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DOCTOR DEALER

The Rise and Fall of an All-American Boy
and His Multimillion-Dollar Cocaine Empire



MARK
BOWDEN

author of the *New York Times* bestseller
BLACK HAWK DOWN

DOCTOR DEALER

MARK BOWDEN



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The Best Game Ever

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The events in this story are true. Names and physical characteristics of many individuals have been changed in order to protect their privacy.

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For Tom Schey

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DOCTOR DEALER

Prologue

Virginia Beach

There was no reason to suspect anything unusual when Larry saw Pat O'Donnell on the dock in a business suit. Pat was a semiretired FBI agent who kept his boat berthed at the Lynnhaven Dry Storage marina. He often came by after putting in a morning at the office, and spent the afternoon talking to his friends as they came in off the water. Sometimes he carried a walkie-talkie in case the office needed to get in touch.

Larry had been out all day with his friend Roy Mason. It had been a lazy fishing trip on a calm sea under a sky so bright it hurt the eyes. Larry looked tousled and tired, the picture of a man of leisure back from a day at sea, his thick black hair windblown, his long narrow nose and cheeks sunburned. He was dressed in a maroon rugby shirt with wide chest stripes of yellow and blue, worn baggy jeans, and leather deck shoes with no socks. He smelled of fish, and was eager to get home and clean up. Larry didn't enjoy fishing as much as Roy; he had gone along mostly to keep his friend company. They hadn't caught much, just a few cove fish that were a nuisance because they snapped at your fingers when you tried to take them off the hook.

As the vessel swung alongside the pier, O'Donnell strode out to meet them. Larry figured Pat wanted to ask, as dedicated fishermen always did, what they had caught and where. Docked across the narrow slip of water, facing seaward, Larry was surprised to see a high-performance Wellcraft, a sleek speedboat called a Scarab. Pat had been talking to two men in that boat. They were also in business suits . . . that was odd.

When the boat got close, Larry jumped up to the wharf and, with Roy feeding him the lines, quickly secured them and skipped back aboard to begin retrieving his gear.

"How's the fishin'?" asked Pat.

Larry smiled and turned and stooped to open the cooler. He knew the sight of three or four cove fish would make Pat laugh. But before he could

turn and display the largest of their catch he was grabbed under both arms by men he had not even seen approaching.

“Larry, it’s all over,” said Pat.

“You’re under arrest,” one of the men said.

Larry looked at Pat, who was no longer smiling.

“You are Larry Lavin, aren’t you?” asked one of the men holding his arms.

“Yes. I am,” said Larry quietly. The man clapped handcuffs on his wrists in one quick motion.

“Wait just a minute . . . there must be some mistake!” shouted Roy. “Pat, what’s going on here?”

Larry was already being rushed forward along the pier, now with a group of five or six men around him. Behind him he overheard Pat O’Donnell hushing Roy’s protests, trying to explain.

(*The Philadelphia Inquirer*; May 16, 1986)

FBI ARRESTS ALLEGED HEAD OF ‘YUPPIE’ COCAINE RING

Lawrence W. Lavin, the former Northeast Philadelphia dentist who allegedly masterminded a major cocaine-distribution ring, was arrested without incident yesterday as he disembarked from a fishing boat in Virginia Beach, Va., the FBI said.

Lavin, 31, had been a fugitive since November 1984, a few months after he was charged with heading a \$5-million-a-month cocaine ring involving many other young professionals. He was free on \$150,000 bail when he and his then-pregnant wife fled their Devon home.

An FBI spokesman in Philadelphia said agents arrested Lavin about 5:20 p.m. as he and another dentist—who did not know Lavin’s true identity—were docking the other man’s 25-foot sport fishing boat at a marina. He was wearing blue jeans and a rugby