

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

**RICHARD  
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**THE  
SPIRE**

Ambition. Betrayal.  
Vengeance. Murder.  
It all begins here...

PROLOGUE

# The Offer

SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER THE MURDER OF ANGELA HALL HAD precipitated the decline of Caldwell College, Mark Darrow returned to campus, standing in the shadow of the Spire.

Darrow had come at the urgent request of Dr. Lionel Farr, his professor and mentor, one of the seminal figures in Caldwell's history and in Darrow's life. It was the end of the spring semester and blossoming dogwood trees, set between generous oaks, brightened the landscape with pink. Even here, Darrow could detect Farr's influence; since becoming provost, Lionel Farr had overseen the planting of pine trees and neatly tended gardens, giving the foliage both variety and order. But the buildings spaced throughout had no particular theme: the oldest—elaborate brownstones with Gothic steeples and towers—were mixed with square, staid structures from the late nineteenth century and newer buildings in a variety of architectural styles, some more nondescript than others. As a student, Darrow had found this hodgepodge engaging, a stone-and-brick record of the growth of Caldwell College over time. Though the campus would never resemble that of a picture-book college, these structures had housed generations of students and nurtured much learning—including, as Darrow gratefully remembered, his own.

The current students looked much like Darrow's classmates had

all those years ago. With the subdued, somewhat dazed look of college kids facing finals, they wandered past him, taking little notice, Darrow reflected wryly, of the former campus legend, now a late-thirtyish lawyer in a business suit, headed for his meeting with the presidential search committee of a small Ohio school in crisis. Then Darrow looked up at the Spire, recalling the most vivid hours of his youth, and all trace of humor vanished.

Erected two decades before the Civil War by the school's founder, the Reverend Charles Caldwell, the tower remained as Caldwell had intended: the epicenter of campus, with four brick pathways radiating outward like spokes, the other buildings set at an appropriate, almost reverent distance. At its base was chiseled, CHRIST, THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE. From there, at Caldwell's insistence, over two hundred feet of sandstone rose above everything but sky.

The founder's aspirations had been realized—the Spire dominated both the landscape and the psyche of Caldwell College. Its image graced the yearbook, the alumni magazine, the school's letterhead, and, for over 160 years, had decorated every diploma issued to a graduate of Caldwell. Part of Darrow's fraternity initiation had been to memorize *Webster's* definition of a spire: "a structure that tapers to a point at the top, as in a steeple." Just below the steeple, in a space with four long openings, the great bell of the college hung, its deep resonant clang reserved for moments of celebration or sadness. The lawn beneath the Spire was the scene of graduations, weddings, pep rallies, and memorial services. In the week before Caldwell's annual football grudge match with its hated rival, Ohio Lutheran, students guarded it at night from vandals: by long tradition, the Spire was where, if Caldwell emerged triumphant, the celebration would begin. It was on such a Saturday in November that a twenty-one-year-old Mark Darrow had ascended the Spire for the first and only time, never imagining that, within hours, this memory, and this place, would turn dark for all the years that followed.

A scant hour before, Mark had thrown the last of four touchdown passes, sealing Ohio Lutheran's defeat; Coach Fiske, whose privilege this was, had designated Mark to ring the bell atop the Spire. Very rarely was a student admitted to the bell tower—the Spire's oaken door had been padlocked since 1938, when a drunken celebrant had fallen from the Spire to his death. The new president, Clark Durbin, had opened the door for Mark and passed him the ceremonial bronze axe with the chip in its blade, the spoils of Caldwell's victory. Then Mark stepped inside.

Alone, he paused inside the shadowy tower, filled with awe and reluctance. Since early childhood, Mark had loathed confined spaces; the absence of light frightened and depressed him. The winding staircase, dark and dank and steep, led, in Mark's imagination, to a chamber suitable to druids or high priests. Battling claustrophobia, conscious of his responsibility to commence the celebration, Mark started climbing. He felt his chest tighten, a nameless terror choking his breathing. As a distraction, he counted each stone step to confirm that—as his fraternity had also required him to remember—the Spire had 207 steps, each one foot high.

Reaching the top at last, Mark opened its door. The square chamber was bare, its mortared stone walls adding to its severity. Hanging over him was a massive brass bell. Mark's other aversion was heights: though the four long openings of the tower began at his waist, he approached the one he had chosen gingerly, as though some invisible hand might send him hurtling into space. But as he surveyed the throng below, a surge of triumph overcame his fear.

The lawn was covered with students, many of whom had already embarked on an alcohol-fueled bacchanalia that, for some, might last until dawn. Among them stood Lionel Farr, his wife, Anne, and their twelve-year-old daughter, Taylor, who had waited with the others for Mark to appear. Mark spotted them and then, for Farr more than anyone, he brandished the axe, his grin of triumph spreading as Taylor

waved back with an adolescent's adoration. Seeing him, the crowd let loose with a deep-throated roar. Then, heart pounding, Mark reached for the heavy iron chain . . .

Staring up at the tower, Darrow could still hear the deep tolling whose echo had nearly deafened him. But now there were spotlights placed around the Spire, so that darkness never came here. This, too, was the work of Lionel Farr.

THE MOMENTS BEFORE he had first met Farr—an encounter that changed his life forever—were also imprinted in Darrow's memory.

He had been a seventeen-year-old in a small Ohio town, a star football player but a middling student. With no real family or any future he could see, he hoped only to wrest one timeless moment from a high school athlete's transient glory. His chance came down to the last play of his final game as quarterback of the Wayne Generals. The air was crisp, carrying the smell of popcorn and burnt leaves; the field, a bowl of light in the darkness, reverberated with the enthusiasm of a football town of seventeen thousand, perhaps half of them here huddled against the cold, screaming and stomping the wooden bleachers with booted feet, the small minority of blacks quieter and seated in their own clusters. There were six yards to go, four seconds left, three points between Wayne and its first defeat in an otherwise perfect season. The Generals broke the huddle, seven linemen in blue jerseys loping toward the line of scrimmage, their shadows moving alongside, as Mark, two running backs, and a flanker spread out behind them. Opposite them was the Cloverdale defense, eleven boys in green uniforms, their four defensive backs—poised to thwart a pass or run—portraits of taut alertness.

For an instant Mark took it all in—the light and darkness, the primal roar of the crowd, the illuminated clock frozen at 0:04. Pulsing with adrenaline, he positioned himself, setting his hands between the center's legs, conscious of his halfback, George Garrison, slightly

behind and to the right. Time slowed for Mark; the cadence of his voice seemed to come from somewhere else.

The ball snapped into his hands.

Spinning, Mark slid the ball into George's stomach, then withdrew it as George, the decoy, hit the line as though determined to break through. Alone, Mark sprinted toward the sideline with the ball. Two linebackers ran parallel, barring his path to the end zone while his own blockers fanned in front of him. Without seeming to look, Mark saw the flanker, Steve Tillman, suddenly break toward the center of the field, two feet ahead of the back assigned to cover him.

At once Mark decided. Stopping abruptly, he threw the ball, praying that Steve would reach it before it fell to earth. Desperately, Steve leaped, feet leaving the grass as he stretched, arms extended, grasping at the ball. Then he clasped it, clutching it to his stomach as he landed near the goal line amid the crowd's thin cry of uncertainty, awaiting the referee's signal that Steve had either reached it or fallen short, the difference between victory and defeat.

Mark's heart raced. Then, gazing down at Steve, the referee thrust both hands into the air.

Tears came to Mark's eyes, a swift surge of joy and loss. This was it, he was certain: the last clear triumph of his life.

The first teammate to reach him, George Garrison, hugged him, his round black face alight. But when Steve Tillman wedged between them, George turned away. "You're the best," Steve said. When Mark reached out for George, he was gone.

The next half hour was a blur—the screaming crowd; the shouted questions from sports reporters; the celebration in the locker room, joyous yet shadowed by the seniors' awareness, so vivid in Mark's mind, that this was the end, deepened by his own deflating knowledge that he had no plan or even hope for where his life might take him now. When he emerged into the chill night with Steve, his sole vision of the future was to take Steve's station wagon and, armed with beer and whiskey, meet two girls at the reservoir.

A man stood in their path, hands thrust into his pockets. "Mark?"

Mark paused, impatient to be on his way, regarding the stranger with mild annoyance. "I'm Lionel Farr," the man said in a voice of calm authority. "I teach at Caldwell College."

Though Mark had met other professors at Caldwell—all of them parents of his classmates—Farr looked like none of them. An inch or two taller than Mark, Farr had strong features and the erect posture of an athlete or a soldier. Unlike most of the townspeople, he was bareheaded; instead of a jacket, he wore an olive wool coat, belted at the waist, adding to his martial air. Nodding to Steve, Farr asked Mark, "Can we talk for a moment?"

Shooting a glance at his friend, who was obviously mystified, Mark saw George Garrison leaving with a pretty classmate, Angela Hall. He thought to call out to them; then, not knowing the black girl, and aware of Steve and George's aversion to each other, he stifled the thought. "I'll meet you at the car," he told Steve.

Steve walked away, casting a last look of bemusement toward his friend. Turning to Farr, Mark said, "What is it?"

The brusque inquiry evoked the trace of a smile. "I've been watching you all season," Farr responded. "You have great presence of mind and understand the game. You could play football in college."

Mark shook his head. "Too small, too slow."

Farr continued to look amused. "I didn't mean at Ohio State. The right college—Division III-A, where small but slow has a chance to survive."

Mark shook his head, feeling the obscure resentment of someone being baited. "Those schools don't give scholarships. For grades, maybe, but not football."

"What *are* your college plans?"

Mark looked down. "I don't know. Money's a problem." He hesitated. "So's my transcript."

Farr waited until Mark met his eyes. "I understand. I know some-

thing about your life, Mark. The money and grades seem to be related.”

Instinctively, Mark bridled at this intimation of sympathy.

“I have friends at the high school,” Farr added mildly. “I hope you don’t mind that I did a little checking.”

In the semidarkness, Mark studied the professor’s face. “It sort of depends on the reason.”

Despite Mark’s curtness, Farr looked unfazed. “A good one, I think. But this isn’t the time and place to discuss it. My wife and I would like you to come for dinner.”

Mark was unsettled. He did not know this man at all, let alone what this was about. Seeing Mark’s reluctance, Farr continued, “Why don’t we say Monday. You can come to my four o’clock class, then home with me. A small taste of college life.”

Bereft of words, Mark responded to the stranger’s understated but palpable force of personality. “I guess so. Sure.”

“Good. I’ll call the Tillmans with directions.”

With this last suggestion that Farr was uncomfortably conversant with Mark’s life, Farr extended his hand.

As though responding to an order, Mark took it.

YEARS LATER, MARK Darrow wondered if his interest in justice and morality, the seeds of his law career, had wakened that next Monday in Farr’s four o’clock seminar.

Mark did not know the campus; for him it existed as a rarefied world, in which young people smarter and more privileged than him engaged in a mysterious rite of passage, learning punctuated by drunken parties. “Brundage Hall is behind the Spire,” Dr. Farr had told him, and so he made his way toward the tower, which before he had only glimpsed above the trees that shrouded the campus. He took one path, then another, until the campus opened to the large grassy circle at its heart. Positioned at the center of the circle, the Spire was

austere but strangely powerful: weathered and stained by time, it was topped by a graceful steeple so high that Mark had to lean back to see it. Hurrying past, he managed to find Farr's class.

Dressed in boots, khakis, and a wool fisherman's sweater, Farr paused momentarily in his lecture, nodding briefly to Mark as he found a desk in one corner of the musty classroom. Turning back to the dozen or so students clustered near the front, Farr said, "Friedrich Nietzsche was hardly the first philosopher to challenge the concept of objective morality. Who were his most convincing predecessors?"

Several hands shot up; Farr pointed to a bearded, red-haired kid in an army jacket. "Callicles and Thrasymachus," he answered, "in Plato's dialogues. Both argued that the idea of 'justice' is a sham, a subjective means of social control, and that therefore a wise man subverts 'justice' to his own ends."

"Then what makes Nietzsche distinctive?"

The redhead answered swiftly, eagerly: "He attacked two thousand years of Western thought, where philosophers promoted 'morality' as a kind of social glue."

Farr nodded. After barely a minute, Mark had grasped how completely he commanded the classroom, how intensely the students wanted his approval or, at least, to interest him. "So if moralists are charlatans or fools, Mr. Clyde, what did Nietzsche think was at the root of our foolishness?"

"Religion," a pudgy student in wire-rimmed glasses responded. "The Christians and Jews were weak; the Romans who ruled them were strong. Therefore these religions used the idea of morality as a defense against the Romans, who, by accepting 'morality,' would be more likely to allow them to survive."

"If," Farr asked, "our most sacred moral precepts—even the Ten Commandments—are merely a tactical invention of the weak, what does that imply?"

Mark felt the desire to object—he had learned the Ten Commandments in Sunday school, and the subordination of self from a

string of coaches. "Racism," a dark-haired female student said sharply. "If Jews are weak, and morality a fantasy they invented to survive, there's no reason not to exterminate them."

Farr gave her an arid smile. "To be fair, Nietzsche also says some rather nasty things about Christians, Germans, and his fellow philosophers."

"But he *can* be read to justify evil." Glancing at her notes, the young woman read, "'As the wicked enjoy a hundred kinds of happiness of which the virtuous have no inkling, so do they possess a hundred kinds of beauty.' Hitler would have agreed."

Farr eyed her narrowly, his leonine head still, as though deciding whether to play this out. "What is Nietzsche positing about man's inherent nature?"

"It suggests that we have within us the desire to be cruel and the need to dominate."

Farr cocked his head. "Let's put that to the test, Ms. Rosenberg. Suppose you ordered one of your classmates whipped or beaten. How would you feel?"

*I couldn't do that*, Mark thought automatically. The young woman answered promptly, "I'd feel guilty."

Farr's cool blue eyes glinted. "To Nietzsche, justice is merely a mechanism through which the state exerts its will, dressing it up in moral sentiments to disguise its exercise of power. What does this do to the concept of guilt?"

The woman hesitated. "That it only exists in our own minds," a clean-cut blond man interjected. "Nietzsche suggests that guilt is a mechanism of social control, keeping us from exercising our own free will."

Once again, Farr nodded briskly. Mark felt the relationship between teacher and class as an organic entity, in which, directed by Farr, minds fed upon one another.

As the debate continued, Mark was surprised to discover that he grasped its core: Does whoever is in authority make the rules to suit

themselves, or are some rules a simple matter of right and wrong? “For our next discussion,” Farr concluded, “I ask you to consider your own nature. Do you refrain from theft or rape or murder because you’re afraid of getting caught or because you’d feel guilty? And, if so, is your guilt based on anything more than what you’ve been trained to feel?” A smile played on Farr’s lips. “I expect an answer from each of you by Thursday.”

With that, the students began slowly filing out, as though still pondering the question. Picking up a trim leather briefcase, Farr asked in a tone of mild inquiry, “Do *you* have an answer, Mark?”

Looking up at the keen face of this professor, Mark felt the same need to please him he had seen in the others, even as he tried to find the bones of a response. Instinctively, he said, “I don’t think the rules were just made up. If there weren’t any, we’d all end up killing each other. You can’t always count on being the strongest.”

Farr laughed softly. “I should introduce you to Thomas Hobbes. We can talk about *him* on the way home.”

A FEW MINUTES later, Mark entered yet another world.

The Farrs’ home, a rambling red-brick structure located on a tree-lined street, was strikingly different from the shotgun ranch house Mark had lived in for most of his seventeen years. It dated back to the 1850s, Farr explained. Lovingly restored, the living room featured a hardwood floor covered by rich-looking Oriental rugs; shelves filled with hardcover books; and paintings that, because they resembled nothing in life, Mark assumed to be modern art. But perhaps most striking was Anne Farr, extending her hand with a smile at once gracious and reserved, her jet-black hair showing the first few strands of gray, her handsome, chiseled face so pale Mark thought of porcelain, her eastern accent suggesting what people called good breeding. “Excuse me while I see to dinner,” she told him pleasantly. “You two just enjoy yourselves.”

Looking around, Mark noticed a sunroom containing white wicker furniture and a slender young girl seated at an easel. He could see only her back; dark-haired like her mother, she painted with total concentration, applying a new brushstroke so carefully her hand barely seemed to move. Noticing Mark's curiosity, Lionel Farr led him to the sunroom, speaking gently as though not to break the girl's spell.

"Taylor," Farr ventured, then added with pleasant irony, "this is Mr. Darrow."

The girl turned. Mark guessed that she was seven or eight; blue-eyed and grave, she regarded him in preternatural silence, as though assessing how she should feel about this stranger. If Anne Farr was still a beauty, someday this child would become one. "My name's Mark," he amended with a smile.

Silent, she continued her deep appraisal of him. Awkwardly, Mark asked, "Do you paint a lot?"

"Yes," she answered with surprising directness. "But I'm not very good."

Her painting was a child's landscape. Though the sky was pale blue, its sun was partially obscured by clouds. Beneath it, the figure of a girl stood in shadow, gazing down at a patch of sunlit grass. "Looks to me like you're good," Mark said.

This induced her first smile, skeptical but pleased, even as her serious eyes still focused on Mark's face. "It *is* good," her father offered. "We'll let you finish it, Taylor."

Farr led Mark to a book-lined study with two leather chairs, a rolltop desk, and an antique world globe featuring countries that no longer existed. For Mark, the life of privilege this suggested was as alien—though more refined—as what he saw on *Beverly Hills 90210*. "Taylor's like her mother," Farr was remarking. "Somewhat reserved, and very artistic. Anne paints as well, though her real forte is poetry."

Mark could not think of a response. Then his eye caught an oil painting of an officer he guessed might be from the Revolutionary

War and, near that, a map of Vietnam. “That’s General Wayne,” Farr said of the painting, “‘Mad Anthony’—the man who gave your football team its name. He cleared the Indian confederacy out of Ohio, gaining a reputation for military genius and a mercurial temper. I don’t know that he was mad, though sometimes genius and madness feed upon each other.”

Mark turned to the map. “Were you there?”

“Vietnam? Yes. I was an officer in the Special Forces.”

Mark thrust his hands in his pockets. “What was it like?”

He felt Farr weigh his answer. “Suffice it to say I learned things there that West Point hadn’t prepared me for, including what men are capable of doing when there’s no constraint on their impulses or desire. Which, I suppose, was the point of today’s lecture.”

Mark turned to him. “I wish I knew more about that philosopher.”

“Not all my students find Nietzsche uplifting.” He waved Mark to a leather chair, settling into his own. “Nevertheless, it’s important to examine the choices you make, and the freedom you feel to choose. Do you know anything about Jean-Paul Sartre?”

“Not really, no.”

Translated, Mark’s answer meant “Never heard of him.” Nodding benignly, Farr continued: “Sartre contends that the human condition is one of absolute freedom. His argument is that we’re free to make choices that reflect our authentic self. So let me ask you this, Mark: If you could define yourself, who and what would you choose to be?”

The abrupt shift to the personal made Mark fidget. “I haven’t really thought about it,” he confessed. “I mean, what’s the point?”

Farr’s face seemed to harden. “What do *you* think it is? From your test scores, you’re far brighter than your grades suggest.”

Mark felt defensive and exposed. “Why not just call me an underachiever.”

Farr looked unfazed. “Because I think that’s oversimplified. Tell me how you came to live with Steve Tillman’s family.”

Mark had sensed that Farr already knew. "It's simple," he said in a flat tone. "My mother's been put away—she's a drunk, and she's crazy. My dad's just a drunk. Being with them was like living alone, only worse."

Farr nodded, seemingly less in sympathy than in acknowledgment of a truth. "It must be difficult not to feel cheated."

"Mostly I don't give a damn." Feeling Farr's probing gaze, Mark felt himself speak against his will. "Sometimes I got pissed off at them. I still can."

"Understandably. But your problem is that the world doesn't care. The only person you're hurting is yourself."

Mark heard a knock. Anne Farr leaned in, looking from her husband to Mark. "I hope I'm not interrupting. But I thought you two might like your dinner warm."

The dining room was as elegant and subdued as the living room was bright. Taylor was lighting candles, the only source of illumination. "We do this every night," Anne explained. "In Boston, where I grew up, my parents made a ritual of it. Candlelight slowed us down, my father said, gave us time to talk."

Over dinner, fish in a surprisingly tasty sauce, Mark sensed that he was expected to converse. Groping for a subject, he asked about Anne's poetry. She was published in literary magazines, he discovered, too obscure for him to know. "I'm sorry," he apologized. "The only ones I read are *Sports Illustrated* and *Field and Stream*."

Farr laughed. "Anne and Taylor are the aesthetes in the family. There's more beauty in one of Taylor's paintings, or a line of Anne's poetry, than in the entire book I'm writing now."

Mark had never known anyone who had written a book. "About Nietzsche?"

Farr smiled. "Yet again. But it's more a psychological study, relating his life to his beliefs—the why of them, I suppose. Including the idea that a man's supposedly objective beliefs are so often a product of his needs."

Anne Farr appraised her husband with a neutral expression. “You do believe that, don’t you.”

Her husband’s smile faded. “Yes. Unfortunately, perhaps.”

Quiet, Taylor watched them. Noting this, Mark turned to Taylor and asked about her painting. Somewhat wistfully, the girl said, “I know what’s beautiful. But I can’t paint it in real life.”

“You will someday,” Mark assured her. “When I was seven, I couldn’t throw a football.”

“Can you now?”

Mark smiled. “A little.”

After dessert, a caramel flan, Mark offered to help clear the table. “The women can tackle it,” Farr said dryly. “Let’s finish our discussion.”

Settling back in the den, Farr said, “From our talk on Friday, I assume you’d continue playing football if you could.”

Despite their courtesy, Mark realized how much at sea he felt in the Farrs’ household. Hesitant, he answered, “Sports is the only place I feel at home.”

“You can find others, Mark. But first you have to change your destiny. For so many kids in Wayne, life after high school means a job making auto parts, or copper fittings, or maybe helping to fabricate Sky Climbers to wash the windows of buildings in big cities most of them will never see. I assume you must want more than that.”

Once again, Mark felt on edge, grasping for the threads of a response. “Maybe go to community college. I thought someday I might want to coach.”

Farr shook his head. “I was watching you in class today. A full scholarship to Caldwell College would open worlds you’ve never imagined.”

Mark struggled to absorb this. It took a moment for him to realize how long he had been silent. “Sorry. I mean, how could that happen?”

"I'm the chairman of Caldwell's scholarship committee. You certainly qualify financially. If you can get your grades up this semester, I'm sure the committee would take notice. We want to reach more kids who lack opportunities."

Mark still could find no words. "Amazing," he finally murmured.

"You don't know *how* amazing," Farr said firmly. "A solid education. A chance to play sports, and then to do far more than that—become a lawyer, a teacher, a business leader, or anything your gifts entitle you to do. You'd graduate debt-free. All it will take to begin your change of destiny is two months of working harder at high school than you've ever worked before. From what I can see, you have it in you." Farr paused for emphasis. "If *you* think you do."

Mark imagined explaining this to Steve.

"What is it?" Farr asked.

Mark struggled to crystallize his thoughts. "I was thinking about the Tillmans—I mean, they took me in. Steve's almost as poor as I am, and he's got better grades."

Farr smiled fractionally—it did not seem in his nature, Mark realized, to exhibit unambiguous good cheer. "If you're asking whether we can extend similar largesse to your friend, I think Mr. Tillman may lack your potential. But I'll see about him."

Abruptly, Farr stood. "You should go home, and I've got work to do. It's become my job to read books to Taylor. She chooses rather precocious ones, I'm afraid."

Mark trailed Farr to the living room. Anne Farr sat on the couch, sipping wine. It struck Mark that she had an ethereal quality, and that, although lovely, she did not appear strong or healthy—unlike his mother, who, drunk or sober, sane or crazy, would burn fiercely until the end. Smiling, Anne said, "Please come again, Mark. Lionel suffers from a surplus of females."

"Thanks," Mark said, then added, "I only counted two of you."

Anne's smile became ambiguous. "Even so."

As they walked to the door, Mark saw Taylor in the living room, studying her painting as if she had not captured what she imagined—or could not. Suddenly conscious of his gaze, she turned, studying Mark with the same quiet gravity. Farr waited until Mark faced him again. “I thought you might ask about Steve Tillman. If I try to help him, Mark, do we have a deal?”

For an instant, Mark felt himself standing on the edge of the unknown. Then, drawn by the sudden promise of hope and the force of Farr’s personality, he answered, “If you can help me go to school here, I’ll do whatever it takes.”

EVER SINCE THAT day, Mark Darrow had done exactly that. But he had not risen by his efforts alone. Lionel Farr had touched the scales of his life, and every privilege he had stemmed from that. Farr had not ordained his tragedies, only his successes.

Two weeks before his return to Caldwell, Farr had telephoned Darrow and asked if he could come by Darrow’s law office in Boston. Farr had not explained himself, and Darrow had not requested him to. Awaiting Farr with curiosity, Darrow had gazed out the window of his corner office in the Prudential Center, rewarded by a panoramic view of the Public Garden and the Boston Common. Five months prior, Darrow had won a \$120 million verdict in a financial fraud case stemming from the subprime mortgage meltdown, adding to a fortune already swollen beyond his wildest imaginings. On his desk the bones and sinews of a complex shareholder suit—financial statements; an expert deposition in which Darrow had eviscerated an arrogant investment banker—were neatly arranged before him. But as Darrow recalled his last visit with Farr, his eye turned, as it so often did, to the photograph of his wife.

Dark and pretty, Lee stood at the bottom of a ski slope, flushed from a breakneck run, her grin of triumph cracking clean and white and sharp. In the photo she was twenty-eight; in Darrow’s mind, she

was forever twenty-nine, in the fifth month of her pregnancy, waving to him through the window of the taxi that began her final trip to Iowa. In the two years since, Mark Darrow had turned thirty-eight. He had not seen Farr since Lee's memorial service.

Even among the throng of friends and relatives and Lee's colleagues from MSNBC and the *Boston Globe* who'd crowded the darkened church, Farr had stood out: at sixty-five, he was tall and astonishingly fit, with thick gray-blond hair and the erect posture of the Special Forces officer he had been before he had resigned his commission to pursue a doctorate in philosophy at Yale. That day he had been a quiet presence, offering a few words of sustenance to help Darrow endure this bleakest of winter afternoons. But Farr had lingered for two days after the service, until Darrow had fulfilled his obligations to Lee's parents, then taken him to dinner at the Federalist.

For Darrow, their reunion was shadowed by the day thirteen years before when, in a strange reversal of roles, the young Mark Darrow had called on the newly widowed Farr. Then Mark had managed only to recite a few words of concern for his mentor and his daughter, Taylor; years later, Farr offered him a stiff martini and companionable semisilence until—amid the elegantly appointed room, the quiet talk and laughter of couples taking their normal life for granted—Darrow had asked simply, "What do I do now?"

Sipping his scotch, Farr studied Mark across the table. They were similar enough in appearance that, at times, people mistook them for father and son: Farr's blue eyes retained the clarity of youth, and his still aquiline nose and seamed face, though betraying his years, showed no trace of dissolution. Answering Darrow, his features seemed graven with his own hard memories. "What I did, I suppose. Each day I picked out a task or two, and tried to perform it like the doing mattered. Teaching helped; I had an audience whose faces revealed how I'd done. So did being a parent, though there I functioned far less

well.” He grimaced. “Perhaps I was better at performing for students than consoling a young daughter shattered by her mother’s death. But each morning I tried to look no further than the day ahead.

“There was no bright line, no turning point. More a slow acceptance of what could not be helped, and the realization over time that a greater portion of any given day held a measure of happiness—or, more realistically given who I am, satisfaction. I had my work, however cerebral and self-contained; you have yours, more engrossing in that it’s filled with challenges and surprises and because, when you’re ready, it will present you with new people to know.” Farr gave a brief, reflective smile. “Eventually the life that goes on all around you, indifferent to your sadness, will sweep you up again. For better or worse there’s a certain Viking hardiness in our natures, an appetite for more.”

Darrow caught Farr’s tacit suggestion: however unthinkable now, there would be women—then *a* woman—beyond Lee Hatton. “I’ve lost a wife,” Darrow answered, “and an unborn child. How does one come back from that?” He paused, then added softly, “Anne died thirteen years ago, Lionel. You’re still alone.”

Farr seemed to look inward. “Perhaps Anne, not solitude, was my anomaly.” He shrugged the remark away. “In any case, I was at a different stage of life than you, more than a decade older, with a daughter who needed whatever solace I could muster. As you’ll recall, Caldwell College is a bit out of the way, and Wayne, Ohio, hardly a magnet for the bright, attractive young people who flock to Boston.” He held up a hand. “Not that it matters in the face of such a profound loss. I’m simply offering my excuses. It would be tasteless to say more beyond the obvious—that you’re young, successful, and live in a vibrant city among close friends. For which I, to whom you mean a great deal, am profoundly grateful.”

Darrow stared at his half-empty martini glass. Then Farr reached across the table, grasping Darrow’s forearm in a gesture of solidarity and consolation. Darrow was touched—Lionel Farr was not given to

overt gestures of affection. Which had made his response to Lee's death all the more telling; though it was seldom expressed, since their first meeting, a great portion of Farr's empathy and respect, so sparely given, had resided with Mark Darrow.

Between that dinner and Farr's unexplained reappearance in Boston, Darrow had forced himself to live each day as if it mattered. But even after two years, his life seemed to matter less. Making money—if it had ever been—was no longer Darrow's purpose.

His intercom buzzed, announcing Lionel Farr, and then Rebecca, his assistant, opened the door to wave Farr inside.

Standing, Darrow embraced him. Then he leaned back, giving his mentor a look of mock appraisal. "You look pretty good, Lionel. I could still pick you out of a lineup."

Farr grimaced, a pantomime of doubt. In truth, Darrow saw a change; though still fit and handsome as he entered his late sixties, Farr looked more tired than Darrow could remember, the flesh beneath his eyes appearing slack and a little bruised. They sat in Darrow's wing chairs, Farr appraising the younger man with affectionate curiosity.

"So," Farr inquired after a time, "how are you?"

Darrow shrugged. "All right. I'm still living out the clichés of grief: anger, pain, acceptance. Some days are okay. Then, on a random morning, I'll wake up and, for a moment, Lee's still alive. I reach across the bed, touching where she used to sleep, and feel her loss all over again. I suppose someday that will stop."

Farr nodded in sympathy. "Eventually. Does your work help at all?"

"Sometimes." Keen to change the subject, and curious about the unstated reason for Farr's visit, Darrow asked, "How's your life as provost?"

Farr gathered his thoughts. "Troubled, as is the school. You remember the impact of Angela Hall's murder: we experienced it as no one else could have—except, perhaps, Steve Tillman. When I recall

the loss of a young woman with so much promise, murdered in such a terrible way, I still feel disbelief.

“But what remains is the impact on Caldwell College. Sixteen years later, it still lingers: however unfair to the school, the perception of a murder tinged with race caused a falloff in applications, donations, minority students, and—as a result—the quality of the student body. For a short but crucial period, our endowment dipped, limiting our ability to give the kind of scholarships you and Angela received. We’ve never really recovered.”

Darrow was surprised. “I thought the place had stabilized.”

“In a fashion,” Farr answered sardonically. “We’ve achieved a slower but steady decline. You’ll recall that you turned down an appointment to the board of trustees, enabling you to preserve your sense of optimism. But the precise rate of decline hardly matters now, for reasons you must keep in strictest confidence.”

A bit stung, Darrow answered, “Who would I tell?”

“‘Who would give a damn’ do you mean? Both of us, I hope.” Farr stood, reminding Darrow of how restless he could be. “Mind if we take a walk, Mark? It’s been years since I strolled through Boston.”

It was a fine spring day, breezy but sunny. Passing the pond in the Public Garden, filled with tourists in swan boats, they stopped at a food stand to buy Polish dogs smothered in grilled onions. Sitting on a park bench, Farr observed, “I always liked this city. You chose well, Mark.”

Finishing his hot dog, Darrow saw a nun glance at them, smiling to herself—even now Darrow could be taken for Farr’s son. Still, the resemblance was not precise. Even before Farr’s hair grayed, Darrow’s had been blonder; his face, however well proportioned, lacked Farr’s striking angularity, the look of warriors; though obviously fit, little about Darrow, now prone to cuff links and Savile Row suits, suggested the Spartan bearing of a soldier. But the most striking difference was in their smiles. Orthodontics, Darrow’s mother’s last sacrifice before descending into schizophrenia, had purchased what

Lee once called his killer smile, which before her death had marked the chief difference between Darrow and Farr. Farr's smile, when it came, was less a show of teeth than a manifestation of his pervasive sense of irony.

"So," Darrow said. "Caldwell."

They began walking again. "Put simply," Farr responded, "nine hundred thousand dollars of endowment money has vanished."

Darrow turned to him. "How is that possible?"

Farr looked off into the distance, as though pondering the question. "Deciphering financial chicanery isn't my specialty. But as provost, I'm obliged to try. From what I know, the signs point to our president. You'll recall Clark Durbin."

"Durbin?" In his astonishment, Darrow almost laughed. "The man's a classic academic—remember how you had to prop him up after I found her body? I can imagine him writing a paper about embezzlement, complete with footnotes. But not stealing."

"Clark's weak." Farr's voice was etched with disdain. "Faced with hardship, the weak step out of character—or, perhaps, discover it. Clark's wife is an invalid, and his son's a drug addict who needed extensive treatment; heroin, as I observed in Vietnam, grips a man by the throat. Add that Clark has the investment skills common to many of my colleagues: none."

"So how did a man who can't pick stocks develop a talent for theft?"

Farr stopped to contemplate a dog chasing a Frisbee thrown by his youthful master, the animal's stubby legs leaving him endlessly short of the red plastic disk. "That dog," he observed, "will have a coronary. It's the downside of trying too hard to please. As for Clark, our board has an investments committee, with your old friend Joe Betts as chairman."

"Joe?" Darrow felt his amazement growing. "In college, his idea of high finance was sending his bloated credit card bills home to Dad."

“People change,” Farr responded. “As you’d be the first to acknowledge. Joe Betts is now a partner in a respected investment advisory firm that oversees our endowment. Durbin was on Joe’s committee, each of whose members was entitled to direct transfer of endowment funds beneath one million dollars.

“The funds in question were certificates of deposit. What seems to have happened is that Durbin e-mailed Joe’s firm, directing that the CDs be transferred to a bank account in the name of Caldwell College, set up by Clark himself. From which, at his direction, the money was transferred to a bank account in Geneva—”

“Then you can forget it,” Darrow said flatly. “The Swiss are a black hole.”

Farr nodded. “In theory, everyone on the investment committee is suspect. But Durbin sent the e-mail, and his signature is on the papers used to open the bank account in Wayne that received the money.”

“Are there other possibilities?”

Farr shrugged. “The other person seemingly involved is Joe himself, who transferred the money based on Durbin’s e-mail. But it’s hard to see how Joe could send that e-mail to himself, or gain access to Durbin’s computer. It all comes back to Clark.”

Pausing, Darrow watched a young couple walking hand in hand, careless of anything but each other. “Still, nine hundred thousand isn’t that much. How large is our endowment?”

“Less than seventy million. The timing of Angela’s death killed a capital campaign we desperately needed. And historically the school has never done well with its money—until the last few years, our investment committee might as well have put it under a mattress. We got heavily into equities just in time for the dot-com meltdown, then the near collapse of our financial system—too heavily, it turns out. By the time Joe’s firm took over, we’d lost over a third of our endowment. And now this.” Farr shook his head in disgust. “Stupidity and criminality are a lethal combination. Piety is even worse: church-related

schools, I'm finding, don't have the financial safeguards they should—they were founded on notions of man's goodness. What pure-hearted Christian would suspect Clark Durbin of being a crook?"

"Or just clever enough to be a fool," Darrow answered. "Embezzlement's a dead-end crime: sooner or later, the thief always gets caught." He faced Farr again. "If it's money you need, I can make up the nine hundred thousand. More, if you like."

Farr smiled faintly. "Who would have ever thought, Mark? I guess lawyering *does* pay better than coaching, your original ambition. But, with deepest thanks, the missing money is not Caldwell's problem. It's reputation.

"As the events surrounding Angela's death suggested, reputation, once lost, is hard to regain—especially among the donors we need to survive. We were planning a hundred-million-dollar capital campaign when the board got wind of this. All that's needed for disaster to strike, I've realized, is for Caldwell to dream up a new fund-raising effort." Farr's voice softened. "Clark's embezzlement has become an existential threat. How do you ask people for money when they don't believe you can safeguard what you have?"

Darrow stopped, hands in his pockets, facing Farr. "You've just redefined your problem, Lionel. It's public relations. How much does the media know?"

"Nothing, yet. *That* problem is still hanging over us."

"Then if you've come to me for advice, I've got some. I assume the board is hiring a forensic accountant to sort out how Durbin's supposed to have done this."

"As we speak."

"Have them draw up a new system of financial controls, to assure the alumni—and the media—that nothing like this can ever happen again." Squinting into the afternoon sun, Darrow put on his sunglasses. "The next thing is to engage an outside public relations firm. You'll need to write this story before somebody else does."

Farr folded his arms. "The board's current hope," he responded in

a dubious tone, “is to keep this quiet until we find out all the details. There’s some thought that Clark will help us retrieve the money in return for a low-key resignation because of ‘health.’ Durbin has reason to cooperate—if he refuses, and this leaks out, some on our board want to press criminal charges. I doubt a mild-mannered heterosexual like Clark will want to make the kind of ‘special friends’ he’ll encounter in state prison.”

Reflexively, Darrow thought of Steve Tillman. “At least Durbin won’t have spent his life there.”

From the glint in Farr’s eyes, Darrow saw that he’d grasped the reference. “True enough. But let’s hope, for Clark’s sake, that one prisoner from our community is enough.”

“Whatever the case,” Darrow said, “get all the facts, then make a complete disclosure. Dribbling out partial information is almost as bad as stonewalling.” He looked at his mentor keenly. “But you know all this, I’m sure. So tell me what else I can do.”

Farr was silent for a moment. “That depends, I suppose, on how you feel about your current life. And what plans you have for the future.”

Darrow slowly shook his head. “I can’t help but think about the first time you asked me that question. My answer’s much the same: I don’t really know. Before she died, Lee and I talked about what we’d do if she got tired of chasing after campaigns. But all that was complicated by the idea of starting a family . . .”

His voice trailed off. “What about the law?” Farr asked.

Darrow shrugged. “I’m a very good trial lawyer, no doubt. I’ve proven that. But there are other talented lawyers who can bring these cases, and I can’t tell myself that I’m doing God’s work. My dilemma is that it’s easier to feel restless in the present than to define a different future.” Giving Farr a fleeting smile, he finished: “It’s like you said when we first met. I’m lacking in direction. But if you still want me to join the board, I will.”

Briefly, Farr paused. The look in his eyes struck Darrow as speculative. “Actually, I want you to consider becoming president of Caldwell College.”

This time Darrow did laugh. Removing his sunglasses, he said, “You’re joking.”

“Hardly.”

“Then you should be. I’ve got no academic credentials; no administrative experience; no background with an educational institution of any kind. I haven’t even kept up with the school. I’ve already offered the only thing I’m good for—money.”

Farr folded his arms. Fleeting, Darrow imagined how they looked to others: two men in business suits in the middle of the Public Garden, talking quietly but forcefully about something very serious. “If your model of a college president is someone like Clark Durbin,” Farr said bluntly, “God help us. That’s the last thing we need. Even colleges that aren’t in trouble are making nontraditional hires: Oberlin just hired Michigan’s outside lawyer, and the Stanford Business School’s run by a former CEO.”

“That makes a kind of sense,” Darrow said. “This doesn’t.”

“No?” Farr countered dryly. “You spent five years prosecuting criminal cases—including homicides—and eight more years untangling every financial scam known to man. Given Caldwell’s recent history, some might say you’re perfect.”

“*That’s* pretty sad.”

“But true. More fundamentally, you embody the best of Caldwell College: a small-town boy who made good through attending a school that stresses teaching instead of research. To be plain, you’re here because of Caldwell.”

“And you,” Darrow answered softly. “I’m well aware of that.”

“As the alumni are of you. You’re an athletic hero, enshrined in our Sports Hall of Fame. You’re a graduate of Yale Law, a nationally renowned lawyer. You’ve been on the cover of *U.S. News*, the *ABA*

*Journal*, *American Lawyer*, and—three times already—our alumni magazine.” Farr spoke with quiet urgency now, brooking no interruption. “You’re young, attractive, and gifted with considerable charisma. You know the school. And what the school needs is a leader with élan and a sense of humor, the vitality to lift our morale, redefine our message, refocus Caldwell on its future, and, in a year or so, help restart the capital campaign required for us to *have* a future.

“For you, the job wouldn’t be a stepping stone to somewhere better. You’d be saying you believe in Caldwell College—that if you invest, others should.”

Darrow held up his hand. “You need more than a symbol. You need someone with qualifications.”

“The first qualification is judgment, which you have. Critical for the fix we’re in, you’re not remote, authoritarian, or rigid—in fact, you’ve always been adaptable, the quickest study I know. You won’t have to learn the culture of Caldwell or the town.” Farr’s tone became emphatic. “With you as president, we can address our problems squarely. You’re more than just a symbol, Mark. You’re a human Hail Mary, a concrete sign that Caldwell can rise again. Anyone else is second best.”

Stunned, Darrow felt a surge of doubt, the stubborn urge to dissent. “‘Anyone,’ Lionel? What about you?”

“The board will make me interim president, if that’s necessary. But I’m too old to do what’s needed. We need a fresh face, one that doesn’t look like a relief map of Afghanistan.” Seeing Darrow smile, Farr added swiftly, “If you wish it, I’ll stay on as provost—for any president, a good relationship with the provost matters. I can walk you through the budget, issues regarding the faculty and board, where the figurative bodies are buried. Whatever you need to ensure that you do well.”

“You talk like all you need is my consent. Don’t you have a search committee?”

“To be sure, and you’d have to meet with them. But I’m not here

on some frolic of my own. There's substantial support for this idea—starting with Joe Betts, who seems to recall you more admiringly than you remember him.”

“We were friends,” Darrow demurred. “With a reservation here or there, I liked Joe, whatever his role in Steve Tillman’s trial. But Joe no more knows me in the present than I know him.”

“He thinks otherwise. So do I. By your senior year, your essential character was apparent. You were, and are, a leader.”

“Of what, precisely? The football team?”

Farr looked nettled. “Don’t be obtuse. People were drawn to you; you had a gift for empathy rare in someone your age. You can’t be in the dark about why you’ve done so well with juries.” Farr softened his speech. “Even the timing is right. It’s April—if you start in June, you’ll have two months of paid rehearsals before the students arrive. During which you can focus on our alumni.”

Darrow smiled at this. “As usual, you’ve thought of everything. Except whether the timing’s right for *me*.”

Farr’s face clouded briefly. “Only you can say for sure.” Glancing at his watch, he said, “It’s past four-thirty. Suppose I buy you a drink at the Ritz Carlton.”

“Won’t help, and the Ritz is now the Taj, a cog in the global economy. But sure—the bar’s the same, and it still makes a good martini.”

Silent, they walked across the gardens in lengthening shadows, crossing Arlington Street to enter the hotel. The first-floor bar faced back toward the gardens; its paneled walls, leather chairs, and oil paintings of hunting scenes reminded Darrow faintly of Farr’s study. With a look of satisfaction, Farr sat across from him at a marble table by the window and ordered dry martinis for them both. Farr permitted Darrow a first bracing sip before saying, “About your timing, I *do* have thoughts.”

“So do I. My life in Wayne, Ohio, seems like a thousand years ago. And as you confessed after Lee’s memorial service, the dating pool is not exactly infinite.”

Farr raised his eyebrows. “At last, you refer to a personal life. Is there one?”

Darrow pondered this. “Call it a half life. On a good day, three-quarters.”

“There’s a woman, then?”

“Plural.” For a moment, Darrow fell quiet. “Physically, I function well enough. But my emotional equipment feels a little stuck.”

Farr contemplated the table, considering his next words. “Forgive me if this sounds tactless. But it seems you’re free to leave Boston without uprooting anyone, including yourself. This may be your time for something new.”

Darrow smiled a little. “Whose idea *was* this, Lionel?”

Farr gave him an ironic smile of his own. “Mine. But the last idea I had about your life turned out pretty well.”

“Except when it didn’t,” Darrow answered mildly. But that was not Farr’s doing. In all but one respect—that which had come to matter most—Darrow was the luckiest man he knew. His debt to Caldwell College, it seemed, was indistinguishable from his debt to Lionel Farr.

As if reading his thoughts, Farr spoke quietly: “There’s no place where you could make such a difference. In a few years, you could give our college what it needs. Perhaps you need that as well.”

Darrow sorted through the jumble of his thoughts, the minefield of memory. The apogee of his young life, and his greatest trauma until Lee’s death, had occurred at Caldwell College in the space of sixteen hours. Perhaps that was why he had never returned. “Do you ever visit Steve Tillman?” Darrow asked.

This seemingly irrelevant question would have puzzled anyone but Farr. “On rare occasions. These days we struggle for subjects. As you’d expect, it’s very sad.”

Despite his own guilt, Darrow heard no rebuke. The two men lapsed into silence.

Darrow finished his martini, feeling its initial jolt filter slowly

through his system. "Give me a day or two, Lionel. You took me by surprise, and there's a lot for me to sift through. And remember."

Farr's eyes held understanding and compassion. "Perhaps more than anyone, I know. That morning we stood at the Spire, looking down at her, is something no one could forget. Certainly not the two of us."

