

LOYAL, GULLIBLE & IN LOVE

By

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CHAPTER ONE

“Have to go and turn myself in.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“The hit and run last night on highway 58. They’re taking about it on channel 6. It was me. I was driving.”

“You’re nuts. Stop saying crazy things like that!”

“Go look at my car.”

“What for?”

“The right hand fender is busted up.”

“Let me see.”

Jake went with Tommy to the big barn in back of the house. Tommy pushed the barn door to the side, and the two of them went inside. Jake turned on the lights. Tommy’s Camaro was parked inside. Jake walked around the car and stopped at the front fender. It had been partly ripped loose and hung down; the headlight was missing.

“Oh shit! Tommy, what happened?”

“Like they said on TV, I hit the kid. The weather was lousy. The rain made it hard to see. I think he was crossing the street when I hit him. He was lying on the street, we panicked and ran.”

“You didn’t try to help him?”

“I knew we couldn’t do anything. He was a crumpled up mess.”

“God help us”! Jake looked at Tommy and shook his head in dismay. “Let’s go kid. You’re right. You have to report to the police. I’ll drive you.”

At the police station, Jake did the talking. “My brother, Tommy Robertson, was apparently driving the car that hit the child last night on 58.”

“Hold on, mister. I’ll get Sergeant Addair. He’s handling that case.”

The sergeant took Tommy’s statement. Tommy described how he was driving on highway 58. It was raining very hard and he didn’t see the child. When he saw the child lying on the street he realized the kid was probably dead. He panicked and ran. At home he hid his car in the barn.

“Tommy, the forensic team tells me the condition of the body indicates the impact wounds show the car must have been speeding. They tell me the car must have been traveling at a pretty high speed. How fast were you going Tommy?”

“Don’t know for sure. We were going fast.”

“Jake, I should keep Tommy until the DA brings him before the magistrate. However, you and I have known each other since grade school, and your brother is a good kid. Never been in trouble. Even though he has that fast car, he’s never even gotten a ticket. I’ll let him go home under your recognizance, but he can’t touch that car. Under no circumstances let him change anything; we’ll come to pick it up as soon as possible.”

On the way home, Jake asked Tommy who was with him when he hit the boy. “Nobody. I was alone.”

“You keep saying we. Sounds to me you had someone else with you in the car.”

“No. Nobody was with me. You know I often use we when I talk about myself.”

“Guess so. 58 is not on the way home. Where were you going?”

“I was going to pick-up Suzie.”

“From the speed they say you were going, you must have been in a big hurry. Why in the world drive so fast in the rain? That’s not like you.”

“I was late. I promised to pick her up at seven, but I got hung up at work.”

“And Suzie couldn’t wait?”

Tommy didn’t answer. He sat silently staring out the front windshield. Jake wouldn’t let it go. “So Miss Suzie couldn’t wait, and here we are.”

“Come on, Jake. I know you never liked her, but this isn’t her fault.”

“Guess you’re right. Tommy, what upsets me most about this mess is not that you were speeding. Although that does surprise me. What surprises me more is that you ran. Tommy, why run? That’s not the way Mom and Dad brought us up.”

Having his older brother bring their parents into this caused Tommy to burst out in tears. “Sorry, Jake. I just panicked. I know that was wrong. But I did want to turn myself in. Will you tell the cops I wanted to turn myself in without you forcing me to do it?”

“Of course! Tommy, you’re my brother. Whatever happens I’ll have your back...”

CHAPTER TWO

The magistrate bound Tommy's case over for trial and advised him to get a lawyer. Jake's wife, Dorothy, urged him to ask Suzie's father to represent Tommy. Jake didn't like the idea. "The man's a prick. Tommy told me the guy tried to forbid Suzie from going out with him because he wasn't good enough for her to be seen dating him."

Dorothy knew all about that. "Jake, this is different. I know the man thinks of himself as the top lawyer in town and socially we don't meet his standards. But this is different. He'd be Tommy's lawyer, nothing to do with dating Suzie. Defending people is what he does, and, regardless of his attitude towards us, we need a top lawyer! Please go talk to him at his office. His office is called Alderidge & Chadwick: it's right next to town hall."

Grudgingly, Jake consented. He never got past the lobby. A secretary came back to inform him that Mr. Alderidge sent his regrets, but he was not available to represent Tommy. Jake was furious. He burst out of the lobby and went directly to the elevator and mashed at the button for the next floor.

On the second floor, he indiscriminately chose the nearest office. An older man seated behind a desk overloaded with files looked up. "Can I help you?"

Jake explained that he needed a lawyer.

He was ushered into a cramped little office in the back. A youngish looking man seated behind a desk also loaded with files waved at the front of his desk. "You look haggard. Sit down and tell me what's up.

By the way, I'm Jarred Kline, and you just met my legal assistant, my dad, Teddy Kline."

Jake explained that he was looking for a lawyer to represent his brother Tommy. He went over all the tedious details starting from the time Tommy said he had to turn himself in. He didn't omit his brief visit to the offices of Alderidge & Chadwick on the main floor.

Jarred Kline laughed. "So Timothy Alderidge sent his regrets. I'm not surprised. It's not my habit to speak badly of fellow lawyers, but Timothy is a pompous ass. Just as well he turned you down. You would've had a very junior man or woman assistant from his office represent your brother. Let me restate that, a very junior man. They prefer not to hire women."

"The charge of negligent homicide is not nothing, and the DA will put one of his better prosecutors on your brother's case. I'm no greenhorn, but this would be a pretty big case for me. I'd have to put a lot of my and Dad's time into building the best possible defense. If you can afford the retainer I would have to ask, I'd love to take your case."

Jake asked what the retainer would be like.

"We're an office of one lawyer and a para-legal. We don't have a big overhead. Anyway, I'll work with you to make this doable."

"We're not without funds. Even though Tommy is still in school and only has a part time job and my wife and I don't have big salaries, we can make some funds available. If needed, we can draw from Tommy's trust fund."

Jarred inquired about the trust fund, at the same time assuring Jarred that he hoped they would not have to touch it.

“When my parents died, I used the money Tommy and I inherited to establish a trust fund for him. He was a minor, and I was appointed as his guardian. We were newlyweds, and he came to live with us. My wife and I had good jobs, and we could easily provide for Tommy. But you never know. Our parents were taken from us suddenly in an airplane crash, and I was worried that, if something happened to me, Tommy would wind up with nothing. The trust fund was meant for his education. So far the only money we have taken from the fund was for a down payment on that expensive car of his. He pays the monthly installments from what he earns.”

CHAPTER THREE

Jarred Kline arranged bail, and although he had to drop out of school, Tommy was back at home. Jake and Dorothy were at work and he was alone in the house. He had not spoken to Suzie since they carted him off to jail after his arraignment. He called her now, feeling restless and alone.

She picked up on the first ring. “Tommy, I miss you so much, when can I see you?”

“I’m home. They let me out on bail. They charged me with criminally negligent homicide and leaving the scene of an accident. My lawyer explained that general criminal negligence is any action that significantly deviates from the reasonable, normal standard of ordinary people. He was trying to have me charged with vehicular manslaughter which is a misdemeanor. He was surprised the DA is handling it as a criminal manslaughter case. The charges stated I was driving recklessly at a very high speed. They can try to put me away for up to twenty years. Suzie, how fast were you going!”

“I’ll be over as soon as school lets out. We’ll talk. Darling, I’ll explain everything.”

Tommy watched through the window as Suzie pulled into the driveway. She was driving Betty Bonovich’s Mustang GT. Tommy went to the door to greet her. “How come you’re driving BB’s car?”

“Dad took my car away.”

“Why?”

“After my second DUI they suspended my license and he’s hopping mad. Don’t worry, he’ll get over it. Always does. Hey, baby, I missed you so much, come here so I can give you a big kiss.”

Suzie threw her arms around Tommy’s neck and kissed him passionately. Her tongue forced open his lips and she gyrated her body against his so her breasts rubbed against his chest while her hips rubbed against his pelvis. She pulled her lips away from his only long enough to repeatedly whisper how much she loved him.

After a while Tommy pulled her inside. “The neighbors can see us; come inside.” Once inside, Tommy turned very serious. “I’m in trouble, serious trouble. We have to think of something. What the hell were you doing? How fast were you driving? What didn’t you tell me the night of the accident?”

“Tommy I want you so much. Let’s first make love, and then I’ll tell you everything. It’s been too long.” She started pulling her blouse off.

Tommy stopped her. “No. I’m in real trouble. I can be sent to jail for twenty years. Just tell me exactly what happened.”

Suzie realized that Tommy was not as hot as always to have sex with her. “Okay, you’re right. Let’s sit down and I’ll explain. First of all, in no way will they lock you up for twenty years. You’re seventeen, and with your clean record, the judge will sentence you as a minor. And whatever the sentence, they’ll let you out by the time you turn eighteen.”

“How do you know that? Did you discuss my case with your father?”

“Hell, no! After my first DUI I took an elective course in criminal law. I’ve learned the juvenile justice system is very different from the

adult criminal justice system. It focuses on rehabilitation. Anyone under eighteen is considered a juvenile, and instead of being punished, the juvenile has to be rehabilitated. The judge decides if the juvenile has to be locked-up during their rehabilitation. In any case the juvenile can't be confined past the age of eighteen.”

“Are you sure of this? My lawyer never mentioned it. He just told me we would have a lot of work to do to prepare for my trial. He said he would try his best to arrange a favorable plea bargain for me.”

“The textbook was pretty clear. You're seventeen and you'll be treated as a juvenile. It would be very different for me. I'm eighteen and have two DUIs, and I drove on a suspended license. They would throw the book at me if you tell them I was driving. I would be in jail for a long time; we couldn't be together. At most, you'll be confined for less than a year. We'll be together again after that, so you and I can spend the rest of our lives together. I'll miss you terribly during that short period, but Darling I'll be waiting for you, and I promise we'll make up the time.” As she was explaining her interpretation of the law, Suzie's hand was resting on Tommy's thigh. Her gently stroking fingers were sexually inviting Tommy to respond, and she looked at him with her practiced, seductively come-hither look.

Tommy responded, “Not here; let's go into my bedroom.”

He was lying in her arms; Suzie had utterly exhausted him, using all the tricks she knew to help send Tommy into a wild climax. She turned to him, “And now the good news. Tommy I'm so excited, I'm pregnant!”

Tommy shot upright. “What the hell! How's that possible?”

“Aren’t you thrilled? We’re going to have a baby. I’m going to have your child.”

Tommy wasn’t sure. “Yeah, but how? I thought you were on the pill.”

“I was. But since I fell in love with you, I forgot to take it. Tommy I think subconsciously I really wanted to be pregnant. To have your baby! Tommy, this is so great. You and I will have a child together. Oh, I love you so much.”

Tommy was dazed. He didn’t know what he wanted, but Suzie’s excitement dragged him along. She loved him, really loved him. If having his baby made her happy, he was okay with it. It would make spending a few months confined in some rehabilitation center worth it if it meant keeping Suzie out of jail.

CHAPTER FOUR

Suzie's knowledge of the law proved to be less than accurate. As in most states, Tommy's judge had the discretion to transfer the case to adult court, since the result was so serious, that is exactly what the judge did. Tommy was told he would be tried as an adult. Based on the fact that Tommy never had any contact with the police, no traffic ticket, not even a parking ticket, Jarred fought the judge's decision to try him as an adult. The judge pointed to the seriousness of the offense, the speed at which Tommy was driving, and the fact that he had left the scene of the accident.

After the final decision was made to try Tommy as an adult, Jarred Kline badgered the DA's office for a lenient plea deal. He argued that basically Tommy was a good kid. Up until this unfortunate accident, he had always been a conscientious student with a responsible after school job. Certainly not a trouble maker. Citing a rumor that Tommy had been drag racing at the time of the accident, the DA would not go lower than twenty years with a chance of parole after ten. Jarred demanded to see the proof of a drag race. Not one person came forward to testify to having seen anything that could be a drag race. The police couldn't even produce anyone who had seen Tommy's car speeding prior to the collision with the child, let alone drag racing. Finally, the DA relented and Tommy was allowed to plead guilty in exchange for a sentence of ten years and parole after five.

Immediately after sentencing, Tommy was taken into custody and shipped off to prison. It was his tough luck to be taken to one of the most notorious prisons in the state. On his second day in jail, Tommy was attacked in the exercise yard. He fought tooth and nail and managed to

defend himself long enough for the guards to arrive and rescue him. He was taken to the dispensary to be patched up and was returned to his cell. The next day, he faked a severe headache and pleaded not to be taken to the exercise yard.

That evening Jarred Kline arrived at the prison to see how his client had settled in. When he heard about the attack on Tommy he immediately went to speak to the warden. Unless something was done to protect Tommy, he threatened to bring the incident to the attention of his wife's brother who happened to be a state senator. The warden proposed they put Tommy in Alex Ryan's cell. Alex was a tough Irishman who could be depended on to protect his cell-mate. The warden assured Jarred that Alex was a very friendly man, but he didn't take shit from anybody. He didn't have to; his six foot four frame and over three hundred pounds of mostly muscle demanded respect from the other inmates. Jarred accepted the warden's proposal. He was given the chance to explain the new arrangement to Tommy.

Despite Jarred's assurance that he would be safe from then on, Tommy was still anxious. He feared that once he was outside of his cell, the same inmates would once again attack him.

When he entered his new cell, Alex stuck out his beefy hand. "About time they gave a humble Irishman like me a civilized roommate. I hear some of the hooligans choose the wrong way to welcome you to this upscale hotel. Next time they forget their manners, I'll teach them a little civility. That luxurious bed across from mine is all yours. Make yourself comfortable."

Despite Alex's friendly smile, the mere size of the man intimidated Tommy. "Glad to meet you Mr. Ryan. I hope we can become friends."

Alex burst out laughing. “Mr. Ryan, haven’t been called that since the day the judge sent me to this hellhole. It’s just plain Alex, and by definition, we’re already friends. Cell mates have to be buddies. Looks like we’ll be roommates for a very long time, so we might as well make the most of it.”

Tommy was starting to feel better. Jarred was right; this guy was the best thing that had happened to him since he arrived.

“Will they keep you here for a long time?”

“Looks that way, kid. They gave me life and no possibility of parole for twenty-five years, and I don’t think I’ll ever be eligible for that.”

“What did you do to get convicted, sir? *Oops*, I mean, Alex. Sorry.”

“I beat up and shot a rich guy from the company where my wife was working. He was screwing her. When I found out how long the two of them had been going at it behind my back, I went home and shot my wife. Both of them died. It didn’t take them long to arrest me.”

Alex shrugged. “What about you? How does a nice youngster like you wind up in here?”

“Hit a kid with my car and killed him.”

“Wow that’s tough. They put you in here for that?”

“They claimed I was speeding and charged me as an adult for criminally negligent homicide and leaving the scene. I panicked and ran but later turned myself in.”

“Did your lawyer try to help?”

“He did the best he could. I like him a lot. He’s the one who got me moved to your cell.”

“You’re lucky. I had one of those court appointed lawyers. He did as little as possible to get paid. Most of the time I wondered whose side he was on.”

CHAPTER FIVE

The day after visiting Tommy in jail, Jarred was back in his office. He was happy about what he had achieved to assure Tommy's safety and was in the process of explaining the details to his dad. His dad interrupted him, "I checked on that girlfriend of his, that girl Suzie."

"Why did you do that?"

"Remember how Tommy hung onto his belief that his case would be addressed in juvenile court?"

"Of course. We couldn't convince him that was wrong, and he didn't let go until they brought charges against him as an adult."

"Well the theory that, as a minor, he would not be held liable came from his girlfriend Suzie. I looked into who this Suzie is. To my surprise, it turns out she's the daughter of Timothy Aldridge. The same Timothy Aldridge who turned down Tommy's brother when he went to see him about representing Tommy."

"You think there is a connection? Was he protecting his daughter?"

"Don't know but I dug deeper. I hung around the high school to see if I could dig up some more information about Suzie. Turns out, there is a lot that makes me suspicious. One talkative young man told me Suzie and two other girls hang around together. As he put it, 'they are bonded at the hip.'"

"That's pretty normal. It doesn't prove anything might be wrong with Tommy and Suzie's relationship."

“Wait, there’s more. The three girls, Suzie, Betty Bonovich and Anais Donahue live in that exclusive mountain area people call Millionaire Ridge. They more or less grew up together. Suzie and the Bonovich girl who they call BB are known as the evil twins. Anais Donahue is referred to as the tag along mouse.”

“So he’s dating a not so nice, rich girl, what does that prove?”

“Bear with me. The same gossipy kid felt it was strange for Suzie, an outgoing often boisterous senior, to be dating Tommy, a shy, introverted junior. He laughingly referred to the four as two bad asses, a mouse and the slave.”

“You think Suzie can tell us more about the accident?”

“I don’t think she loves our boy. She carefully spun that shit about the juvenile justice system to protect something, and it sure wasn’t Tommy.”

“You want me to cut you lose so you can look into this a little more?”

“We’re no longer on the clock. Can we afford to spend the time?”

“Paid or not, Tommy is still our client. If we missed something, it’s our job to hunt further. Besides I’ve become pretty friendly with Tommy’s brother and his wife Dorothy.”

Jarred’s dad couldn’t come up with anything more than Suzie’s two DUI convictions and her suspended license. Interesting, but probably not relevant, was his discovery that BB’s dad was the billionaire casino owner under frequent investigation by the IRS and FBI. Anais was less interesting. Her parents were divorced and she lived with her mother. He and Jarred questioned Tommy about his

relationship with Suzie. Tommy was very defensive, and when they inquired about Suzie's possible connection to the accident, Tommy became abnormally aggressive in his defense of her.

Their investigation seemed at a dead end, until a month later when a prison guard approached Jarred. He was leaving the building, when the guard flagged him down.

"Sir, can I speak to you for a minute?"

"Sure, what's up, officer?"

"Sir, I noticed you visit your client Tommy Robertson very frequently. Does he ever mention the blond who also comes frequently?"

"Not really. Why do you ask?"

"Well, she's always throwing kisses at him through the glass, and one time when I was stationed on the visitors' side of the glass, I overheard her repeatedly tell him how much she loved him and how devastated she was about losing the baby. She also kept repeating that she would wait forever for him."

"Losing the baby? I wasn't aware she was pregnant. Are you sure she meant she had a miscarriage and it was their baby she lost?"

"Yes sir. That's what I understood. And....well it makes no sense. I saw her with some guy late last night at the bar in my local bowling alley."

"You sure it was her?"

"Absolutely. I'd recognize her any place. She's really not the type to be that sweet kid's gal. He's such a polite fellow, all the guards like him."

“What makes you say she’s not his type?”

“I don’t know. They just don’t fit. He’s kind of an ordinary looking kid, and she’s sort of flashy. Not beautiful, but you could say she’s attractive. You know, cute. The way she dresses I think she’s a sexy dame, and hell, I think she looks a lot older than him, so what is she doing with him?”

“Can you help me find the guy she was with when you spotted her in the bar?”

“Don’t know him from Adam but I’ll try.”

During a later visit Jarred asked Tommy if he knew before the accident that Suzie was pregnant. Tommy admitted that the first he heard about it was during the time he was out on bail. He stated he was not really upset about Suzie’s miscarriage. He felt bad for her, since she really wanted his child. However, he did seem puzzled about her lack of grief when she told him she had lost the baby. He attributed that to her desire not to get him too upset and maybe love her less because of it. Jarred chose not to tell Tommy about the guard seeing Suzie with another man at this time, he had to figure out more about what was really going on.

CHAPTER SIX

Alex Ryan had also been talking to the same prison guard who had spoken to Jarred. Alex was more direct than Jarred. “Hey buddy, you and I will be stuck together in this cell for a long time. I like you and I appreciate your company, but we, if we are real friends, we have to be more honest with each other. You told me you left the accident scene because you panicked. I’ve know you for a short time, but I have the feeling you’re not the type to run. I think you and I are of the same breed. We always own up to what we do. We admit our mistakes. So, own up. What really happened?”

“Damn it, Alex, I told you. I panicked. Stop trying to bully me; I told you the truth, and if you don’t believe me, that’s your problem.”

“Don’t get you’re dander up young man! Things just don’t add up. The guards tell me you were dating an older woman, a pretty good looking one they say. At first, she showed up at least once a week. Now, I hear she barely makes it once a month.”

Tommy flew into a rage. “Leave me alone. It’s none of your damn business what’s going on between and me and my gal. If you must know, she is very busy at school. It’s her final year in high school, and she is not some older woman. Yes, I’m a year younger, but she loves me. We’ll get married when I get out.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, I’m not trying to hurt you by pointing out the obvious. You have to face facts Tommy; a woman like that is not going to wait around for years ‘til you’re finally paroled.”

Tommy burst out in tears and threw himself face down on his bunk. Alex didn’t know what to do with the sobbing teenager. He had

meant well by pointing out that Tommy couldn't depend on Suzie waiting forever on him. He decided to back off and not broach the fact that Suzie was already seeing someone else. Little did he know what was happening in Jarred's office at about the same time...

CHAPTER SEVEN

Teddy Kline, Jarred's father, looked up from his desk. He thought he had heard someone at the door but nobody entered. Another soft knock made him look up again. In a loud voice he yelled, "Come on in; the door isn't locked."

A young girl entered and approached his desk. "Hello my name is Anais Donahue, and I've come to see you. I have some things I want to tell you."

Teddy was surprised. "I think you want to see Jarred Kline, the lawyer. He's not in right now, but I can take a message."

"No, I came to see you. A while back you were at my school. I saw you speak to some of the kids in my class."

"Yes, that's right. I was asking about Suzie Alderidge and your name came up."

"That's who I want to talk to you about. She's a friend of mine, but there are things I think you should know. Are you Tommy Robertson's lawyer?"

"No, that's my son. I work with him on the case. That's why you saw me at your school."

"There are things you should know. Tommy didn't do it."

"Do what?"

"He wasn't driving the night of the accident."

That caught Teddy's attention. "Wow! Sit down and tell me what you know. Wait...do you mind if I turn on the tape recorder? That way, my son Jarred, he's the lawyer, can hear what you have to say when he gets back."

"Okay, he has to know. He has to help Tommy."

"You're sure it won't hold you back knowing that I'm recording this?"

"No, that's okay. Everybody has to know the truth."

Teddy got the tape recorder from Jarred's office and put it on his desk. He handed the microphone to Anais and told her to go ahead.

Unsolicited, Anais started with, "I'm telling you this because I have to. Nobody forced me to tell all this, but it's the truth, and I can't hide it any longer."

Teddy went back behind his desk and sat down. He motioned for Anais to continue.

"Before I give you the details of what really happened on the night of the accident, I have to tell you about Suzie and me. I hope that will make you understand why I kept quiet all this time. I hope I don't have to go to jail for being such a coward and not speaking up while an innocent person was sent to jail."

He nodded some encouragement for the girl to keep going.

"Suzie, another girl named Betty Bonovich, and I have been friends forever. When we were in tenth grade, Suzie discovered weed. I mean marijuana. She always had a lavish allowance and could easily pay for it. When she was short of cash, Betty, we call her BB, chipped in and also became a user. When we reached our junior year, their supply dried

up. I think the dealer got arrested or something like that. I don't know for sure because I refused to smoke the stuff. They offered to pay for me, but I refused to join.

“Anyway, in our junior year they found another source. This source was a senior at our school. He wasn't a real dealer and didn't ask for cash. Instead, he demanded sexual favors. It started out with heavy petting. He especially liked to feel up Suzie because of her big breasts. The petting led to a hand job, and when Suzie was really hard up for a smoke, he demanded she give him a blow job. Suzie objected, but eventually gave in. This situation continued until Suzie discovered the guy no longer could exert power over her. With her sexual favors, she learned to control him.

“Betty and she created an army of slaves. They would select a group of guys and create dominance over them by sexually giving them what they wanted in just the right way. Up to this year, they stopped at actual intercourse. The guy who supplied them with pot went to a local college and started inviting us to frat parties. The two of them became really weird. They got guys all hot and bothered and loved to watch them climax. They shrieked with laughter when a guy came. For BB it was more or less a lark. She loved to see how much control they could exert over guys. For Suzie it was much more than that. Touching guys sexually stimulated her. She started needing it more and more. Why did I silently witness all this kinky behavior? I was scared of them. I was afraid to lose their friendship. I thought I was totally dependent on them, and I was.”

“Since we were toddlers, we've lived close to each other in houses people describe as mansions. Suzie's father adores her. In his eyes, she can do no wrong. BB's father is a billionaire. Her folks travel all over,

and most of the time she lives alone in the house with a housekeeper and a full set of servants.

“My parents are divorced. My dad is a famous producer, first Broadway and now Hollywood. When I was eight, he left my mom for his twenty-eight year old secretary. He now lives on a ranch outside of LA. He abandoned the secretary a few years ago for a younger starlet. I think he’s on his third starlet now. Oh. That’s not really true. He now has Margie, a woman his age who directed one of his films. I like her.

“Since her divorce, Mom has insisted on maintaining the big house even though she can’t afford it on the alimony and child support Dad pays. We have to crimp on everything except her clothing budget. On my birthday, Dad flies me out to California and I get to spend a week with him. For the rest, I never see him, not even on holidays. However, he did buy me a nice car for my sixteenth birthday. That’s the car my mom drives. I have to hitch a ride with either BB or Suzie. I have nice clothes, some of which Dad bought me when I visited him, but most of it I got from either Suzie or BB. Like I said, they have huge allowances, and when they go shopping they take me along and buy stuff for me.

“After school, we spend most of the time at BB’s house. I help both them with homework. Most of the time I do it for them. I try to prep them for tests, but they aren’t really interested. So we cheat on tests. I slip them the answers, making sure the three of us don’t have identical answers. We’ve been getting away with it for years.”

She took a deep breath and blew her nose, then continued, “The kinky sexual desires of Suzie are where Tommy comes in. After school, Tommy used to work at the local drive in. From the kitchen he got promoted to the counter where he supervised the other six servers. Suzie loved to go in and flirt with him. He loved it. Here was this popular high

school senior paying attention to him in front of all the other employees and kids from our school eating there.

“One day she decided to be cute. She asked BB to go in and order for her. When the food came she told Tommy Suzie had hurt her foot. Could he bring her order to her car? Tommy was more than glad to do it. When he got to the car Suzie asked him to step inside. She was in the backseat and when he got inside with her she started making out with him. Tommy was infatuated and instantly in love. Suzie got a big kick out of it and led him by the nose for months. He followed her like a puppy.

“The day of the accident, Tommy had the day off and Suzie asked him to come over to BB’s house. I don’t remember how it all unfolded. At one point, she was making out with him, and then the two of them wound up in one of the upstairs guestrooms. When I asked BB where they were she said the two rabbits were upstairs screwing as usual.

“It took a long time for Suzie to come downstairs. She was laughing her head off and said, ‘Wow that young tiger gets excited. He wore me down with all that energy of his. He finally had enough and fell asleep. Boy did he give me a workout. Quick, give me a weed, I deserve it.’

“BB and Suzie both lit up. They didn’t get really high but they were slap happy. That started it all! They got into a serious discussion as to which car was faster. Tommy’s Camaro SS or BB’s new Mustang GT. Suzie decided to put them to the test. Tommy had left his keys downstairs on the coffee table. Suzie picked them up and said, ‘Let’s see which one is faster. I’ll drive the Camaro; you drive your Mustang.’

“BB thought she was kidding. But no, Suzie was dead serious. ‘We’ll settle this with a little drag race. Coming?’ BB sprang to her feet

shouting 'You bet. My Pony car can beat the shit out of that baby Corvette.'

“When they returned they weren't laughing. In the meantime Tommy had come downstairs. They had to explain what happened to his car. They never told him Suzie hit someone. They just said she messed up his fender. Tommy was beyond mad, but Suzie used her cajoling ways to calm him down. She assured him she would pay to have the car repaired, but asked him to claim he had a one car fender bender. Tommy agreed, but he was afraid Jake would be angry he messed up his car. He decided to hide the car in his barn and take it to a repair shop when Jake wasn't home.”

Anais put down the microphone and Teddy turned off the recorder. “That's quite a story, Anais. I believe what you told me, but what compels you to come forward now? At this late date?”

“I'm angry and hurt. BB and I have been lovers forever. It started way back when we experimented by touching each other in certain parts. BB went further and further and started telling me how much she loved me. My body responded to her and I fell deeply in love with her.”

“What makes you turn on her now?”

“I caught the two of them in bed. I have a key to BB's house, and they didn't hear me come in. They were in BB's bedroom making love. I felt betrayed and stormed out of the house. I've been crying and brooding about it for the past week. Now I realize, the two have been doing it behind my back for some time. When Suzie couldn't find a guy to satisfy her desires, BB must have been quick to oblige. I knew Suzie was evil, but I never in my wildest dreams expected BB to do this to me. I loved her, and I was sure she loved me too. It's what gave Suzie a hold

over me. I was scared she would drive a wedge between BB and me. I dreaded losing BB's love.

“Now, I'm sorry I didn't speak up earlier. If I confess to knowing what happened and who was driving, will Tommy go free?”

Teddy thought for a long time before he answered. “We can try. I'll give this recording to my son. He's the lawyer and he'll decide what to do. I suggest for now you don't mention any of this to anyone else. Give me your cell phone number, and I'll call you as soon as we decide about what to do.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jarred listened to the tape. When he reached the end he played it again. This time he took notes. Teddy watched silently, and when Jarred finally put down his pencil he asked, “Well what do you think? Based on this can we spring Tommy?”

Jarred’s answer disappointed him. “Don’t think so. This gives us a clear picture of what happened. It’s not far from what we suspected, but as long as Tommy persists on taking the blame it will be extremely hard to contradict him. We have to get him to realize who Suzie really is and what their relationship was all about. If we can’t do that, he’ll never buckle.”

“Should we let Jake hear this tape and ask him to persuade his brother to speak up in his own behalf?”

“Hell, no! I’ll never pit brother against brother. This thing could drive the two apart. No, that’s out!”

“Then, what? We can’t leave him sitting in prison while we know exactly what happened. Have you ever heard of a client lying not for but against his best interest?”

“It’s unusual, but I’m sure it happens.”

“You mean we can’t do anything unless he cooperates?”

“I have a plan. Remember I told you the guard saw Suzie with a guy in the bowling alley bar? Call Anais and ask if she can help us find out who this fellow is.”

Anais thought it was probably Henry Whang. “He’s a senior at the college where we used to attend frat parties. I often saw Suzie go up to his room with him. She bragged about slipping out of the house at night and meeting him for drinks and winding up in his frat room to have sex.”

The next day, Teddy drove out to the college. At the frat house, he asked for Henry Whang. Henry wasn’t there, so Teddy left a message to meet him at the local hangout for dinner at six.

Promptly at six a man entered the restaurant and asked for Mr. Kline. Teddy had expected an Asian fellow and was surprised that Henry Whang turned out to be anything but Asian looking. His rumpled light brown hair could use some attention from a barber. His big blue eyes dominated his handsome face, and his wide shoulders made Teddy suspect he would be dealing with a self-confident athlete.

“So you’re the Mr. Kline who left the mysterious dinner invitation for me at my frat house. Are you a recruiter for one of the NFL teams seeking illegal contact before the national combine?”

Teddy responded that he was not. He explained he was on a completely different mission. When Henry heard what Teddy was after he got up and started to leave. Teddy stopped him. “I’m not going to get you into trouble. On the contrary: I need your help to get an innocent boy out of jail. Please just hear me out.”

Henry sat down again. “What in the hell are you talking about?”

Teddy carefully went over the entire story. Starting with the accident, he told the whole story up to the recent confirmation that Tommy was not driving his car that night. Henry became uneasy when Teddy mentioned Suzie. “Look, I did nothing wrong. I know that broad

is at least eighteen and having consensual sex with her is legal. I can screw her all day long, and that is not a crime.”

“You’re absolutely right. You’re in the clear. All I need from you is to confirm you had consensual sex with her during the last month.”

“I’ve no problem with that. We all screwed her off and on during the last year.”

“Who are we all?”

“The guys in my fraternity. A freshman fraternity brother started bringing her to all the frat parties. Actually, there were three of them, high school seniors. Suzie was the hot one. She turned out to be an easy lay. We passed her around; none of us has any particular attachment to that girl other than she’s a great lay. Most of the time, she encouraged it. The other one, if I recall correctly she’s called BB, is more of a cock tease. You can’t persuade that girl to go all the way. Great fun to play with, but it stops right there.”

Teddy wanted to know about Anais. Did she participate in sex? Henry threw up his hands and with a boisterous laugh he replied, “No Way! That tall skinny dame made it obvious she didn’t even want to be at the party. Suzie referred to her as the mouse. When we were all pretty high on pot, Suzie persuaded one of the guys to grab the mouse’s hand and push it into his crotch. She yelled at him and slapped his face. For the rest of the evening, she sat on the porch waiting for the other girls to drive her home.”

Teddy cringed at the thought of Anais being embarrassed in that way. “I’m here to ask you to do me a big favor. Would you be willing to come to the prison and meet Tommy? He remains locked up because,

for all the wrong reasons, he claims to have been driving when his car killed that little boy.”

To Teddy’s relief, Henry readily agreed. “Sure. I have no problem telling him the truth. When the prison guard saw me, I was in the bar with Suzie. That night my fraternity was enrolled in an inter fraternity bowling competition. After I bowled in two consecutive matches, I went into the bar with two of my friends. After some guy-type chitchat, I felt a little horny and called Suzie to meet me in the bar. After she arrived, we had a few drinks. She was carded, and we left to go to my dorm room. After some good sex she stayed in bed with me until about three o’clock at which time she left to go home.”

“Will you tell him that in just that way?”

“I don’t want to hurt the kid.”

“It will hurt him. Hurt him badly. But it’s the only way we can knock some sense into his head. And prevent him from spending most of his life in jail to protect a girl who doesn’t deserve it, and contrary to his belief, doesn’t love him.”

CHAPTER NINE

Henry Whang's visit to the prison just about destroyed Tommy. He ran from the guarded room where he heard through the glass partition what Henry came to tell him. On the way out, he literally destroyed the chairs placed along the wall for the guards to sit on while the prisoners sat at the glass partition and spoke by phone with their visitors. He ran screaming down the long corridor leading back to the cell area. Halfway down he stopped and started banging his head against the wall. The guards caught up to him and dragged him to his cell. He was in a catatonic state when they finally managed to place him on his bunk.

Tommy was lying like a crumpled-up vegetable, face down on his bunk, when Alex Ryan returned to their cell. The guards had informed him what had happened, and he would have none of it. He reached down with one hand and pulled Tommy to his feet. He held him up straight, and with his face inches away from Tommy's he growled, "Stop this shit. Stop it right now! You're not going to lie cowering on your bunk and let some useless slut ruin your life. Open your eyes when I speak to you, and hear what I have to say."

Tommy opened his eyes and realized Alex was holding him upright with one beefy hand. This massive man was pointing a finger inches away from his nose warning him he better listen to what he had to say. "I was stupid enough to let a woman ruin my life, and here I am locked away for good. You, you can get out of here! Forget that bitch. She never loved you, and she was never good enough for you to love her. She conned you like my wife conned me. I was stupid enough to let it destroy me. You're not that dumb. Anyway, I refuse to let you destroy

your life out of some stupid misplaced loyalty to an evil creature. Do you hear me?”

Fear had replaced Tommy’s grief. He mumbled, “Yes, sir.”

Alex let go of him and Tommy sat back down on his bunk. Alex went over and sat on his. “You know I’m your friend. I enjoy your company. You took away my loneliness, and I’ll miss you. Yes, you little punk. Believe it or not, Alex is going to miss you. That won’t stop me from kicking you the hell out of here. You can be a free man. I can’t, and it would be selfish of me to try to keep you here.”

Tommy was slowly recovering from all the emotion that had poured over him in a very short time. “Alex, do you think she played me? Why would she do that?”

“Good question. Why would anyone do that to another person? I don’t know. I’m not a psychiatrist, but I’m sure it’s some kind of sickness. She must have some sick need to control decent people like you. For years, my wife made me believe we were happily married. While she was banging her boss, she pretended to love me. Go figure. Although they didn’t use a very gentle way to make you understand what was going on, you have some good friends who rescued you. I never did.”

“I’m ashamed I let myself fall so deeply in love with her.”

“Now that is exactly what I don’t want to hear. If you had cancer and get cured would you apologize for having been sick? Would you think you had to be ashamed for needing help to recover?”

“Of course not.”

“Then, right now, ask permission to call your brother, so he can get that outstanding lawyer of yours to put things in motion to get you out of here.”

CHAPTER TEN

Teddy and his son were in the office discussing the ethics of using what they dubbed the cold turkey method to get Tommy to accept the truth. Now they had to find a way to get him out of prison. They had taken Anais' tape to the DA, but he wasn't interested.

The chief prosecutor in the DA's office, Matt Bowens, was a college friend of Jarred's and they discussed the case with him. Matt was very familiar with Timothy Alderidge and his superiority complex. Besides not liking the guy, he had fielded quite a few complaints about his daughter. She had the reputation of being a wild young lady as arrogant as her father. Matt didn't agree with the way the court let her off with only a suspended license after her second DUI.

Matt pointed out that, because Tommy had pleaded guilty, it would be impossible to get a new trial. Unless they could prove his confession was coerced, it would be a dead end. He felt the best bet would be to go after the two girls and see what they could dig up.

Just then the door flew open and Anais came flying in. "You have to help me. I think they may be coming after me."

"What in the world is this all about? Who's coming after you?" Teddy got up to meet her and she practically fell into his arms.

"They know I'm mad. I haven't spoken to either Suzie or BB since the day I caught them in bed together. They're afraid I'll spill the beans, and they've spoken to Suzie's father who contacted BB's father."

Teddy made Anais sit down in the only comfortable chair in the office. "Okay, so now we can presume their fathers know what

happened the night of the accident. Or maybe they only know the version the girls told them. Calm down and tell us what they're doing. Why do you think they are after you?"

"They offered five million for me to keep quiet."

Jarred almost fell off his chair. He whistled then said, "They offered you five million?"

"Well yes but not directly to me. They approached my mom and told her Suzie and BB were somehow involved in the accident that killed the little boy. They said I knew enough to get them into legal trouble. If I talked to the police, the girls could go to jail. Besides, the parents of the little boy could sue them for a large amount. Those guys know my mom is always trying to keep up the pretense she has plenty of money and belongs in their circle, you know what I mean, local society. Mom is working on me to keep quiet. She's pushing me real hard."

"What have you told her so far?"

"I told her to lay off; that it was my decision. She won't let up. I should have come to you right away, but I wanted to get away, to leave town. So I called my father."

Jarred nodded his approval. "Good move. What did he tell you to do?"

"He said I was more than welcome to come live with him. If I wanted to, he would send me a plane ticket. He told me whatever my decision was he wanted me to stay away from BB's father, Mr. Bonovich. He called the man a sleaze bag who belonged in jail."

Teddy agreed. “He’s right about that, but we need you here to help build a case against the girls. Unless we can pin the accident on one of them, or better yet both of them, Tommy stays in jail.”

“I’m not going back to the house. Mom knows about the call I got telling me bad things could happen if I didn’t keep quiet.”

Jarred reacted instantly, “Who called you!”

“I have no idea. A man on the phone yelled at me that I knew nothing. He said I was at the house with Suzie and BB when Tommy left, and we didn’t learn about any accident until the next day when we saw it on the news. He told me that was all I knew or bad things could happen.”

“You have no idea who he was? You didn’t recognize his voice?”

“No. I told my mother about it, and she said I should follow those instructions. That it was correct. ‘I was at the house with both girls when Tommy left and the next day we saw the accident on the news.’ She said I was jealous of the girls, and I shouldn’t tell stories that could get them into trouble. I told her I knew Mr. Alderidge and Mr. Bonovich had offered her five million dollars if I kept quiet. She said I was wrong. It had nothing to do with me. They were friends who offered to help her out while she was a little short on funds because my father was late in sending her money. I grabbed her keys and took the car, *my* car, and drove directly to here.”

Teddy shook his head. “Oh boy, this complicates things.”

Jarred agreed. “Yes it does but it also gives us new ammunition to get at those two girls. Anais we’re getting into a conflict of interest situation with you. We’d love to help you to get away from here, but that could conflict with Tommy’s best interest and he is our client. Why

don't you call your father again? Ask him if you should leave or help us get Tommy free; we could see about a safe place for you stay around here.”

Her father's reaction surprised Anais. He told her she should never have made that recording. She might be charged with being an accessory of some sort. He didn't know much about the law on the subject, but she did help hide the fact that Suzie was driving Tommy's car at the time of the accident. “Those guys have the tape and they can use it to get you in trouble.”

Anais protested, “Dad they're helping me. They told me to call you.”

“Anais, I don't want you to listen to anyone but me. They're not on your side. I'll make arrangements right now to catch the next plane out to be with you. I'll bring the family lawyer with me. In the meantime, I want you to do the following. I'm calling the Imperial Hotel to book a room for you. All charges, no matter what, will be on my credit card. Don't tell anyone what you're doing. Go home and take what you need without making it obvious you're leaving. Don't take the car; they can trace the license. Take a taxi directly to the hotel and check in. I'll be there within two days. Don't worry about clothes. We'll shop for new ones when I get there.”

Anais was shocked and confused by her father's reaction. “Dad, why now? Why are you doing this?”

“Because I'm your father! If you'll stop blaming me for the divorce, you'll realize I've always been on your side.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Jarred reported the telephone threat to Matt Bowens. Matt didn't have a clue why or how Anais suddenly disappeared without a trace. But for Jarred's account of what Anais told him, Matt had little to go on. Despite the lack of any real evidence, based solely on past rumors that Bonovich had mob connections, he promised to investigate if a threat had been made.

Jarred didn't think they had enough to get started. "We can't find Anais. I'm sure her mother won't help us. Where do we start?"

"You forget I'm not conducting an investigation as your dad would. The DA's office has the power to subpoena people and question them."

"So what are you going to do?"

"If the threat is real, they'll suspect Anais has gone to the authorities. She has disappeared, so they can't get at her. I'll let them think I have evidence against them, and I'll have those two young ladies picked up for questioning."

"Can you do that based on what we have?"

"Who's to stop me? If Alderidge tries, I'm dying to take him on."

"They'll simply deny everything and dare you to prove they had anything to do with the accident. Then what?"

"Oh Jarred. You're such a goody-goody. That's not the way things go in the real world."

"What does that mean?"

“Obviously we question them separately. No matter how much they lawyer up, they’ll be no match for my guys. I’ll have one of our ladies draw them in by being sympathetic, and then one of my tough guys will nail them.”

“Sounds like you’re writing a TV script.”

“No, I’m being realistic. We’ll hold them as long as we can. When we feel BB is getting weary of being questioned, we break the news that Suzie confessed and pointed the finger at BB as the one who was driving. Without a doubt, BB will defend herself by telling us she was not in the Camaro but driving her own car. Bingo! She just confessed to a crime. Drag racing and being an accessory to vehicular homicide. We’ll let her plead guilty to a far lesser crime if she testifies that Suzie was driving Tommy’s car.”

“Come on, Matt. You can’t just go and lie to BB and tell her Suzie said she was driving. That’s not ethical!”

“You’re right. It isn’t. But neither is killing a child and sending a boy who loves you to jail for your reckless behavior. I have the title of prosecutor, but that doesn’t mean I’m only charged with prosecuting people. An even more important part of my job is to protect the innocent. You brought me clear evidence that your client Tommy is innocent. That he is a love-sick puppy is no crime. I don’t think it’s unethical to use any means at my disposal to get him out and put that bitch in his place. That I hate her father has nothing to do with it!”

It didn’t work out quite the same way Matt had envisioned it. Both Jarred and Teddy were in the courtroom at the opening of Suzie’s trial. They were floored when Matt told the jury in his opening statement the prosecution would present evidence that Suzie’s fingerprints were found on the steering wheel of the Camaro, the car identified as the car that hit

the child. They didn't get to speak to Matt until after the jury returned a verdict of guilty on all counts and Suzie was taken into custody by two armed guards.

They cornered Matt after he had given a short press conference on the courthouse steps. Matt readily agreed to join them for lunch to celebrate.

Jarred didn't wait for the food to be served. "What happened to BB's testimony, and when did those fingerprints turn up?"

Matt looked a little sheepish when he explained. "My boss, the DA, thought it was a terrible idea to go after BB to get evidence on Suzie. He made a quick call which confirmed the Camaro which had been impounded months before was still sitting in the back of a police lot. He sent out our most experienced forensic crew to see what they could come up with. He was gloating when he sat me down in his office and showed me copies of a beautiful set of fingerprints the team had taken from the steering wheel. The team explained to him that from the location of most of Tommy's prints compared to Suzie's they could tell the two of them held the steering wheel differently resulting in a clear set of Suzie's' prints."

"When I asked him how he had come up with the idea to check the Camaro he smiled at me and said, 'That's why I'm the DA, and you are my assistant.' Sometimes I really hate him for putting me down like that."

"He put you in charge of the case against Bonovich and Alderidge, so he must have some faith in you."

"That's a mixed blessing. It's a big name case, so it's great for my career. It's also very easy to lose and I'd go down in flames."

“You think you can get a conviction?”

“We wouldn’t have gone after them if we didn’t. The boss let me lean on Mrs. Donahue, Anais’s mother, pretty hard. She initially turned on them, but she’s not dependable. We’re trying to get the big fish Bonovich by offering Alderidge a sweetheart deal. He, too, started cooperating, but Bonovich and his people are pulling in chits for past favors. We’ll have to see how it all pans out.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

The governor had to intervene to get Tommy fully exonerated. The young man didn't emerge undamaged from this episode in his life. It took a big chunk out of his confidence. The first month after his release he hung around the house, afraid to be seen in public. His brother Jake and his wife Dorothy were worried about him. Especially, his not finishing high school caused them great concern. Jake felt that if Tommy would get a GED diploma that would be enough to get him a good job. Dorothy disagreed. She was adamant; he had to get a High School Equivalent Diploma, HSED , and enroll in a community college.

To give Tommy a taste of what it would be like to work in the computer department of a big company, she cajoled him to come along and spend a day at her place of work. Getting exposed to the type of work she did helped Tommy, but not nearly as much as what she did for him by proudly introducing him to her colleagues as 'our younger brother.'

On the way home, Tommy asked if she didn't mind that people knew it was his own stupid fault he had spent some time in jail. Dorothy was blunt about it. "You're the only one who finds that stupid. People know you were suckered by that evil bitch. Some even think that what you did was heroic. Although misguided, here finally was a guy loyal to the girl he thought loved him."

"You mean that?"

"Tommy, to girls that's fricking romantic! I'm lucky to have Jake, but a lot of girls are not that lucky. They are pushed around by some self-centered guy who wouldn't think of doing something like that."

“What does Jake think about me?”

“Maybe it’s about time you asked him.”

Tommy couldn’t bring himself to ask, but two weeks later something happened to break the ice. Tommy was sitting in the living room when he noticed a car pull into the driveway. Due to his conviction he had lost title to the wrecked Camaro and was fretting that he no longer had wheels. He called Jake to tell him someone was in the drive way.

Jake asked him to come along to see who it was. A man was standing next to a brand new Honda Civic hatchback. The fire engine red car had a sporty trim that added an extra touch to its bold appearance. The man came up to Tommy and said, “Here are the keys to your new car.”

Tommy pointed at Jake. “Don’t I wish, but that’s the guy you want.”

Jake took a step forward, pretended to take the keys, but pulled back his hand. “Tommy, don’t give this man a hard time. He’s right, they’re your keys.”

Tommy had no idea what was going on. “What do you mean my keys?”

“It means they are the keys to your new car.”

The shock was too much for Tommy. For a while he stood paralyzed. Then he exploded and grabbed hold of Jake. “You mean that, really? How is that possible”!

“After you sign the delivery papers for the gentleman, I’ll explain.”

Tommy tried, but his hands were shaking so badly he needed help placing his signature on the correct line. The man told him to step inside the car so he could explain all the electronics but Tommy couldn't sit still and concentrate to absorb even half of what the man was telling him. The man realized he wasn't getting through and told Tommy to come to the dealership the next day so he could explain in the detail the car's full package of electronics.

After the man left, Tommy sat in the car looking at and touching the fancy interior. He still couldn't believe the car was really his. After a while Jake joined him, "Like it?"

Tommy looked at his older brother and he started to tear up, "This isn't real. It can't be happening. Did you really do this Jake? For me? Why?"

"Let's go inside and talk about it."