

C h a p t e r 2

LOCKWOOD

“You don’t like being here, do you, John?” Dr. Donald Smythe said, digging with his little finger for another yellow nugget of earwax.

“I like it fine,” Lockwood lied. His sinuses were killing him. He was allergic to something that was blooming in the Washington, D.C., swamp. The room was too cold; the doctor was fat. John Lockwood was being forced to submit to a second psychiatric reevaluation in a year, as part of the U.S. Customs Service’s most recent Internal Affairs investigation of him, and he couldn’t help himself—he resented it. Lockwood was an Assistant U.S. Customs Special Agent in Charge for the Southern District. He was also something of a legend in the Service. He made spectacular arrests which always got Federal indictments, but he had been investigated five times in the last eighteen months for various forms of improper conduct. He had yet to be found guilty of anything, but the intensity of the assault from IA was growing. Each failed attempt to discipline him had made the investigators more vindictive.

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

They had insisted he go “stress related” until this psychological exam was complete. He suspected he might have another beef coming, because two days before, in a frustrated moment, he had slugged an Internal Affairs SAC named Victor “Brute” Kulack in South Beach, Miami. It had been a stupid thing to do and Lockwood regretted it immediately, but the argument and a seething anger had escalated so fast he couldn’t control it. He was becoming more and more puzzled by his own behavior. It was undermining him with his superiors. But more important, it was altering his opinion of himself. He was no longer certain of what he stood for.

“You say you don’t resent these sessions, but your body language says otherwise,” Dr. Smythe said, retrieving another yellow ball and rolling it between his thumb and forefinger, before ditching it surreptitiously on the carpet beneath his chair.

“If my body is talking to you, Doctor, maybe we need to change places.” Lockwood smiled.

“Evasive response,” Smythe said into his tape recorder. They sat in silence and regarded each other like enemy generals staring across the desolate battleground of Lockwood’s career in law enforcement.

“Are you angry because you’re a child of three institutions?” Smythe pushed on.

“Depends on which institutions you’re talking about.”

“I was referring to the Materwood Home for Boys and then the St. Charles Academy and, to a lesser degree, the Marine Corps.”

“Oh . . .” Lockwood said noncommittally.

“There were others?”

“I was briefly in the institution of marriage, but I got kicked out,” he said, remembering Claire with a sharp pang of anxious desperation. Claire had been his life’s most damaging failure. She had been the only

FINAL VICTIM

one to bring him softness, and he had wasted that valuable warmth, squandered it, wounding both of them with his selfishness.

“We’ll get to that,” Smythe said. “Could it be because you were raised by institutions, you have a latent hostility toward them, and that’s what is causing this self-destructive behavior?”

Lockwood leaned back on the couch and laced his fingers behind his head.

“Well, lemme give that some thought. . . .” He closed his eyes and let some time pass. He’d learned that during an IA head test, you had to say as little as possible. Information was power. This wasn’t about Lockwood’s mental health; it was about getting him suspended. The less they had, the less they could use. At the same time, he had to capture Smythe and try to get him to sign the FFD slip, stipulating he was fit for duty. He listened to the desk clock ticking and kept his eyes closed. It was a humid April, Washington, D.C., day, but the building was freezing cold. An unrelenting air conditioner hissed at them. In truth, he had hated the Materwood Home for Boys. The fathers had been strict and the food stringy. He’d been small for his age and had been picked on, but he had learned to fight at Materwood—something that came in very handy at St. Charles a few years later.

“What do you remember?” Dr. Smythe prodded. “This won’t work if you don’t participate.”

“Oh . . . Sorry, I was just going back to Materwood in my head . . . remembering the place. I guess they did all they could for us. They were underfunded. We had okay sports, but the equipment was all hand-me-down stuff from the public school system. The bats and everything were cracked, and we hadda wrap ’em tight with tape to use ’em. . . .” He was talking with his eyes closed, chewing up the hour.

“What am I supposed to do with all this bullshit, John?” Dr. Smythe

finally said. "Am I supposed to just sign off on you and pass you along till you turn into someone else's field disaster? 'Cause if that's what you're planning, I can outlast you. Shit, man, I can have you lounge on that couch until your beard is gray."

John knew, eventually, he had to give this guy something. The problem was, there was some truth in what Dr. Smythe had said. Lockwood *had* been raised by institutions. The Materwood orphanage was bad, but St. Charles Academy had been a dungeon . . . a piss-hole full of social mutants. Boys with men's bodies who'd been deformed by relatives, demeaned by experience, and destroyed by their environment. He remembered the day he'd walked through the gates at St. Charles. He'd been too small and looked too easy. Fifteen years old . . . trying to saunter, trying to look tough, bouncing on his toes, rolling his shoulders. He was terrified and trying not to look it.

"Hey, tight-ass. You gonna be my weenie woman," an eighteen-year-old black inmate named Dwight Jackson yelled through the yard fence at him. Everybody at St. Charles, including the guards, called Dwight "Crazy-D." He was six-two and weighed over two hundred pounds. He had already been reprocessed by the adult criminal court and was awaiting transfer to the state pen at Joliet. He looked to John like he'd been chiseled out of purple onyx. John tried to glare fiercely at him, but Crazy-D wasn't buying.

"You my chick with a dick," Crazy-D yelled. "You're mine, sweetmeat."

The students at St. Charles slept in dormitories, and somehow it had been arranged for John to have the bunk right above Dwight Jackson. John knew that as soon as the lights were out, he would be pulled down and his head buried under a pillow. . . . His arms would be held and he would be raped by the huge inmate. This was something he was determined to prevent, even if he had to get wrecked in the process. At nine

FINAL VICTIM

o'clock, just before the trusty pulled the power switch on Building 12, Crazy-D patted the top bunk. "Dis be de trick bunk. Jump your curvy ass up der. We gonna get to it soon as de Jelly Roll call lights-out," he said, grinning, exposing four gold teeth.

John had left his shoes on and, saying nothing, jumped up onto the top bed and pulled the covers up to his chin. Then, while Crazy-D moved around the room, laughing and high-fiving the brothers, John quietly pulled the heavy, leather-soled brogans off his feet. When the lights were turned out, he waited.

"Get your ass down here," Crazy-D whispered from the bunk below. "I got a instrument needs playing." And then he kicked the mattress above him, where John was lying.

Without saying a word, John Lockwood dropped down and, with his leather shoe in his right hand, he started to pound the larger boy in the face. He broke Dwight's nose with the first blow. The second filled his eyes with blood. Before the startled eighteen-year-old could even sit up, it was almost over. Then, with both hands laced together, John swung with all his might at Dwight's jawline. Gold teeth flew out of Crazy-D's mouth, hitting the floor and bouncing like ejected brass. In seconds, Dwight was screaming in pain. When the lights went on and guards ran in, John Lockwood was standing triumphantly over his huge opponent.

"No motherfucker in this place ever lays a hand on me!" John yelled, spewing out rage and unused adrenaline. The guards dragged him out of the dormitory. He did three weeks in isolation and three years in St. Charles, but nobody ever tried to molest him again.

One week after being released from St. Charles, John was busted in a G-ride. Rather than go to the Big House for Grand Theft Auto, he chose the Marine Corps. The Marines were his third parental substitute. He ended up, strangely enough, as an MP. He found it more than a

little weird to be wearing a badge instead of looking at one, but five years later, when he mustered out, he had achieved his GED and the rank of Tech Sergeant. Some buddies had signed applications for U.S. Customs, and he had more or less gone along with them because he didn't have anything better to do. That had been ten years ago.

"You have to look at the reason all of this is happening to you, John," Smythe said, slogging on. "You pretty much do things the way you want. I think you should take a look at why that is . . . why you seem to relish breaking the rules."

Lockwood nodded. "Okay." His sinuses were beginning to ache, so he pulled out a small nasal inhaler he'd bought at the drugstore, clamped it over his nose, and inhaled the vapor, immediately clearing his sinuses. "Allergic to something," he explained.

The little alarm clock on Smythe's desk rang. The session was over.

"How about two o'clock Tuesday?" the doctor said, looking over his half-glasses at the calendar.

"Sounds good," Lockwood chirped.

He left by the side door and found himself standing in the chilly marble-floored corridor. He was cold, and it wasn't just the frigid office building. John Lockwood could hear his own blood pumping and feel his heart sinking, and he wasn't sure why.

His beeper went off. It was the DOAO's office. He found a pay phone in the lobby and called in.

SSS

Laurence Heath was one of the old breed of Customs officers, a no-nonsense commander who wanted the good guys to win. He'd worked his way up from a field office in Hays, Kansas, to become Special Agent in Charge for Arizona. Any supervisor running operations in a border state like Arizona, where the smuggling action was constant, was gener-

FINAL VICTIM

ally considered to be a hot shoe. The border was no place for fuck-ups. After ten years in Arizona, Heath had recently been promoted to Director of All Operations, which made him the second highest officer in the Service. He had also been John Lockwood's boss in D.C. on Operation Girlfriend.

That operation was one of the biggest drug busts in Southern Florida's history. Lockwood had been the Special Agent in Charge and had quarterbacked the case from the time an ex-baggage handler named Ray Gonzales had wandered into the Southern District office. Ray told him that he'd quit his job at Global Airlines because a lot of the baggage handlers at Miami International Airport had been opening targeted luggage from Central American flights and removing drugs or cash before they got to the Customs shed. Lockwood had convinced Gonzales to become the key informant on the bust. Drug dealers had their own universal code words when talking on open phone lines, and since airplanes were often called "girlfriends," Lockwood named his sting "Operation Girlfriend," and had proceeded to work it for almost eighteen months.

When the bust went down, Customs agents rounded up almost a hundred airport baggage handlers and skycaps, as well as two dirty Customs agents. At the last minute, Lockwood's long-awaited airport sting was kangarooed by an Internal Affairs SAC named Victor Kulack. Kulack had moved too soon and tried to arrest the two Customs agents. One of them got away and made a phone call. The bust climaxed in a deadly shoot-out. Ray Gonzales, who had become Lockwood's good friend, ended up in critical condition at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Dade County, Florida. Lockwood filed a complaint against Kulack for jumping the bust, and before they left Florida, he ran into him in a bar. When Kulack called Ray Gonzales "just another Cuban grease stain," Lockwood lost it and swung at him, knocking him out with one punch.

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

Now Kulack was upstairs, seething, on the Internal Affairs floor of the Washington, D.C., Customs building. Lockwood had been wondering what Kulack would do and figured the call from the Director of All Operations was the other shoe dropping.

He got off the elevator on the third floor and moved along the green-carpeted corridor. The offices were all spacious and decorated with oak furniture; very nice for civil servants. All of the men and women on this floor were in the Senior Executive Service (SES), Assistant Commissioners or above, and made their living passing paper and begging the appropriate Congressional committees to improve funding. The furniture had been purloined from a Senate office building after its renovation two years ago. As far as Lockwood could see, oak furniture and a full dental package were the best perks in SES.

Lockwood could hear Heath before he saw him.

"Where the fuck is he? I said forthwith!"

Heath's assistant, Bob Tilly, was seated at an oversized secretarial desk outside of Heath's office. He shot Lockwood a smile weak as Oriental tea and waved him in.

Laurence Heath looked like the commander of a tank division. He had a bull neck, with rolls of fat and muscle coming off the back of his shaved skull. He was popular in the Customs Service, because he was willing to downfield-block for his men. Through the large window behind him, Lockwood could see across Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House. A cloud-drenched April sun was struggling to get through. The sky looked like oatmeal.

"Are you ever gonna stop wearing your balls outside your trousers?" Heath said, without preamble. His bright-blue eyes and huge shoulders glowered.

"Larry, I don't know what Victor Kulack told you, but you can bet there's another side to it."

FINAL VICTIM

"He's upstairs, about to paper you for failure to correctly supervise an informant."

"That's bullshit."

"Shut up, John." Silence hung like a velvet curtain. "He says there's five thousand dollars missing from Operation Girlfriend's petty cash account." Heath held up a Customs Internal Affairs folder and waved it at Lockwood like a booking sheet. "He says you and your informant, Ray Gonzales, were dipping into that account to buy drugs, and that you put those drugs on the street to build your pedigree with the river scum down there."

"That's a lie. The money went to buy information. We were trying—"

"I said shut up. I'm not through. Stop talking for a change."

"Okay . . ."

"Then I get it in the halls that you knocked this asshole through a wall in a bar fight in South Beach before you came back up here."

"Kulack tried to steal the bust, sir. He jumped the gun. Got two guys shot."

"So you hit him?"

"Accounts vary. There was undoubtedly some kind of struggle—"

"You fuckin' amaze me."

"He tried to hijack the bust to get those two dirty counter agents. There were over a hundred baggage handlers and skycaps involved in that smuggle. Those two Customs guys were less than five percent of the bust. Internal Affairs is supposed to investigate bad police work, not cowboy investigations to get headlines. We ended up in a dick-dragging shoot-out because Kulack jumped early and the cat got loose."

"So you hit him?" Heath asked again.

Lockwood didn't answer. He could tell by the red that was working its way up from under Heath's collar onto his neck that he was probably going to come out better by holding his silence. Larry Heath leaned

forward, snapping out his words. "Vic Kulack is shit on Melba toast, but he is also an Internal Affairs SAC. Internal Affairs, in case you haven't read your organization manual lately, is a couple of limbs higher on the tree than Operations. Technically, that makes Kulack your boss. Kulack says you fucked up the bust. He says five thousand dollars is missing. The hint implicit here—in case you missed it—is you and Gonzales were dealing drugs with Federal money and keeping the proceeds. I know it's bullshit, but if he files that paper and it gets into court, Operation Girlfriend develops a dose of the clap."

"Sir, if you're suggesting that I turn this over to Kulack because he filed this bullshit charge against me—"

"He hasn't technically filed it yet. He said he'd consider sitting on it to protect the integrity of the case."

"Isn't that against the law? If he's got something on me, let's do the dance."

"Shut up. . . ."

Lockwood stood in front of the desk and watched the red line finish its climb up the side of Heath's neck and begin to turn his shaved head a nice watermelon-pink.

"My job here is to manage the flow of arrests and convictions. Internal Affairs is not my favorite division, but the Customs Service has to guard against illegal action in the ranks, just like every other law enforcement agency."

"Sir . . . may I speak, sir?"

Heath didn't answer but lifted his chin slightly, indicating this better be great.

"This case was in my jacket for almost eighteen months," Lockwood began. "I developed Gonzales as an informant. I talked him into going back to Miami Airport and getting his old job back. Gonzales is

FINAL VICTIM

a stand-up player. He risked his life for us. He solicited every one of those dirty baggage handlers without regard for his own personal safety. And then, at the last minute, Kulack moves in and jumps all over the take-down. Fucks it up. Gonzales gets a bullet in his kidney and damn near dies. He's still hung up in a Dade County hospital."

"I got all of this from the newspaper."

"Don't turn Operation Girlfriend over to Kulack."

"Why not?"

"The guy's a moron. He can't put spaghetti on a plate without a diagram. The A.A.G. is green and the case still needs a lot of evidentiary investigation. Kulack's gonna fuck it up."

"If he files this mismanagement charge against you and implies you were dealing drugs, it's gonna be in the court record and you're gonna be an anchor at the trial."

"That's blackmail."

"That's government service. He's also demanding a hearing for hitting him in Florida. It's scheduled at nine on Monday morning. The IA conference room on five. Be there. Personally, I think he's got a shot at getting you cashiered. I think I can get him to scotch the mismanagement complaint if we give him Girlfriend, but you're turning into your own worst enemy. What the hell's happened to you, John?"

Lockwood said nothing. He had no answer.

"I'll have Bob Tilly supervise Kulack and the greenie in the A.G.'s office. Tilly's got plenty of field and court experience. You can fill the prosecutor in but, as of now, you're outta Operation Girlfriend."

Lockwood stood there and felt the blood going up into his own head. But he had a thick shock of black hair and a swarthy complexion, so, unlike Heath, whose blush made him look angry, on Lockwood, it just made him look darker. Finally, he nodded and turned to leave.

STEPHEN J. CANNELL

“Lockwood.”

He was almost out the door, but he turned and looked back at Heath. “Yes?”

“Agents like you are good for the Service, because they remind everybody else there’s a creative way to do the job, a way that may not be printed in the manual. But agents like you are also an administrative nightmare, because you strain my ability to cover your ass. Whether you know it or not, son, I’m doing you a huge favor here.”

“Right.”

“In the meantime, I understand that Dr. Karen Dawson could use some help updating the sex offenders computer program. Since you’re on desk leave, you’re assigned to work with her. She’s in B-16. You start down there tomorrow.”

Lockwood didn’t respond. He nodded his understanding and left. This run of bad luck seemed unending. He had just lost a case he had spent a year and a half working on, to a man he despised. And, if that wasn’t enough, he’d been assigned to go down to the basement tomorrow morning and work on some dry-biscuit computer program with “Awesome Dawson.”