

## Chapter 5

"The jury's back," the bailiff said to Weinstein and Randall from the conference room door.

"That didn't take long," Randall said. "Is that good or bad?"

"Yes," Weinstein said to his client. "It is good or bad. Let's go see what they have to say."

Dick Randall had a panicked look on his face.

"Take it easy." Weinstein patted him on the back. "I'm very hopeful. We presented a good case."

The pair made their way back into the courtroom and made themselves comfortable at the defense table, or at least as comfortable as they could be on the hard, wooden chairs.

"All rise," the bailiff shouted. "Superior court for the county of Snohomish is now in session, the Honorable Judge Daniels presiding."

Weinstein, Randall and the few occupants of the courtroom came to their feet. A stooped, gray haired man entered from the side door and ascended to the bench.

"You may be seated," he said. "I am told that the jury has reached a verdict."

"We have, your honor," the jury foreman said.

The bailiff walked over to the foreman and took a piece of paper from her. He returned the paper to the judge.

The judge opened the paper and studied it for an instant.

"Will the defendant please rise?"

Randall and Weinstein came to their feet in unison as if they were marionettes on a string.

"How do you find?" the judge asked.

"On the charge of sexual exploitation of a minor we find the defendant, Richard Randall, guilty as charged."

A soft murmur spread through the court house.

Dick Randall felt as if he had been slugged in the gut. He had had run ins with the law in the past, but this, this was too much. He fought to catch a breath. He reached out with his right hand to grab the top of his chair and steady himself.

“You honor,” Weinstein said, “we ask that bail be continued for my client until sentencing.”

“So ordered,” Judge Daniels quickly agreed.

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The conference room at Hardwick, Bernstein & Johnson was impressive. If you were the CEO of Millennium Systems, you would have stopped to consider the power it implied.

The walnut paneled room on the sixty-fifth floor of the Columbia Tower had floor to ceiling windows looking out over Puget Sound and the Olympic Peninsula.

This was one of those delightful September days. Fluffy white clouds flew through the crystal blue sky. Elliot Bay reflected the deep blue, with ferry boats, yachts and fishing boats scurrying across the water. Anchored tankers and freighters presented obstacles to the traffic. White sails dotted the seascape.

Across the bay, Chris saw the snow-covered Olympic Mountains. Rugged crags soared into the sky like giant snow cones.

The conference table could easily accommodate twenty people. Upholstered swivel chairs surrounded a brass trimmed walnut table whose a massive weight that implied permanence.

“Right this way Mrs. White,” the attractive brunette said as she opened the door. “May I get you coffee, water or any refreshments?”

“Coffee would be nice.” The slightly overweight mousey looking woman entered the room. Behind her, a tall, well built young man wearing jeans and a University of Washington Husky T-shirt lingered, watching the receptionist walk away.

“Mrs. White,” Chris said, extending his hand, “It’s nice to meet you. Clayton, I’m Chris Hardwick.”

The woman shook Chris’s hand. The movie star handsome teenager just stared at Chris.

“Please sit down.” Chris motioned towards the table. “Let’s get started.”

Natalie White meekly took a chair. Clayton Johnson-White stared defiantly at Chris for a moment, then sullenly sauntered to the other side of the table before he sat down.

“First of all, I want to explain attorney/client privilege,” Chris said.

“Do you think we’re stupid?” Clayton asked. “I know all about that shit.”

“Clayton, language,” Mrs. White interjected.

“Okay, Clayton. It looks like you’re in some trouble.” Chris opened the folder in front of him.

“You have been charged with breaking and entering. With third degree theft. Do you understand these charges?”

“Get real man.” Clayton swiveled back and forth in his chair. “They can’t do much to me. I’m a minor. A couple of weeks in Juvie and I’ll be back on the street.”

The pretty receptionist came back into the room carrying a tray with a thermos, two cups of coffee and cream and sugar on it.

“You’re sure I can’t get you anything?” she asked Clayton.

He shook his head.

“Clayton, you’re building quite a record here,” Chris said. “The longer your rap sheet gets, the harder the judge will be on you.”

“Man, this is bull shit. Get me a lecture by the judge and let’s get on with our lives.”

Chris studied his client for a moment. The teenager was obviously intelligent. Just as obviously, he had no respect for authority.

“What do you expect your life to look like, Clayton?” Chris asked.

“Why do you give a shit?”

“Clayton Johnson-White. Language,” his mother said.

“I give a shit because you’re my client. I give a shit about all of my clients. You’re a smart kid. You have a lot of promise. I hate to see you mess up your life with childish pranks.”

“Fuck you. You think because you have long hair you can understand me? Well, let me tell you that you don’t understand anything.”

“I understand more than you think.” Chris picked up his coffee cup and took a tentative sip. “I said you’re smart. I have your IQ test results here. You’re off the charts. I know what that’s like. You think that everyone else is dumber than you. They don’t see what you see. They can’t relate to how you see the world. You can’t understand why it takes them so long to figure things out. I get that.”

“Yeah, what would you know about that?” Clayton flipped his hair out of his eyes. “You’ve got everything. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth. You’re a fancy lawyer because your dad’s a lawyer. Well my dad was a nothing. He left us when I was seven. When he was with us, he used to beat me ‘til I bled. He sent me to the hospital more times that I can count.”

“Clayton, there’s no need to air your dirty laundry,” his mother said.

“Why not, Mom?” Clayton turned on her. “Every time you met some new guy, you’d take off and leave Tammy and me by ourselves.”

“Clayton!”

“I was seven years old. You left me to take care of Tammy for days at a time in your old trailer.” Clayton’s voice was rising.

“Listen, Clayton, or do you prefer Clay?” Chris asked.

Clayton just stared at him, eyes smoldering, and didn't answer.

"Okay, Clayton. I can't change what happened to you in the past. But you don't have to let it define you. You're growing up now. You have the chance to make your own future. It all starts right here."

Clayton stood up. "What do you know? You're a dumb shit in a suit that sold out to the Man. You don't understand anything."

"Sit down kid." Chris voice was quiet, but took on a menacing tone. "It's time you listened to someone and learned a little bit."

Clayton took his chair. He stared at Chris with a defiant look in his eyes.

"That's better." Chris looked at his folder. "I see you dropped out of school when you were twelve."

"Dumb shits. They couldn't teach me anything that I couldn't learn on my own. They were teaching arithmetic and I was checking out algebra books from the library. The teachers didn't know as much as I did."

"He's right," Natalie White said. "He was smarter than his teachers. He read books I couldn't understand. I decided that he was better off learning on his own."

"Weren't you concerned about his future?" Chris asked. "About getting him into college?"

"Why would I want to go to college? To have more dumb shit teachers that don't know as much as I do judge me?" Clayton sat forward in his chair. His knee bounced rapidly up and down.

Chris wanted to reach out and calm the knee. It drove him crazy.

"I think I can work with the prosecutor here," Chris said. "You have seven counts of breaking and entering. I think I can justify the theft."

"When Mom brought a new guy home, I took off into the woods. I didn't need to stay around and hear her banging him in the next room."

"Clayton . . ." Mrs. White had a forlorn tone in her voice.

"Yeah, well I broke into those houses to get food and blankets. I needed to take care of myself in the woods."

"I think I can bargain this down," Chris said. "You'll probably do some time in juvenile detention, but it won't be too long."

"Oh Clayton." Natalie White sounded like a lost little girl. "Not again."

"Why should you care? It gets me out of your hair. First Tammy, now me. When we're both in juvie you don't have to worry about being a mom. You can do whatever you want."

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In the old days, when Ted lived in Seattle the first time, he and Chris had a tradition. Every Wednesday night they met at Ted's apartment after work and Ted cooked a real dinner. It was a time for them to unwind, to discuss whatever was bothering them. Sometimes Ted felt like he was on some cheap TV talk show, but it cemented his bond with Chris. He couldn't have felt closer to a blood brother.

But this was a new world. Chris had other ideas.

"Let's meet at your sister's restaurant," Chris said. "It's a lot more convenient and you won't have to cook"

*Yeah, wanting to meet at El Nuevo Chaparral had nothing to do with not having to cook.* Ted was onto Chris. He just wanted a chance to see Hope.

That was okay, but with Hope at the table, Ted never felt like he and Chris made the kind of connections they used to.

Oh well, times change.

Ted was sitting in the bar when his tall friend breezed in the door. He studied Chris for a moment. He was so used to seeing Chris in jeans and a T-shirt that this new guy in a Brooks Brothers suit and wing tips almost seemed like a stranger.

At six two, with blond hair and blue eyes, Chris seemed like the perfect example of an all-American boy to Ted, something Ted could never hope to be. No matter how much Ted wanted to be mainstream American, his swarthy skin, dark hair and stocky build shouted "Hispanic." He couldn't escape who he was.

But in Seattle it didn't matter that much. Growing up in East LA there hadn't been a day gone by that some white kid hadn't called him a wet back or beaner or some other derogatory name. In the northwest, that kind of language was practically unheard of. Except for his run in with some skin head neo-Nazis that put him in the hospital once, he didn't feel any different from anyone else when he was in Seattle.

"Hey, *amigo*," Chris said as he entered the bar, "you want to get a table in the dining room?"

"Sure." Ted picked up his Dos Equis and followed Chris to the hostess stand.

"Well, well," Hope's smile nearly broke her face open. "Mr. Hardwick. Table for two?"

"You could make it a table for three if you like," Chris said.

Ted wanted to throw up. Couldn't they save the flirting for when they were alone?

"Can I get you something to drink?" the pretty server asked as Hope seated them.

"I'll take a Margarita, on the rocks," Chris said.

"I'm good." Ted waved his bottle of beer at her.

"Bring me an ice tea, Mari, please." Hope seated herself next to Chris.

The smells of Hope's restaurant brought back memories of home. Ted could picture Mama roasting chiles on her *comal* in the kitchen. He smelled the *frijoles* cooking. Her *carnitas* was his favorite. Hope had really captured the feel of a Mexican kitchen in her new restaurant.

“So, how’s the job going?” Ted reached for a tortilla chip and dipped it in the green salsa that Mari brought along with the drinks.

“I got my first ‘real’ case today,” Chris said. He sipped at his drink. “Man, that’s good. Reminds me of our summer in Mexico.”

“A time I’d just as soon forget,” Hope said.

“So,” Ted said, “What’s your new case?”

“Oh, I got some asshole kid. A distant relative of Ben Johnson, one of our senior partners. He dumped this on me because I’m the most junior attorney in the firm.”

“Sounds like fun.” Ted waved his empty beer bottle at Mari. She smiled and nodded.

“Is Maria going to join us?” Hope asked.

“No. She’s got some kind of faculty dinner tonight. For new staff.”

“This kid,” Chris said, “he’s some kind of genius. His IQ is off the charts.”

“Sounds like someone else I know.” Ted poured his new beer into a frosted glass. He had been in awe of Chris’s intelligence since he met him his freshman year at the U.

Chris had an incredible mind. He could read something, then pull an image of it up in his brain months later and search it like a Web page. Ted and all of their friends hated Chris in school because he never had to study for tests. He just sat down, pulled up the text books in his head, and wrote his answers.

The fact that Chris was valedictorian of their class and finished number two at UW Law behind his step-mom only proved what a Brainiac he was.

“He’s really poorly adjusted. He can’t cope with society.” Chris reached for a chip and dipped it in the salsa. “He had a really rough childhood, but that doesn’t excuse his behavior. He’s just anti-social.”

“Why did he have such a rough childhood?” Hope asked.



“Oh, his dad beat him, then left him at an early age. Then his mom won’t win any mother of the year awards. But his problem is that he’s smarter and more mature than the adults that surrounded him. He hated school because it slowed down his learning process. He dropped out when he was twelve, but is better educated than most people with a BA.”

“I can see how that would make him sour on the world,” Ted said.

“Yeah, but at some point he has to take responsibility for his own life. He can’t go on blaming his mom or his dad or his teacher for all of his troubles. He has a lot to offer. He’s just plain wasting his talent.”

“So what are you going to do?” Hope asked.

“I’m going to slap some sense into him. He needs a drill sergeant, not a lawyer. Someone to hold him accountable and force him to grow up.”

“Are you ready to order?” Mari approached the table.