

Chapter Sixteen

June went along with David in the ambulance, while I ran to get the car from Ackerman's gas station. There was only room for one in the ambulance, and she was the doctor. It was more important for her to oversee David's care, while I would only get in the way.

When I arrived at the hospital, June told me that David had been taken into surgery and that she had spoken to Margaret. We sat on chairs outside the operating room, not knowing what to say to each other. There were no questions to ask. We both knew the answers. After a while, June patted my knee and gave me a wan smile.

"The doctor seemed competent," she said. "Let's hope David pulls through. He's young and strong."

"Maybe God will save him. He certainly deserves it. He was doing God's work."

She shrugged. "Who knows what God will do? I hope you're right."

"Should I pray?"

"Sure. I'll pray with you."

"I don't know what to say. I don't remember the last time I prayed."

"Just say whatever's on your mind. You're a terrific lawyer. Plead your case. Give it everything you've got. I'll do the same."

We prayed for fifteen minutes, and then we got tired. If God heard my argument, He'd get it right away and would rule one way or the other. What was the point of praying and praying? Did I think I could wear Him down?

A nurse came out of the operating room.

"Doctor Taylor, Congressman," she said. "Maybe you should go down to the cafeteria for a coffee and a bite to eat. It's going to take a while. Hours and hours. We'll call you if there's any change. We have both your

numbers.”

“How is it going?” asked June. “What is the doctor doing?”

“I can’t get into it in great detail,” the nurse replied. “Your grandson has lost a lot of blood, and there’s damage to his internal organs. The doctors are doing everything in their power for him. Let’s hope for the best.”

“I can’t leave,” I said.

“I understand,” she said. “There’s a small waiting room down the hall. The chairs are more comfortable. And there’s a television. If there’s anything, I’ll run there and call you. You’ll be just seconds away.”

“All right,” I said. “We’ll do that.”

“I’ll go down and get us some snacks,” said June. “Margaret should be here any minute, so you won’t be alone if it takes me a little while.”

“I dread the moment she arrives.”

I turned on the television and tuned to CNN. They were reporting about nothing except for the demonstration. Interviews and interviews with police officers, politicians, walkers, marchers, townspeople. Talking heads pontificated and analyzed from every angle and perspective. What was there to talk about? There was no mystery to what had occurred. The only mystery was the identity of the man who fired the rocket-propelled grenade.

“For those of you just joining us,” the commentator was saying, “there was a violent attack in Hesterville by members of the white supremacist American Identity Party. In the aftermath of the rally, rocket-propelled grenades were fired by an unidentified assailant at three targets – a Chabad House, the Shiloh Gospel Church, the majority of whose members are African American, and a Hispanic-owned pharmacy.

“A young man and a young woman were critically injured at the Chabad House. Several other young men were also wounded, but not as seriously. Three people died in the attack on the church, and eight more were injured. The building was destroyed. No one was injured at the pharmacy, because it was closed at the time, but it is in shambles. Let’s go to the video.”

The video was clearly spliced together from different cameras. It was

gruesome. It began with footage of the vast crowd in the demonstration area, including many closeups of red-faced, fist-shaking, screaming demonstrators, and excerpts of Farragut's harangue. There was a clip of the pickup trucks smashing through the barricade. There was a clip of June and me kneeling over David with the young woman lying inert a few feet away. Her name, as I learned later, was Kimberley Ann Adams. She was eighteen years old. There was a clip of the carnage at the black church. There was also a clip of the shattered pharmacy, its storefront no more than a black gaping maw. The commentator was mostly silent while the video clips were playing. They spoke for themselves.

"The FBI has deemed these hate crimes and is investigating," he continued after the raw images came to an end. "Senator Farragut, chairman of the American Identity Party, expressed shock at what happened. He sent his condolences to the victims and their families and says he will keep them in his thoughts and prayers. The senator claims he is innocent of inciting to riot, because he begged the crowd to march peacefully and eschew violence. If no criminal charges are brought, there are bound to be civil suits. The consequences of this horrific tragedy promise to reverberate through American society for a long, long time. And now to our Washington correspondent."

A middle-aged woman appeared on the screen. She was standing on the street with the White House behind her.

"All of Washington is in shock," she said. "The President was outraged at what he described as one of the worst acts of domestic terrorism in American history. He promised to hunt down the criminals and bring them to justice. Leaders of both parties have expressed their sorrow and anger. They condemned the act in the strongest terms and promised to work together to destroy this cancer on the American body politic."

I shut off the television. I couldn't bear to hear another word about strong condemnations and thoughts and prayers. They meant nothing. They were just excuses for doing nothing. If any of these people would do

something, we wouldn't need their thoughts and prayers or their strong condemnations.

Was I responsible for what had happened to David? Was I so opposed to his going to Hesterville because I had a premonition of doom? I had no premonitions. In fact, I really thought he would be safe. I was just being extra cautious. Why go there when you don't have to? Why take a chance of visiting Paris when you can vacation in other places? But should I have put my foot down? I had no authority over him, legal or moral, and he would not have listened to me. I dropped my head into my hands and sobbed until I could barely catch my breath.

I heard someone come in and looked up. It was Margaret.