

Chapter Twenty-four

Undertaking a major enterprise, in my opinion, involves a substantial measure of self-delusion. For instance, a person opens a business after making a careful business plan. He knows he has his work cut out for him, but he convinces himself that, as long as he works hard, he'll find success. More often than not, however, the startup work and challenges exceed all expectations. He finds himself harried and almost overwhelmed. He doesn't have time to eat or sleep. Had he known what was coming, he might never have started. But he's already committed, so he hunkers down and perseveres.

All the cases I've ever tried required solid preparation. The more complicated cases required much more preparation. But they were rarely overwhelming. I didn't have to become a doctor to present medical evidence. But I quickly discovered that the Lavender Williams lawsuit was in a class of its own.

My first readings of the books Nancy Hannah had provided for me had been fairly superficial. I had just wanted to get a sense of the opposing views without getting into the weeds from which they drew their opinions. But now I had to examine all the evidence, and I quickly discovered that I could not present the evidence for the authenticity of the Bible or rebut the evidence against it without becoming something of an amateur expert on the Bible and its origins. The subject was too complicated to skirt the surface.

Fortunately, my partners at Cain, Schmidt, Barrow and Taylor were cooperative, and I was able to hand over my caseload to associate attorneys and concentrate on my research. I also commandeered Nancy Hannah Mikhail and Elliott O'Hara, two of the brightest young associates in the firm, to work with me full time. Paul Blake also joined our team. He would

be needed to investigate potential expert witnesses and to do jury research when the time came. We set ourselves up in one of the small conference rooms and went to work in secrecy.

During the months of preparation, there were several small AIP rallies in different parts of the country and a few minor scuffles, but there was not much to distract us from our work. The AIP had clearly decided to keep a low profile for a while. The FBI investigation was unrelenting, not only in the manhunt for the killers but in the scrutiny of the AIP's seditious activities and its finances. Jordan Fowler, the special agent in charge of the New York office of the FBI, an old friend of mine, kept me abreast of developments in the case. He also informed me that the FBI was infiltrating additional undercover agents into the white supremacist groups that comprised the AIP.

The FBI is a great organization, and I had no doubt that they would bring the killers to justice and also expose the nasty underbelly of the white supremacist movement. They would weaken and contain the AIP, but they would not destroy it. As long as it remained neopagan, the movement would endure. If the Bible could be shown to be authentic, however, many white supremacists would return to their Christian roots. Although Christianity had a decidedly bloody history, it would not condone a race war. The Lavender Williams trial was a long shot, but it struck at the heart of the movement.

After months of intense effort, we were ready. We filed suit in federal court for violation of civil rights against the principal of the Cushman Middle School, the Board of Education and the City of New York. We asked for a jury trial. The trial was set for November in the Theodore Roosevelt Federal Courthouse, the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, at 225 Cadman Plaza East in downtown Brooklyn. The presiding judge was the Honorable Katherine Baker, who had a reputation for being tough but fair.

We still needed additional time for preparation, but by the trial date, we

would be as ready as we would ever be. I called Lavender and brought her up to date. I reassured her that she would take the stand only briefly at the beginning of the trial. There was nothing else for her to do. Regardless of the outcome, she would be two million dollars richer.

The day of the trial was cold and rainy; it was a good thing I didn't believe in ominous omens. Nancy Hannah Mikhail and Elliott O'Hara were waiting for me in the hallway outside the courtroom. The client and her husband were also there.

"Good morning, Mrs. Williams, Major Williams," I said. "I'm glad you're on time."

"I'm never late to class, Mr. Taylor," she said. She was wearing a simple blue dress and a nervous look on her face.

"Then let's go in," I said. "Let's do this."

The courtroom was empty except for one woman sitting by herself in the last row of the visitor's gallery and looking at her phone. I recognized her as Jessica Davis, a reporter for the *New York Post* who frequented the halls of the courthouse in search of interesting cases. She was a small woman in her forties with short brown hair and restless brown eyes. Her eyes lit up when she saw me. She jumped to her feet and headed in my direction with her hand extended. I told my client to take a seat at the plaintiff's table along with my associates, and I braced myself.

"Congressman!" she gushed. "Fancy meeting you here."

"I could say the same. What are you doing here?"

"Well, I saw your name on the docket, and I thought the case might be newsworthy." She winked. "Maybe for a page past the centerfold."

"I'm flattered."

"Would you like to tell me something about your case?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm not looking to try the case in the media. If you're curious, you can sit and observe, but I'm not sure it's worth such a large investment of your precious time."

Actually, I did want the case to receive a lot of publicity, but not just

yet. This was not a lurid murder trial. Too much premature publicity might lead to overexposure and a decline in public interest. That was the last thing I wanted. But Jessica Davis was the only reporter present, and if she was looking for a scoop, she was not likely to write about a wrongful termination suit if it might turn out to be much more interesting. She would hold off for a while.

“Listen, Congressman,” she said. “Something is going on here. I can smell it. I’m sure you want favorable coverage, but obviously not just yet. I’ll hold off if you promise me something.”

“I’m listening.”

“I want the inside track. This is my story, and when all the other media come barging in here, I’m first in line. Can you promise me that?”

I shook my head. “I can’t make any promises, but I will definitely be more favorably disposed toward you.”

This was tantamount to a promise, and she was satisfied. She went back to her seat and returned to her phone.