

## Chapter One

The sun was sinking toward the Hudson River as I walked home from my law offices on Lexington Avenue. It was a chilly night in April, perfect for taking my wife out to a leisurely meal and a glass of French wine in one of our excellent Manhattan restaurants. The last thing I wanted was to go to a family Passover Seder in Brooklyn.

It's not that I have a particular issue with Passover Seders, even in Brooklyn, except that they almost always start too late and last too long. My problem is with my family. I don't like them, except for my grandson. And my father, of course.

My brother Bernard is ten years younger, two inches shorter and sixty pounds heavier than I am. He is also much richer, and I'm far from a pauper myself. Of course, I have nothing against rich people. Some of my best friends are rich people, including me. I just don't like when they're loud and smug and ignorant, like my brother Bernie. I also don't like Beatrice, his wife, and their nosy, noisy kids.

My brother Alex is fifty-three years old and a total contradiction. On the one hand, he's a firebrand progressive, a pot-smoking flower child living in a Greenwich Village bachelor pad, and at the same time, he manages one of the most predatory hedge funds on Wall Street. It's true that he sends money to displaced people in Africa and visits all the art galleries, but he impresses me as a closet philistine, a supercilious fraud.

And then there's my sister Sylvia, fifty years old, a neurologist who practices and teaches in Columbia Presbyterian Hospital near the George Washington Bridge. You'd think she'd be a person of substance, but believe me, she's not. She knows her neurology, but otherwise, she's an airhead. She's married to Edoardo Alfieri, an Italian immigrant eight years younger

than she is. He's a wild-eyed, mustachioed violinist in the string section of the Jersey City Philharmonic Orchestra who dreams of making it to the New York Philharmonic but never will. They live in a six-bedroom house in upscale Montclair, New Jersey, with three cats, a butler, a maid and no children. You cannot have an intelligent conversation with either of them about anything other than neurological disorders and violins. I don't even know if they converse with each other. Edoardo's English is awful, and Sylvia speaks no Italian.

I suppose they're harmless, and we're all grateful to them for taking in my father, Maury Taylor, after my mother died. He is ninety-two years old, full of pep and vigor, in pretty good health. I don't think he's much of a burden on Sylvia and Edoardo, because I'm sure they don't converse much. He has his own room with a separate entrance, he takes care of his own expenses, and George, his assistant, drives him wherever he wants to go.

That's my family. Except, of course, for Margaret, my daughter, but that's a long and sordid story, perhaps for a different time. She has resented me since she was young.

As they say, you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family. I would not have picked any of them for friends, but I could tolerate them for one night. Truthfully, my reluctance to go to the Seder was mostly because of Margaret, but at least I'd see David, my favorite and only grandchild.

When I got home, June was already dressed and ready to go. She prepared a snack for us while I showered and dressed. As I was struggling with my cufflinks, I heard June call me.

"Adrian! Come! I'm in the den. You have to see this! Hurry!"

I left my cuffs unfastened and went to the den. She was sitting on the edge of the sofa, her eyes glued to the screen.

"Aren't you worried that we're going to be late?" I asked.

She turned and gave me a wry look. "Me? You think I'm eager to go to this thing? I dread it. I'm only going because of you." She paused and smiled. "And because of Maury." Of all my family, whom she barely

tolerates, June loves my father. Her sentiments are returned.

“Can you help me with my cufflinks?”

“Put them into your pocket, Adrian. I’ll help you after we watch this. The commercial is almost over. Sit down! It’s live!” June likes exclamation points.

I sat on the sofa next to her and looked at the screen. There was a wild demonstration on Freret Street in New Orleans in front of the Tulane University quad. I recognized the place. Tulane is my father’s alma mater. The camera panned the raucous demonstrators. They didn’t look like college students. They were men and women in their twenties, thirties and forties. Hundreds of them. Many of them carried placards. They looked like people who most probably did not have college degrees. They were screaming and waving their fists in the air. And they were all white.

In the foreground, a reporter was describing the event.

“Good evening. My name is Sheldon Friedman. We are here on this quiet street in New Orleans, but it’s not so quiet this evening. A group called the Waco-Ridge Coalition is protesting the proposed appointment of Jeremy Muhammad as the new president of Tulane. Mr. Muhammad is African-American. The student population right now is over seventy percent white, less than ten percent African-American and about five percent Hispanic. Plus some Asian-Americans and international students. The nomination of Mr. Muhammad signals an attempt to achieve a more balanced demographic.”

“Hey you!”

The reporter turned to see who had shouted at him. It was a burly man in his late thirties, sunburned, with a headband, an uncombed beard and long hair. His shirt was sleeveless, and his arms were heavily tattooed. The man approached the reporter and glared into his eyes.

“Hey, pinko Jew reporter, what are you telling the public? Are you telling them the truth or more pinko lies?”

“Would you like to speak on camera, sir?”

“Damn right, I would.”

“I’m sure our viewers would like to hear you. Who are you, sir?”

“I’m Jimmy Joe Darby, leader of the Waco-Ridge Coalition.” He said it as if he expected everyone to know his name. If he led a few more demonstrations like this, I thought, he might very well get his wish.

The reporter had obviously not heard of the organization or its leader.

“What is the Waco-Ridge Coalition?”

“It’s a group of patriotic Americans organized to defend ourselves, our families and our American values from the pinko Jew nigger federal government and the corruption of our society. We honor the fallen at Waco and Ruby Ridge. We will avenge them.”

“And why are you demonstrating?”

“We don’t want that nigger Ayrab getting in. He should go back where he came from. He’s a damn Muslim.”

“Mr. Darby, I think you’re misinformed. He’s a Southern Baptist, a graduate of Tulane. His grandfather was a Black Muslim back in the Sixties. He’s a descendant of slaves. His people have been here hundreds of years. To where should he go back?”

“Let him go to Africa. Or the Ninth Ward. Tulane is the crown jewel of Southern colleges. The Harvard of the South. They should be getting rid of their nigger students, not looking for more. And all those Jews! Why the hell do they have so many Jews?”

Darby was right that a substantial part of the student body was Jewish, far more than the Jewish percentage of the American population. Back in the day when the Ivy League colleges in the North had quotas for Jewish applicants, many who were rejected headed for Tulane. Their children and grandchildren followed in their footsteps, as children usually do, especially when it comes to the elite universities.

“I can’t answer your questions, Mr. Darby,” said the reporter. “I’m only here to report. How many members are there in the Coalition?”

“ I’m not gonna tell you exactly, but it’s thousands. And there are many

more thousands in other groups like ours. And people who support us without actually being members. You won't believe how many. Millions!"

"What do you mean by support?"

"They believe in what we're doing. Some of them give us money. You look at my folks here, and you think we're a bunch of rednecks. But you don't know what's going on. Plenty of people in fancy suits in high places are behind us. There's gonna be a reckoning. We're ready."

"Are you armed?"

"You better believe it."

"Who are the other groups? Are their leaders well-known?"

Darby sneered. "You mean better known than me?"

"I'm only trying to get information for our viewers."

"Sure, why not? It's about time your viewers heard about us. They'll be hearing plenty more soon. We're tired of biding our time. There's Quincy Montague and the Bunker Hill Brigade. Darron Vandewegh and the July Fourth Faction. Knute Hatwick and the Euro-American Alliance. These are our allies. But there are plenty of other groups."

"Do you coordinate with your allies?"

"Yeah. We work together. We're all on the same page."

The reporter took a deep breath.

"Well, Mr. Darby, I can't say I wish you good luck, but I thank you for speaking to our viewers. We want them to be informed."

Darby grunted and walked away, seemingly satisfied. The reporter turned to the camera. He tried to make a final comment, but overwhelmed, he could think of nothing appropriate to say; he didn't want to end this remarkable interview with inanities.

"This is Sheldon Friedman," he said in a tight voice, eloquent in his failure to comment. "We're reporting to you from Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Good night, and God bless."