unsound as the strategies racing through his mind. No sense ruining their lives. And in the horror of the moment he'd thought of the various schemes he could use to disappear. A mad dash to the airport. A clandestine car ride to the bus station. A long jump off a tall bridge.

But they were watching, weren't they? And probably listening, too, so all phone calls would be shared. Someone was watching at that very moment, he was certain. Perhaps in the minivan from Indiana there were a couple of goons with headsets and night-vision gear, getting their jollies as they monitored him and burned taxpayer money.

If the Valium was working, he couldn't tell.

When the digital clock on the radio hit 9:58, he turned off the engine and stepped into the snow. He walked bravely across the asphalt, each step leaving footprints. Could this be his last moment of freedom? He'd read so many cases of criminal defendants freely walking into the police station for a few quick questions, only to be charged, handcuffed, jailed, railroaded by the system. He could still run, to somewhere.

When the glass doors slammed behind him, he paused for a second in the deserted lobby and thought he heard the clanging of cell-block iron at his back. He was hearing things, seeing things, imagining things. Apparently, the Valium had reversed itself and had him ready to jump out of his skin. He nodded at the decrepit clerk behind the front counter, but there was no audible response. As he rode the musty elevator to the second floor, he asked himself what kind of fool would voluntarily enter a motel room filled with cops and agents all hell-bent on accusing him of something that never happened? Why was he doing this?

The video.

He had never seen it. He did not know anyone who had seen it. In the secret world of Beta there were rumors and denials and threats, but no one had even known for sure if the 'Elaine thing' had actually been recorded. The reality that it had, and that the evidence was now in the possession of the Pittsburgh police and the FBI, made him ponder the bridge scenario.

Wait a minute. I did nothing wrong. I did not touch that girl, not that night anyway.

No one touched her. At least that was the sworn and battle-tested version within the Beta fraternity. But what if the video proved otherwise? He would never know until he saw it.

The noxious smell of fresh paint hit him as he stepped into the hallway on the second floor. He stopped at room 222 and glanced at his watch to

make sure he was not a minute too early. He knocked three times, then heard movement and muffled voices. The lock chain rattled, the door was jerked open, and Special Agent Nelson Edward Ginyard said, ‘Glad you could make it.’ Kyle stepped inside, leaving the old world behind. The new one was suddenly terrifying.

Ginyard had his jacket off, and strapped over his white shirt was a shoulder harness, with a fairly large black pistol in a black holster snug under his left arm. Agent Plant and the two others from Buster’s were staring, and all three were also coatless so that young Kyle could get the full measure of their arsenal. Identical nine-millimeter Berettas, with matching holsters and black leather harnesses. Seriously armed men, all with the same scowl as if they’d be more than happy to shoot the rapist.

‘Good move,’ Plant said, nodding now.

Actually, Kyle thought in the haze of the moment, coming here was a very stupid move.

Room 222 had been converted into a makeshift field office. The king-sized bed had been pushed into a corner. The curtains were tightly closed. Two folding tables had been hauled in and were covered with the evidence of busy work – files and thick envelopes and notepads. Three laptops were open and on, and in the one nearest the door Kyle caught a glimpse of himself, from his high school yearbook. Central York High School, class of 2001. Tacked to the bare wall behind the folding tables

were eight-by-ten color photos of three of his Beta brothers. At the far end, almost to the curtains, was one of Elaine Keenan.

The room adjoined another, and the door between them was open. Agent No. 5 walked through it – same gun, same holster – and glared at Kyle. Five agents? Two rooms. A ton of paperwork. All this effort, all this work, all these men, just to nail me? Kyle felt light-headed as he observed the power of his government in action.

‘Do you mind emptying your pockets?’ Ginyard said as he offered a small cardboard box.

‘Why?’

‘Please.’

‘You think I’m armed? You think I might pull out a knife and attack you guys?’

Agent No. 5 saw the humor and broke the ice with a good laugh. Kyle pulled out his key ring, jangled its collection for Ginyard to see, then put it back in his pocket.

‘How about a pat down?’ Plant said, already moving toward Kyle.

‘Oh, sure,’ he said, then raised his arms. ‘All Yale students are heavily armed.’

Plant began a very soft and quick frisk. He finished just seconds after he started, then disappeared into the other room.

‘Detective Wright is across the hall,’ Ginyard said. Yet another room.

Kyle followed him out of the room, into the stuffy hallway, then waited as he tapped gently

on the door to room 225. When it opened, Kyle entered alone.

Bennie Wright displayed no weaponry. He offered a quick handshake while spitting out, 'Detective Wright, Pittsburgh PD.'

A real pleasure, Kyle thought but said nothing. What am I doing here?

Wright was in his late forties, short, trim, bald with a few strands of black hair slicked back just above his ears. His eyes were also black and partially concealed behind a pair of tiny reading glasses perched halfway down his narrow nose. He closed the door behind Kyle, then waved at the appointed spot and said, 'Why don't you have a seat?'

'What do you have in mind?' Kyle asked without moving.

Wright walked past the bed and stopped beside yet another folding table, this one with two cheap metal chairs facing each other. 'Let's talk, Kyle,' he said pleasantly, and Kyle realized he had a slight accent. English was not his first language, though there was almost no trace of his native tongue. But it was odd. A man named Bennie Wright from Pittsburgh should not have a foreign accent.

There was a small video camera mounted on a tripod in one corner. Wires ran to the table, to a laptop with a twelve-inch screen. 'Please,' Wright said, waving at one chair as he settled himself into the other.

'I want all of this recorded,' Kyle said.

Wright glanced over his shoulder at the camera and said, 'No problem.'

Slowly, Kyle walked to the other chair and sat down. Wright was rolling up the sleeves of his white shirt. His necktie was already loose.

To Kyle's right was the laptop with a blank screen. To his left a thick, unopened file. In the center of the table was a fresh legal pad, white, with a black pen on it, waiting. 'Turn on the camera,' Kyle said. Wright punched the laptop, and Kyle's face appeared on the screen. He looked at himself and saw nothing but fear.

Wright went efficiently into the file, retrieving the necessary paperwork as if young Kyle here were simply applying for a student credit card. When the proper sheets were found, he placed them in the center and said, 'First, we need to cover your *Miranda* rights.'

'No,' Kyle said softly. 'First we need to see your badge and some identification.'

This irritated the detective, but only for a few seconds. Without a word, he fished out a brown leather wallet from a rear pocket, opened it, and said, 'Had this for twenty-two years now.'

Kyle examined the bronze badge, and it did indeed show signs of age. Benjamin J. Wright, Pittsburgh Police Department, officer number 6658. 'How about a driver's license?'

Wright yanked back his wallet, opened another compartment, fingered through some cards, and then flung down a Pennsylvania photo license. 'Satisfied now?' he snapped.

Kyle handed it back and said, ‘Why is the FBI involved in this?’

‘Can we finish up with *Miranda*?’ Wright was readjusting the paperwork.

‘Sure. I understand *Miranda*.’

‘I’m sure you do. A top law student at one of our most prestigious law schools. A very smart young man.’ Kyle was reading as Wright was talking. ‘You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in court. You have the right to an attorney. If you can’t afford one, then the state will provide one. Any questions?’

‘No.’ He signed his name on two forms and slid them back to Wright.

‘Why is the FBI involved?’ He repeated the question.

‘Believe me, Kyle, the FBI is the least of your problems.’ Wright’s hands were hairy, still, calm, and his fingers were laced together on top of the legal pad. He spoke slowly, with authority. There was no doubt this meeting belonged to him. ‘Here is my suggestion, Kyle. We have so much ground to cover, and time is slipping by. Did you ever play football?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then let’s say this table is a football field. Not a great analogy, but one that will work. You are here, at this goal line.’ With his left hand he striped an imaginary line in front of the laptop. ‘You have a hundred yards to go, to score, to win, to walk out of here in one piece.’ With his

right hand, he laid down the other goal line, next to the heavy file. His hands were four feet apart. ‘A hundred yards, Kyle, bear with me, okay?’

‘Okay.’

He pulled his hands together and tapped the legal pad. ‘Somewhere in here, at about the fifty, I’ll show you the video that is the source of this conflict. You won’t like it, Kyle. It will make you ill. Nauseous. Sick to your stomach. But, if we are able, then we will continue your little march to the goal line, and when we get there, you will be quite relieved. You will once again see yourself as the golden boy, the handsome young man with an unlimited future and an unblemished past. Stick with me, Kyle, allow me to be the boss, the coach, the man calling the plays, and together we’ll make it to the promised land.’ His right hand tapped the goal line.

‘What about the indictment?’

Wright touched the file and said, ‘It’s here.’

‘When do I see it?’

‘Stop asking questions, Kyle. I have the questions. Hopefully, you have the answers.’

The accent wasn’t Spanish. Eastern European maybe, and at times it was so slight it almost disappeared.

Wright’s left hand touched the goal line in front of the laptop. ‘Now, Kyle, we need to start with the basics. Just some background, okay?’

‘Whatever.’

Wright pulled some papers from the file, studied them for a second, then picked up his

pen. ‘You were born on February 4, 1983, in York, Pennsylvania, third child and only son of John and Patty McAvoy. They divorced in 1989, when you were six years old, neither has remarried, correct?’

‘Correct.’

Wright made a check mark, then launched into a series of quick questions about family members, their birth dates, education, jobs, addresses, hobbies, church affiliations, even politics. As the list grew longer, Wright shuffled papers and the check marks multiplied. He had his facts straight, every one of them. He knew the date and place of the birth of Kyle’s two-year-old nephew in Santa Monica. When he finished with the family, he pulled out more papers. Kyle felt the first signs of fatigue. And they were just warming up.

‘Would you like something to drink?’ Wright asked.

‘No.’

‘Your father is a general practice lawyer in York?’ It was a statement, but more of a question.

Kyle only nodded. Then a barrage about his father, his life and career and interests. After every fourth or fifth question, Kyle wanted to ask, ‘Is this really relevant?’ But he held his tongue. Wright had all the data. Kyle was simply affirming what someone else had found.

‘Your mother is an artist of some variety?’ Kyle heard him say.

‘Yes, and where is the football right now?’

‘You’ve gained about ten yards. What kind of artist?’

‘She’s a painter.’

They probed the life of Patty McAvoy for ten minutes.

Finally, the detective finished with the family and settled on the suspect. He served up a few easy ones about his childhood, but didn’t dwell on the details. He already knows it all, Kyle told himself.

‘Honors from Central York High, star athlete, Eagle Scout. Why did you select Duquesne University?’

‘They offered me a basketball scholarship.’

‘Were there other offers?’

‘A couple, from smaller schools.’

‘But you didn’t play much at Duquesne.’

‘I played thirteen minutes as a freshman, then tore an ACL in the final minute of the final game.’

‘Surgery?’

‘Yes, but the knee was gone. I quit basketball and joined a fraternity.’

‘We’ll get to the fraternity later. Were you invited back to the basketball team?’

‘Sort of. Didn’t matter. The knee was shot.’

‘You majored in economics and made near-perfect grades. What happened in Spanish your second year? You didn’t make an A?’

‘I should’ve taken German, I guess.’

‘One B in four years is not bad.’ Wright

flipped a page, made a note about something. Kyle glanced at his face on the laptop and told himself to relax.

‘High honors, a dozen or so student organizations, intramural softball champs, fraternity secretary then president. Your academic record is impressive, yet you managed to also maintain a pretty active social life. Tell me about your first arrest.’

‘I’m sure you have the records in your file there.’

‘Your first arrest, Kyle.’

‘Only one. A first, not a second. Not until now, I guess.’

‘What happened?’

‘Typical frat stuff. A loud party that didn’t stop until the cops showed up. I got caught with an open container, a bottle of beer. Nitpicking stuff. Misdemeanor. I paid a fine of three hundred bucks and got six months’ probation. After that, the record was expunged and Yale never knew about it.’

‘Did your father handle it?’

‘He was involved, but I had a lawyer in Pittsburgh.’

‘Who?’

‘A lady named Sylvia Marks.’

‘I’ve heard of her. Doesn’t she specialize in stupid fraternity stunts?’

‘That’s her. But she knows her stuff.’

‘I thought there was a second arrest.’

‘No. I was stopped by the cops once on

campus, but there was no arrest. Just a warning.'

'What were you doing?'

'Nothing.'

'Then why were you stopped?'

'A couple of fraternities were shooting bottle rockets at each other. Smart boys. I was not involved. Nothing went in my file, so I'm wondering how you heard about it.'

Wright ignored this and wrote something on his legal pad. When he finished scribbling, he said, 'Why did you decide to go to law school?'

'I made that decision when I was twelve years old. I always wanted to be a lawyer. My first job was running the copier in my father's office. I sort of grew up there.'

'Where did you apply to law school?'

'Penn, Yale, Cornell, and Stanford.'

'Where were you accepted?'

'All four.'

'Why Yale?'

'It was always my first choice.'

'Did Yale offer scholarship money?'

'Financial incentives, yes. So did the others.'

'Have you borrowed money?'

'Yes.'

'How much?'

'Do you really need to know?'

'I wouldn't ask the question if I didn't need to know. You think I'm talking just to hear myself talk?'

'I can't answer that.'

'Back to the student loans.'

‘When I graduate in May, I’ll owe about sixty thousand.’

Wright nodded as if he agreed that this was the correct amount. He flipped another page, and Kyle could see that it, too, was covered with questions.

‘And you write for the law journal?’

‘I’m the editor in chief of the *Yale Law Journal*.’

‘That’s the most prestigious honor in the school?’

‘According to some.’

‘You clerked last summer in New York. Tell me about it.’

‘It was one of those huge Wall Street firms, Scully & Pershing, a typical summer clerkship. We were wined and dined and given easy hours, the same seduction routine all the big firms use. They pamper the clerks, then kill them when they become associates.’

‘Did Scully & Pershing offer you a position after graduation?’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you accept or decline?’

‘Neither. I have not made a decision. The firm has given me some additional time to decide.’

‘What’s taking so long?’

‘I have a few options. One is a clerkship for a federal judge, but he might get a promotion. Things are in limbo there.’

‘Do you have other job offers?’

‘I had other offers, yes.’

‘Tell me about them.’

‘Is this really relevant?’

‘Everything I say is relevant, Kyle.’

‘Do you have any water?’

‘I’m sure there’s some in the bathroom.’

Kyle jumped to his feet, walked between the king-sized bed and the credenza, switched on the light in the cramped bathroom, and ran tap water into a flimsy plastic cup. He gulped it, then refilled. When he returned to the table, he placed the cup somewhere around his own twenty-yard line, then checked himself on the monitor. ‘Just curious,’ he said. ‘Where’s the football right now?’

‘Third and long. Tell me about the other job offers, the other firms.’

‘Why don’t you just show me the video so we can skip all this bullshit? If it really exists, and if it implicates me, then I’ll walk out of here and go hire a lawyer.’

Wright leaned forward, adjusted his elbows on the table, and began gently tapping his fingertips together. The lower half of his face eased into a smile while the upper half remained non-committal. Very coolly, he said, ‘Losing your temper, Kyle, could cost you your life.’

Life as in dead body? Or life as in brilliant future? Kyle wasn’t so sure. He took a deep breath, then another gulp of the water. The flash of anger was gone, replaced by the crush of confusion and fear.

The fake smile widened, and Wright said,

‘Please, Kyle, you’re doing fine here. Just a few more questions and we’ll move into rougher territory. The other firms?’

‘I was offered a job by Logan & Kupec in New York, Baker Potts in San Francisco, and Garton in London. I said no to all three. I’m still kicking around a public-interest job.’

‘Doing what? Where?’

‘It’s down in Virginia, a legal aid position helping migrant workers.’

‘And how long would you do this?’

‘Couple of years, maybe, I’m not sure. It’s just an option.’

‘At a much lower salary?’

‘Oh, yes. Much.’

‘How will you pay back your student loans?’

‘I’ll figure that out.’

Wright didn’t like the smart-ass answer, but decided to let it slide. He glanced at his notes, though a quick review wasn’t necessary. He knew that young Kyle here owed \$61,000 in student loans, all of which would be forgiven by Yale if he spent the next three years working for minimum wage protecting the poor, the oppressed, the abused, or the environment. Kyle’s offer had been extended by Piedmont Legal Aid, and the clerkship was funded by a grant from a mammoth law firm in Chicago. According to Wright’s sources, Kyle had verbally accepted the position, which paid \$32,000 a year. Wall Street could wait. It would always be there. His father had encouraged him to spend a

few years out in the trenches, getting his hands dirty, far away from the corporate style of law that he, John McAvoy, despised.

According to the file, Scully & Pershing was offering a base salary of \$200,000 plus the usual extras. The other firms' offers were similar.

'When will you select a job?' Wright asked.

'Very soon.'

'Which way are you leaning?'

'I'm not.'

'Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure.'

Wright reached for the file, shaking his head grimly and frowning as if he'd been insulted. He retrieved more papers, flipped through them, then glared at Kyle. 'You haven't made a verbal commitment to accept a position with an outfit called Piedmont Legal Aid, in Winchester, Virginia, beginning September the second of this year?'

A rush of warm air escaped through Kyle's dry lips. As he absorbed this, he instinctively glanced at the monitor, and, yes, he looked as weak as he felt. He almost blurted, 'How the hell do you know this?' but to do so would be to admit the truth. Nor could he deny the truth. Wright already knew.

As he was lurching toward some lame response, his adversary moved in for the kill. 'Let's call this Lie Number One, okay, Kyle?' Wright said with a sneer. 'Should we somehow arrive at Lie Number Two, then we turn off the

camera, say good night, and meet again tomorrow for the arrest. Handcuffs, perp walk, mug shot, maybe a reporter or two. You won't be thinking about protecting illegal immigrants, and you won't be thinking about Wall Street. Don't lie to me, Kyle. I know too much.'

Kyle almost said, 'Yes, sir,' but instead managed only a slight affirmative nod.

'So you plan to do some charitable work for a couple of years?'

'Yes.'

'Then what?'

'I don't know. I'm sure I'll join a firm somewhere, start a career.'

'What do you think of Scully & Pershing?'

'Big, powerful, rich. I think it's the largest law firm in the world, depending on who got merged or swallowed yesterday. Offices in thirty cities on five continents. Some really smart folks who work very hard and put enormous pressure on each other, especially on their young associates.'

'Your kind of work?'

'It's hard to say. The money is great. The work is brutal. But it's the big leagues. I'll probably end up there.'

'In what section did you work last summer?'

'I moved around, but most of my time was spent in litigation.'

'Do you like litigation?'

'Not especially. May I ask what these questions can possibly have to do with that matter back in Pittsburgh?'

Wright took his elbows off the table and tried to relax a little deeper into the folding chair. He crossed his legs and placed the legal pad on his left thigh. He chewed the end of his pen for a moment, staring at Kyle as if he were now a psychiatrist, analyzing the patient. 'Let's talk about your fraternity at Duquesne.'

'Whatever.'

'There were about ten members of your pledge class, right?'

'Nine.'

'Do you keep in touch with all of them?'

'To some degree.'

'The indictment names you and three others, so let's talk about the other three. Where is Alan Strock?'

The indictment. Somewhere in that damned file less than three feet away was the indictment. How could his name be listed as a defendant? He had not touched the girl. He had not witnessed a rape. He had not seen anyone having sex. He vaguely recalled being present in the room, but he had blacked out at some point during the night, during the episode. How could he be an accomplice if he wasn't conscious? That would be his defense at trial, and a solid defense it would be, but the specter of a trial was too awful to imagine. A trial would come long after the arrest, the publicity, the horror of seeing his photo in print. Kyle closed his eyes and rubbed his temples, and he thought about the phone calls home, first to his father and then to his

mother. Other phone calls would follow: one each to the recruiting directors who'd offered him jobs; one to each of his sisters. He would proclaim his innocence and all that, but he knew he would never shake the suspicion of rape.

At that moment, Kyle had no confidence in Detective Wright and whatever deal he had in mind. If there was indeed an indictment, then no miracle could keep it buried.

'Alan Strock?' Wright asked.

'He's in med school at Ohio State.'

'Any recent correspondence?'

'An e-mail a couple of days ago.'

'And Joey Bernardo?'

'He's still in Pittsburgh, working for a brokerage firm.'

'Recent contact?'

'By phone, a few days ago.'

'Any mention of Elaine Keenan with Alan or Joey?'

'No.'

'You boys have tried to forget about Elaine, haven't you?'

'Yes.'

'Well, she's back.'

'Evidently.'

Wright readjusted himself in the chair, uncrossed his legs, stretched his back, and returned to the most comfortable position with both elbows stuck on the table. 'Elaine left Duquesne after her freshman year,' he began in a softer voice, as if he had a long tale to tell. 'She

was troubled. Her grades were a mess. She now claims that the rape brought on severe emotional distress. She lived with her parents for a year or so in Erie, then began drifting. A lot of self-medication, booze and drugs. She saw some therapists, but nothing helped. Have you heard any of this?’

‘No. After she left school, there was not a word.’

‘Anyway, she has an older sister in Scranton who took her in, got her some help, paid for rehab. Then they found a shrink who, evidently, has done a nice job of putting Elaine back together. She’s clean, sober, feels great, and her memory has improved dramatically. She’s also found herself a lawyer, and of course she is demanding justice.’

‘You sound skeptical.’

‘I’m a cop, Kyle. I’m skeptical of everything, but I have this young woman who is credible and who says she was raped, and I have a video that is pretty powerful evidence. And on top of that, there’s this lawyer who’s out for blood.’

‘This is a shakedown, isn’t it? All about money?’

‘What do you mean, Kyle?’

‘The fourth defendant is Baxter Tate, and of course we know what that’s all about. The Tate family is very rich. Old Pittsburgh money. Baxter was born with trust funds. How much does she want?’

‘I’ll ask the questions. Did you ever have sex—’