

Chapter 1

An Ordinary Monday

IT WAS STILL RAINING on Monday morning, and the students at Central High were hanging their wet jackets in their lockers when the first bell rang. It had been raining all morning after a night of heavy thunderstorms. The buses were late because of flooding on some of the roads. This was the last Monday in September and the start of the fourth week of school. Activities were well under way, and the students were busy with band, choir, and football practice after school. Each student was expected to take part in some activity, and most did.

Around noon, the sun finally came out. The football coach, Bob Ryan, was glad to see the weather change. He had planned a workout for his team practice that afternoon. Afterward, he would talk about their schedule of games. The first game was just a week away.

At three o'clock the players arrived on the field, and Coach Ryan spoke to the group. "Okay, men," he began. He always called them "men," and they called

him “Coach.” “It’s still pretty wet out there, but that’s part of football. The weather isn’t something we can plan on, and we’re going to have to play games in rain and snow. So, let’s see what you’re made of! Show me what you remember from Friday’s practice. Get out there and get dirty!”

“Coach, where’s Mark?” asked Chuck, the quarterback. “We practiced the screen pass with him on Friday.”

“Hey, has anyone seen Ellison?” the coach asked. No one responded. No one seemed to know where he was.

Coach Ryan said, “Frank, you take the screen pass for today. Chuck, after practice see if you can find out where Mark is. If he is sick, he should have let someone know he wasn’t coming to practice. Let’s go. It’s getting late.”

After practice, Chuck called Mark’s mother, Mrs. Ellison, to find out if Mark was sick.

“Hello, Mrs. Ellison. This is Chuck Shaw. I was wondering how Mark is.”

“Hello, Chuck. Why Mark is fine. I’m the one with a bad cold.”

“He wasn’t at football practice today, so the coach asked me to call,” said Chuck.

“That’s strange. He always goes to practice. He looks forward to it.”

“I know, Ma’am. I asked some of the kids on his bus, and they said he wasn’t on the bus today.”

“Oh well, that’s because I said he could use my car since I was home anyway. But, he isn’t home yet, and

he should be. Now I'm getting worried. I hope he didn't have a problem with the car."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Ellison. I'm sure you'll hear from him." Chuck hung up the phone and immediately called Coach Ryan.

"Coach, it's Chuck. I called Mark's house and spoke to his mother. She said Mark isn't sick and that he drove to school today. But, she hasn't heard from him. She's pretty worried."

"That's not like Mark. He's a good student and always comes to school. I wonder if he had car trouble."

"That's what I was thinking. Should we call the police?"

"That's a good idea. I'll call Police Chief Williams, and I'll call you back, Chuck."

"Okay, Coach."

Coach Ryan dialed the number for the police station and told Chief Williams what was going on. "Matt, it's Bob Ryan. I've got a problem here. One of the boys on my team, Mark Ellison, didn't show up for school or practice, and his mom doesn't know where he is. Have you had any reports of car accidents today?"

Chief Williams said, "We've been busy all day with flooded cars, but I haven't seen the Ellison boy. What kind of car does he drive?"

"I don't know," the coach answered. "You'll have to ask Mrs. Ellison. You can imagine how worried she is."

"I'll take a ride over to their place and talk to her. Thanks for letting me know. By the way, how is our

team doing? Do you think we'll win some games?" The chief was a fan of the local sports teams and always took an interest in them.

"They're hard working, and they sure want to be winners. Come to our first game, okay? You can cheer them on."

"I'll be there. I'll call you when I have some answers about Mark."

"Thanks, Matt."