

## Chapter Two: *Truth or Fiction?*

Felicity Anderson from the Gaia Gazette had a knack for uncovering information before anyone else. Her previous background in undercover investigative reporting proved extremely valuable. Thanks to her drop-dead gorgeous appearance, she effortlessly charmed people, particularly men, into divulging information to her. People felt an irresistible urge to confess their secrets whenever she was present, as if she had the power of a truth serum.

“I’ll have a glass of the Hidden Angels,” Felicity said, referring to her favorite mead.

I poured her a glass, amazed at her ability to compartmentalize negative events from her routine actions. “Know anything about white supremacists in Gaia? Or if there are any federal agents here because of it?”

“No specifics, just what I learned when I talked with a few of the people who are here for Ted’s rally.” She glanced at her notes. “Three of them—Larry, Randy, and Ivan—were incredibly passionate. They didn’t give their last names, but I’ll follow up. They proclaimed emphatically they were part of a righteous cause, part of a movement greater than themselves.” She dug around in her bag and plopped down a white supremacy report from the Department of Homeland Security.

“Where’d you find that?”

“Google.”

“Is it for real?”

“Printed it directly off the dot.gov site.” She paged through to a few highlighted sections. “Anyway, the movement’s appeal goes something like this. The time is now to embrace white pride, to reclaim America as a white country. People drawn to this movement believe they must stand up for the well-being of white people. They feel a need to halt the immigration of non-whites and secure America’s future through white children.”

“Wow.” I picked up the federal document and fanned to a dog-eared page. “It says Homeland considers white supremacy a national security threat.”

Felicity nodded. “That would include RogueWave, the group holding the rally on Ted’s property. Did you notice the flyers on the windshields in the parking lot?”

I peeked behind the canvas wall of Bliss Creek’s booth and spotted the fluttering paper on the cars in the Sunflower Café lot. “Who put them there, and when?”

“Most likely when everyone was rubbernecking the fight between Ted and Franco. These are the two I grabbed.” The printing on the first was ‘Diversity = White Genocide.’ The second stated, ‘White is Right. Deus Vult.’ Felicity pointed at the last two words. “I looked that up. It’s Latin for ‘God wills it.’”

“Do you think the people here for Ted’s rally stuck them under the wiper blades?”

“That would be the logical explanation.” She stuffed the report back in the bag. “I understand you and George found a Third Reich coin by the vineyard, and Luna found a Nordic medallion below the graffiti on her wall.”

“How did you—oh, you must have bumped into George?”

“I did. But believe me, I would have learned about that, anyway. I’ve covered threats like this in the past.” She strode out of the booth, her cleavage-enhancing shirt and A-line skirt hugging her svelte frame. All male eyes tracked her as she swung her shapely legs off the bar stool.

Tiffany plopped on a stool across the counter from me. “Think there will be any trouble with RogueWave during June-Fest?”

I straightened the pole supporting the awning. It didn’t require straightening, but I needed to gather my thoughts. “I don’t know. Felicity has good instincts and an infinite network. So, probably.” I didn’t mention that my gut feel reinforced her opinion.

Luna brought a tray of coffees from her café. “On the house.” She passed mugs to all of us. “What did Felicity have to say?”

I wrapped my fingers around the comforting coffee. “She’s worried about the group being in Gaia for Ted’s rally. So am I.”

“Finally trusting your gut?” Luna smirked. She’d been telling me for months to accept my intuition.

“Okay, psychic-in-residence, what’s your gut telling you?”

“The powerful aura of hatred that radiated from the Nazi medallion unsettled me. My gut says we’re in for some surprises.”

####

A new trickle of tourists flowed into the booth. Most were not aware of the angst the locals were feeling from the upcoming white supremacy rally. They were here for excellent food, live music at several venues, and a chance to inspect produce and artwork from local vendors.

Several people sat down to sample a flight of Bliss Creek wine. One of them tilted her head toward the parking lot. “What are all the flyers about?”

It was a question I had braced myself to answer repeatedly. “An unrelated rally held outside our spring festival on some agricultural property.” I slid a bottle of mead in front of them. A diversion tactic. “Were you aware that Bliss Creek ferments its mead using honey from an onsite bee apiary?” A few more visitors gathered around to hear my spiel about the process.

In the back of the crowd was Zach Taylor, a real estate developer turned congressional candidate. A charismatic man with both brains and brawn, he chatted amiably with everyone he met. We had gotten off to a rocky start. He went into a coma from an allergic reaction to my bees’ stings after his confrontational offer to buy my property. And we couldn’t find his Epi-Pen. Like I said, a rocky start. But things were changing.

Zach walked up and plopped onto a bar stool. “Sounds like it’s been an eventful day here.”

“That’s putting it mildly. Are you here to relax or to work the crowd?”

“A bit of both. And to see you.”

My heart did a mini-somersault. “Would you like a drink?”

“Not yet. I’ll take a rain check.”

“Do you know Ted Arnold?”

“Not well.” Zach drummed his fingers on the counter. “Our views are at opposing ends of the spectrum, leaving no room for compromise. He would, without a doubt, never vote for me.”

“Do you know anything about his rally?”

There was a moment of hesitation before his response. “Just some concern among the aides. There’s been an undercurrent of discussions about agitators and potential violence. Nothing concrete, but ....”

“What do you mean?”

Another hesitation. “The distribution of white-supremacist propaganda is widening. It’s always been around, but now technology has enabled it to explode. And it’s even moved into out-of-the-way places like Gaia.” He turned to me with cocoa-brown eyes, flashing his James Bond smile—not too sexy, yet masculine and appealing. “And on that somber note, when are we going to go on that date you promised me?”

“As soon as June Fest ends and I’m back to serving customers from one location. Deal?”

“Deal.” Zach swung away on the bar stool before stopping and turning back. “I almost forgot. How’s the solar project going?”

“Real estate development will forever be in your blood. Even as you work on a tight election campaign.”

“Guilty.” He massaged his sculpted jaw. “Did you have any luck with Sothic Solar?”

“Actually, I did. I ordered solar panels to put on the warehouse roof. Over time, I’d like to put panels on all the roofs. It should cover most of the energy for pumps, fermentation equipment, lighting, and air conditioning. At least according to Sothic. And we’re discussing a bunch of building-integrated photovoltaic technology I don’t fully understand.” I was proud of myself for just remembering the term. I had never heard of building-integrated photovoltaic technology before.

“Good. That means they talked with you about designing solar into the architecture. I can’t endorse any company since I would consider it a conflict of interest. But I wholeheartedly endorse the technology. That’s the future I want to see for Wisconsin and the rest of the country. We can save on the cost of building materials and electric power while reducing reliance on fossil fuels.”

Zach’s face beamed with excitement, complemented by energized body language. There was no one else around for him to be playing politics. This is the real Zach Taylor, not the stereotypical developer I had previously thought him to be. Or at least that’s what my gut was telling me.

“I may build a new indoor and outdoor patio.”

“With solar integrated into the new canopy?”

I nodded. “And possibly even into a new facade with skylights. Depends on budget.”

“I told you I want to help.”

“You don’t owe me anything. I didn’t save your life. The hospital did.”

Zach’s eyebrows drew together, causing worry wrinkles above his nose. “You haven’t changed your mind about letting me at least pay for the new bee hives, have you?”

I chewed my lower lip. My car’s check-engine light was still on. Losing the honey inventory from my bees being poisoned was not insignificant. And the bills kept coming. “You are not responsible for my hives being destroyed.”

“No. But no matter what you think, I believe you saved my life. This is the least I can do.”

I conceded. “Thanks. The hives arrive tomorrow. I’m eager to get things back to normal.”

Zach propped his elbows on the counter and leaned toward me. His lips were inches from mine. Then Luna blew in from behind the canvas wall.

“Oops!” Luna said.

We both straightened up.

“I better get back to schmoozing,” Zach said. “The election will be here soon enough.” He tilted his head toward Luna in an acknowledgement as he pounced off the stool.

Luna watched his retreating figure. “Guess my timing was off. Does this mean you two will *finally* go on your date?”

A laugh bubbled in my throat. “Barring another fender bender phone call from my son, or roof damage from a storm, I hope so. They say that third time’s a charm.” I glanced toward the café. “Things pretty slow?”

“Typical afternoon lull. Sam and Roxie can handle the flood of five customers who are eating.” Luna removed her apron and laid it on the counter. “I’ve been thinking about investing in solar when I replace the café roof, but I’m concerned about what it will look like. I want to maintain the historic appearance of the building from when it was part of the Underground Railroad.”

“The guy that Zach put me in touch with at Sothic Solar has been invaluable. Maybe you should talk with him.”

“Let me think about it.” She glanced up and down Main Street. “Is anyone going to spot you so we can take a walk around the Fest? There are a couple of artist projects I want to scope out for a bare spot in the café.”

“Mariama and Sasha should be here soon.” Sasha Blackstone, a long-term employee, arrived with Ojibwe baskets and dream-catchers to sell in the booth. Mariama was on her heels. “Right on time.”

Mariama entered carrying a handful of flyers. “I picked these up all over the ground.” It sounded like “I peeked deez up all ova dee ground,” given Mariama’s Nigerian accent. “I did not remove any from the cars in the lot. I just could not condone the litter.” She reached behind the counter to toss them into the garbage.

I plucked one out of the bin. “Felicity showed me a couple. We figured they have something to do with the rally scheduled to be held on Ted Arnold’s property tomorrow. I wonder what would happen if Ted’s property wasn’t available for the rally.”

“It would still go on,” Mariama said. “Ted made sure he had support from the RogueWave group to carry on even if there were glitches in the plan. He even specified the names of several individuals on the permit application.”

Three heads (that would be Luna’s, Sasha’s, and mine) jerked in her direction. “How do you know that?” I asked.

“Ted Arnold is my fada.”