

Chapter Fifteen

The pickup trucks drove straight at the barricades below us. The police trained their weapons on the approaching vehicles, but they only fired into the air. The trucks gathered speed. At the last moment, the police officers and crowd gathered behind the barricades scattered, and the first pickup truck smashed through the barricade. The other trucks followed close behind.

The pickup trucks slowed a little to allow the swarming marchers to catch up, then they headed south on Columbus Avenue. The marchers waved their tiki torches and shouted, “The spics will not replace us! The niggers will not replace us! The Jews will not replace us! The gooks will not replace us!”

The counter-demonstrators hung back from the procession and shouted curses, epithets and slogans from the safety of the sidewalks. David and the Mitzvah Tank were parked on Jamestown Road. They were out of the path of the marchers. I prayed they would be safe.

June pulled at my arm frantically. “Adrian, look! They’re slowing near the Mitzvah Tank!”

The lead pickup had indeed slowed almost to a crawl. Through my binoculars, I saw a burly man with long blond hair and a tattoo on his neck lift a black tube from the bed of the truck and point it at the Mitzvah Tank. In a feverish haze, I looked for David. He was handing candles to a young woman in front of the Mitzvah Tank.

It took me a moment to identify the tube, but there was nothing I could have done right then and there. All I could do was watch in horror as the man in the truck pulled the trigger of the grenade launcher. There was a wispy tail of white smoke as the grenade flashed through the air and struck

the Mitzvah Tank The white van exploded in a ball of flame. David and the young woman were flung through the air like a pair of rag dolls.

Immobilized by shock, I saw the pickup truck speed up a little and slow down near the Shiloh Gospel Church. The man fired again, and the front of the church crumpled. As I was told later, he also fired a grenade into Cortez's pharmacy a few blocks away.

"David!" June's scream penetrated my fog. "David!"

The enormity of what I had just seen suddenly hit me like a blow to the sternum. My scream was even louder, but it did not escape into the air. It ripped through my heart and tore it to shreds.

We flew down the stairs and ran to David, but the police had cordoned off the area and wouldn't let us through. I tried to push my ways through, but they grabbed my arms and pulled me back.

"You can't go there, sir," a sergeant said to me. "It's a crime scene."

"You have to let me through," I shouted. "That's my grandson."

"I'm awfully sorry," he insisted. "We have medics on the way."

I was beside myself with fury. "Let me through! I'm Congressman Adrian Taylor! If you don't let me through, I'll have your badge!"

The sergeant looked at me with indecision in his eyes.

June stepped forward. "Officer, let us through."

"Who are you, ma'am?"

"I'm June Taylor, the Congressman's wife. I'm a doctor. Let us through to see if we can help our grandson."

The sergeant stepped aside and let us in.

David's crumpled body lay immobile on its side. He was unconscious. His face was ashen and covered with blood, as if all the blood from within had been squeezed out and splattered over his face.

"Is he breathing?" I whispered.

"Very faintly," said June. "I can hardly find a pulse. Here, help me with this abdominal wound, he's bleeding heavily." She ripped off her jacket and handed it to me. "Take this and try to staunch his bleeding."

She stood up.

“Where are you going?” I asked in a panic.

“I have to see to the young woman. I’m right here if you need me.”

I placed the balled-up jacket over David’s wound and pressed with all my might.

“David, my dear sweet David,” I pleaded. “Please open your eyes. If just for a second. David, I love you. David, you can’t leave me. David. David. David.”

There was no reaction. I wept and kept pressing the jacket on the wound. I would not let the life seep out of him. I staunched my tears for a moment.

“What’s with the young woman?” I managed to ask June.

“I think she’s gone. I’m still trying to find some vital signs. There’s not much blood. She must have hit her head when she was thrown.”

The ambulance pulled up, and the first responders jumped out. They lifted David gently, laid him on a gurney and hooked him up to an IV. Suddenly, David went into a convulsion and opened his eyes. Then his eyes began to roll into his head.

June grabbed his hand. “Stay with us, David. Stay with us!”

She squeezed his hand, and I thought I saw an almost imperceptible squeeze in return. His convulsion passed, and he closed his eyes.

“Where are you taking him?” she asked the medics. “I’m a doctor, and I’m also his grandmother.”

“Hesterville General is on the other side of town. He’ll be in good hands. It’s an excellent hospital, and we have to get him there right away. There’s no time to waste.”