

## Chapter Thirty-one

**J**ournalists have a nose for a developing story, but it often takes a while until they discover its sensational core. Jessica's reporting had drawn the media to the trial, but the excitement was still not there. A former congressman was representing a Brooklyn teacher who had used the Bible in her history classes. Interesting, but not quite front-page news. Nonetheless, the media attended the trial in force, just in case it became a major story. I was doing my best to make sure it would.

The posted transcripts of the opening statements of the trial had generated some interest but not enough. My goal was to promote the story of the trial in the media, which would drive traffic to Jessica's website, which would further raise the public profile of the trial, which would drive even more traffic to her website. And so on. If I wanted to strike at the AIP, that was what I had to do.

Friday night, June and I went out to dinner. We didn't take our cell phones, our usual practice when we're out together. Before we left, she lit two Sabbath candles, something she didn't normally do. She said it was in honor of David's memory. It brought tears to the backs of my eyelids.

There's a good kosher restaurant on Lexington Avenue, but we decided not to overdo it. David wouldn't have expected it of us. I really missed him, and I hoped that wherever he was he approved of what I was doing. It was for his sake, but also for my sake. His killers had hurt me deeply. Violence has many ripple effects, many victims, and all of us are entitled to vengeance. I didn't want to view myself as an avenger. I told myself I was a champion of truth and justice, but it was only partially true. The passion that drove me was the thirst for vengeance. I wanted to crush David's killers, just as they had crushed me, and June, and Margaret, and my poor father.

We ate in a steakhouse. After two glasses of wine, I felt the tension ooze away. I wasn't particularly hungry, but I ate all my food anyway. June once asked me why I finish everything on my plate if I'm not hungry, and I told her it was because people in India are starving. I used to think this was a cliché, that it wasn't true anymore, but it is. I was once having trouble with my computer, and I ended up spending some time on the phone with a Microsoft technician in New Delhi. I asked him what kind of safety net they had in India, and he told me there was none, that thousands of people died of starvation every year. I googled it later. I felt it was obscene to throw away good food when millions had little or nothing to eat. I felt that food deserved respect. If I couldn't find someone to take my leftovers, the least I could do was eat it myself.

After dinner, we went for a stroll hand in hand on the promenade by the East River. There was a hint of drizzle in the air, but we didn't mind. We sat on a bench and watched the joggers run by.

“How are you?” June asked. “Are you okay? I’m concerned about you.”

I knew what she meant, but I asked anyway. “What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean! Sometimes, you look like you’re going to explode. And the trial hasn’t even started yet!”

“Don’t worry. I have it under control.”

“I’m sure the case is under control. But are you?”

“I’m trying.” I smiled at her. “The wine, the river and my beloved wife. That’s a great combination for reducing stress.”

She brushed the hair from her forehead and gave me a look. Then she smiled that enigmatic female smile and said nothing for a few minutes.

“Adrian, what’s going to happen?”

“What do you mean?” This time I didn’t know what she meant.

“You know, everything. The AIP. America. Our home. Our family. Where are we headed?”

“I don’t know.”

“Do you think the trial will have any effect? I mean, I know it’s

important to you. I know you're doing this for David. But do you really think it'll make a difference? Do you think it'll change anything?"

"I don't know. I wish I did. All I know is that I have to do what I can and hope for the best. I'm doing the best I can do. I can't think past that."

She folded her legs under her and stared at the languid river. "What drives these people? Why're they so full of hate?"

"People hate because they're deprived of something and afraid of something. Racism and bigotry aren't mysteries. If people were satisfied with what they have and confident that they wouldn't lose it, they'd be much happier, much more tolerant. But if they're worried about losing their jobs and their homes, and they see others who appear and sound different being successful, they become angry. If someone comes along and offers a solution, they're ready to listen."

"But how about the rich whites who fund organizations like the AIP? Are they feeling insecure as well?"

"Maybe. In a way. If they feel that the dominance of the white race is threatened, they feel threatened themselves. I suppose, there's some truth to what Sanford Johns was saying. We identify with our group. A threat to our group is a threat to each of its members."

"So, what's the solution?"

"It's not a race war. It's learning to see beyond race, to focus on what unites us rather than on what divides us. Sounds trite? Maybe it is." I paused. "What do you think? What's going to happen?"

"I'm hoping the government'll take down the AIP, just like they took down the Communist Party back in the day. I'm hoping the FBI infiltrates these groups and brings them to justice. I'm hoping for peace and goodwill on earth. I'm hoping that the trial brings you peace and closure and that the two of us will live together happily ever after."

"Amen."

"By the way," said June, "what's happening with the civil suit?"

I shrugged. "I'm not really involved. Last I heard, depositions were

postponed for two months.”

“Margaret must be getting impatient.”

“No, not at all. She’s hoping the FBI will find evidence that will help us in the civil suit.”

“Makes sense.”

When we got home, the first thing we did was check our phones for messages and missed calls; it was as if we’d stepped out of the world for three hours, and we had to know if we’d missed anything important. June made us some herbal tea, and we switched on the television.

There was a tedious report about the most recent polling in the next election, and then the familiar face of Sheldon Friedman, the reporter who had covered the demonstration at Tulane University, appeared on the screen. He was standing on a dark country road near a dirt track that led into the woods. The track was blocked by a heavy wooden barricade. Two black Suburbans, three police cars and a number of media vehicles were parked on the shoulders of the road. Overhead, a helicopter beamed a searchlight into the woods.

“We have a developing situation here outside the village of Yellow Brook in the Adirondack Mountains region of upstate New York, about forty miles from the Canadian border. After an intense manhunt for several months, FBI investigators believe they have tracked the Hesterville shooters to this lonely corner of Padunkee County. The FBI has identified the fugitives as Christopher Jones, John Paul Swift and Jerry Anderson. We have no more information about them at this moment.”

He walked over to the barricade.

“I don’t know if viewers out there can read the sign on the barricade, so I’ll read it for you. ‘Beware! Private property! Trespassers will be repelled with heavy arms. No exceptions for search warrants!’ According to information provided by the FBI, this hundred-acre property belongs to Padunkee Investments, an offshore company headquartered in Aruba. It’s a shell company owned by another shell company, whose ownership seems to

be untraceable. Aerial photographs show a number of buildings on the property and quite a bit of human activity. An eight-foot chain link fence runs around the entire property.

“The FBI is reluctant to storm the compound, especially since there may be women and children on the grounds. They want to avoid a repeat of the Waco disaster nearly thirty years ago. They’ve sealed off the compound and are preparing for a protracted siege.

“This is Sheldon Friedman reporting from Padunkee County, New York. We will keep you informed as the situation develops.”