

Chapter Twenty-nine

Our opening statements had not taken too much time, but the judge decided not to begin testimony until after lunch. There would be plenty of time to eat an unhurried lunch and still discuss strategy with my associates.

Just as I was leaving the courtroom, Jessica Davis approached me. Her reporting the previous evening had led to the large press contingent in the gallery, and now she was probably afraid of losing her advantage. I liked Jessica and decided to help her, but I wanted something in return.

She gave me her biggest smile. “Congressman! Can I ask you a few questions? I won’t make you miss your lunch. I promise.”

“How would you like to buy me lunch?” I said. “Then we can talk in private and at leisure.”

She caught her breath. “That would be fabulous.”

“Is it in your budget? You know that Congressmen eat expensive food, don’t you? No hot dogs and pizza for me.”

“Don’t worry about it, Congressman, you can have caviar and lobster, even if I have to pay for it from my own pocket.”

“There’s one condition,” I said. “Please don’t call me Congressman. I don’t like it.”

“All right. Should I call you Adrian?”

“Let’s keep it formal. Call me Mr. Taylor, and I’ll call you Ms. Davis.”

“Suits me. Where would you like to go?”

We went to the Mikonos Café, a Greek luncheonette five blocks from the courthouse with simple décor and terrific food. We ordered lunch and took a table far from the counter. I insisted we eat before we talked. Jessica picked at her food like a bird, but I ate all of mine.

“Do you mind if I record this?” she asked after we ordered coffee.

“Not at all.”

“Great.” She put a phone on the table and started recording.

“Congressman, I mean Mr. Taylor, why did you take this case?”

“I’ll be straight with you, Ms. Davis. It was for personal reasons.”

“You never struck me as a particularly religious man.”

I shook my head. “No, it was for my grandson. Did you ever hear of David Goldfield?”

The light of recognition appeared in her eyes. “Oh, I remember. I’m so sorry for your loss. I really am. It was such a horrible tragedy. I covered the funeral. Your eulogy really touched my heart.” She took a deep breath. “So let me see if I understand this. Your grandson was Chabad, which means he believed in the Bible. So you want to justify his belief?”

“Not quite. I want to strike a blow against the people that murdered him. Have you listened to Sanford Johns?”

“Who hasn’t? A real nut job.”

“His followers don’t think so. He preaches neopaganism, sounds a lot like Nietzsche. People should take their cues from nature. Might makes right. Survival is the only morality. The foundation of his so-called religion is that the Bible is a fraud, a hoax, fake news. There are no golden rules, no higher morality. Without the Bible, you can have a race war.”

“I see,” she said, drawing out the words. “You want to convince the world that the Bible is true. Do you want the world to believe that God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai?”

I shook my head. “I’m not sure I believe it myself. I mean, I’m pretty sure something extraordinary happened back then. But I’m not sure what it was. I want people to believe the Bible was written when it claims to have been written, that it was not some hoax cooked up a thousand years later. If people were brought up as Jews or Christians or Muslims, I don’t want their religion ripped away from them by people ridiculing their beliefs. Their religion protects us from the likes of Farragut and Johns.”

“So, what exactly is your goal?”

“I want to prove that it’s more reasonable to believe that the Bible is extremely old, that it was written in deep antiquity at about the time it claims to have been written. If I can prove that, it would be difficult to deny the basic truth of the monotheistic religions. If I can prove that, the clergy will convince those thugs that the AIP is the road to Hell.”

“You’re taking a chance. What if you lose? Then the verdict supports the claims of Sanford Johns.”

I shook my head. “That’s what I thought at first, but it’s not really true. A verdict in my favor, I mean in favor of Mrs. Williams, would be wonderful, but even if we lose the verdict, we can still come out ahead.”

“How’s that?”

“That’s where you come in, Ms. Davis. I told you I want something in return. I want your help.”

“I don’t understand. What can I do?”

“My goal is to bring the case to the people. I want to circumvent academia. Until now, the professors wrote their books and presented their opinions to the public as *fait accompli*. This is what you have to believe, they say, since we’ve proved it. The loudest voice wins. But did they really prove it? The people never examined the evidence and decided for themselves. Most people are intelligent. They’re perfectly capable of hearing the evidence and making an intelligent determination. Just like the members of our jury.”

“You mean just like in a murder trial.”

“That’s exactly what I mean. The detectives and the prosecutors collect and assemble the evidence, and based upon what they have, they conclude that such-and-such a person committed murder. The defendant offers a different view of the case. Then the jury hears the testimony, looks at the evidence and decides with whom they agree. The fate of the accused hinges on the decision of the jury. If they can’t decide either way, they acquit. I want to prove to the jury, and by extension to the general public, that the

case in favor of the Bible is as powerful as the case against it. More powerful in fact.”

“And if you win, will people accept the opinion of the jurors over the opinions of the professors?”

“Don’t forget that there are professors on both sides. But your point is well-taken. As I said, this where you come in.”

“I still don’t understand.”

“I’ll give you transcripts of the trial as it progresses, and I want you to post them on your website. Don’t change a word, but you can condense them just a drop if you must. People will follow the actual trial on your website. They’ll hear the evidence, and they’ll discover a mountain of evidence in favor of the Bible. They may not read every single word, but they’ll get the gist of it. They’ll see the whole picture. You’ll get a lot of traffic, Ms. Davis. More traffic than you’ve ever had. They’ll read the transcripts, and they’ll read your articles. Do a good job, and maybe you’ll get a Pulitzer.”

She took a sip of her coffee and gave me a long speculative look.

“You won’t give the transcripts to anyone else?” she said at last. “I’ll have an exclusive?”

“Only you.”

She took a deep breath. “I’ll do it. Thank you.”