

CHAPTER 1



THE VOLUNTEERS

For the third time that morning, Palmer Collins repositioned his lanky, angular frame and re-crossed his legs. With a flick of his hand he straightened the leg of his gray trousers, then crossed his arms in his lap. A moment later, his foot bounced impatiently with a rhythm that shook the pew. To his right, Olivia, his wife, cut her eyes at him with a disapproving scowl.

Dressed in a navy blue suit with a fitted jacket, she sat with her back straight and poised, her legs discreetly crossed at the ankles. Her brunette hair was curled in back and held in place behind her head with a tortoise-shell clip. A round short-brimmed hat was perched atop her head, and she wore burgundy high-heeled pumps.

As Collins continued to bounce his foot, the vibration gently rocked the pew and with each rhythmic beat the scowl on Olivia's face deepened until for the third time that morning she gave him a quick jab in the side with her elbow. He responded, as always, with a tight-lipped smile, then shifted positions once more, this time with both feet firmly on the floor, and did his best to keep his mind focused on the sermon, but it was a futile effort. The week had been far too long and the weekend much too short. Already his thoughts raced ahead to the work that awaited him the following morning.

It was February 1946, and with the war over most of the soldiers were home from Europe and the Pacific. Everyone was eager to get on with their lives and Manhattan was more alive than ever, which meant business was good. Transactions, incorporations, and mergers—the

kind of business upon which law firms relied—were at an all-time high and Fortas, Brown & Hoffman, the firm where Collins worked, was right in the middle of it. Collins' desk was stacked with files waiting for his attention.

The sermon that day was about being our brother's keeper, a predictable theme with oft-repeated words and phrases that rolled down from the pulpit with little meaning for Collins until Rev. Thornton mentioned the recent liberation of Jews from German concentration camps. Most of the lawyers at Fortas, Brown & Hoffman were Jewish and almost all of them had lost a friend or family member in the Nazi death camps. "Now," Thornton continued, "the Jews face another hour of liberation and, I fear, yet another war for survival." Only this time, he argued, the trouble was in Palestine as Jews attempted to return to their historic homeland and were met with opposition, hostility, and global apathy.

Slowly, Collins' thoughts turned away from the work that awaited him at the office but instead of focusing on the sermon, he was transported in his mind to a time before the war when he, newly married and fresh from Fordham Law School, practiced from an office in Queens. Beginning with only a single client, he built the practice into a lucrative business that afforded a comfortable, but by no means lavish, lifestyle. By the time America joined the war, Collins was older than most men who were drafted for military service and watched with growing frustration as friends and colleagues headed off to defend the country while he was left out.

Finally, when he could stand it no longer, he closed his law practice and enlisted in the army. After basic training, he was assigned to an infantry unit and months later deployed to North Africa. Three days after arriving there he was wounded by sniper fire and, much to his dismay, was sent home and discharged.

His father-in-law offered Collins a position in the family business, but Palmer was determined to contribute to the war effort and took a job with the government's War Production Board, which, among other things, regulated the conversion of manufacturing plants from

domestic consumer items to the production of wartime materiel. Collins was assigned to an enforcement office in Manhattan where he worked to prohibit the manufacture of unauthorized goods. After three years with the board he was ready for something else and took a job with Fortas, Brown & Hoffman, a large Manhattan law firm with a diverse corporate client base. Two years later he made partner—junior partner, but partner nonetheless.

Still, a nagging sense of guilt lingered. Others had fought the war from beginning to end and returned home as heroes. Many more lay silent in graves on foreign fields, never to return home. He, on the other hand, spent the war in Manhattan enjoying a lifestyle that was luxurious by comparison. And though it was not so much a problem for him as before, that Sunday as he fidgeted and squirmed on the pew, the words he heard from the pulpit unexpectedly dredged up a dark and bitter pain that he'd worked hard to keep inside.

As the sermon wore on, Collins forced himself to concentrate on the moment at hand and soon became aware that Rev. Thornton was looking in his direction. And not merely looking but several times staring intently, letting his eyes bore in as though the words of the sermon were meant for Collins and no other. “We *are* our brother’s keeper,” Thornton’s voice rose toward the conclusion. “If we claim the name of Christ as our own, we are no longer the people we used to be, living only for ourselves and taking all we can get only for self-indulgent pleasure. We are a people with holy obligations. The righteous among the living. And it’s long past time we acted that way.”

The last time Rev. Thornton looked and spoke like that, he’d had a message for Collins after the service concluded. A note from one of Thornton’s old friends who worked with the British government—a sympathizer to the cause of the Jews in Palestine who knew things he wanted to safely pass along to *someone* but hadn’t a clue to whom he could give them without creating unnecessary trouble. Thornton, equally sympathetic to the Jewish cause, was eager to help but could think of only one person—Collins—with access to people who might have influential contacts in the region. And so it had become

an unlikely arrangement—a Methodist pastor, receiving confidential information from a government agent, and handing it to an attorney at a predominantly Jewish law firm. Unlikely, unpredictable, and yet, to Collins’ utter delight, strangely mysterious and exciting.



When the service concluded, Collins stepped into the aisle and slipped on his overcoat while he waited for Olivia and their two children to join him. Once they were ready, he followed them up the aisle toward the vestibule and the church’s front entrance. Already he could feel the rush of cold air from the street and he glanced ahead to see the doors flung wide and the brilliant winter sunlight filling the street outside.

Moments later, Collins and his family reached the entrance and approached the doorway. Rev. Thornton stepped forward to greet them, and Olivia offered him her hand. Then Thornton turned to Collins and grasped his hand in a firm handshake. As their palms met, Collins felt a slender, flat object pressed against his hand and at once recognized it as a small envelope. Before he could speak, Thornton moved even closer, rested a hand on Collins’ shoulder, and said in a low voice, “I’m sure this one is as important as the last.”

“Yes,” Collins nodded. “No doubt it will be.” He drew back his hand and deftly slid the envelope into the pocket of his jacket.

Olivia, standing a few steps away, noticed what transpired between them and as Collins came down the steps from the church to the sidewalk she joined him at his side. “What was that all about?”

“Nothing, really. Just some business we’re working on.”

“You lawyers.” Olivia grinned and slipped her arm in his. “Always with your secrets.”

“Yeah,” he sighed. “Me and my secrets. Where are we going for lunch?”

“Surprise me,” she said playfully. “I like surprises.”

“No, you don’t.”

“Well, I like this kind of surprise,” she grinned.

Collins walked with Olivia and the children to the corner, then hailed a taxi and rode over to P.J. Clarke's, a restaurant on Third Avenue. As they ate lunch, Collins took the envelope from his pocket and glanced at the note inside. Olivia leaned near. "What is it?"

"It's nothing." He returned the note to the envelope and stuffed it back inside his pocket. "But I have to go to the office for a while this evening."

"Again?"

"Can't be avoided."

"Can we at least finish lunch?"

"Sure. There's always time for Sunday lunch."

Across the table his son, Greg, piped up, "You promised to throw the football with me in the park."

"And we will," Collins replied.

Olivia raised an eyebrow. "Isn't it a little cold today for throwing the ball?"

Collins shot a look in Greg's direction. "Never too cold for football, is it?"

"No, sir," the boy beamed. "The Cleveland Rams played the Washington Redskins for the NFL championship last year and it was eight below zero."

"We're not in Cleveland," Olivia demurred.

"We'll be fine," Collins assured. "It's not *that* cold outside."



True to his word, Collins braved the cold wintry blast that swept through the city and spent the afternoon in the park throwing the football with his son. They returned home to the apartment in time for dinner and as everyone else prepared for a relaxing evening at home, Collins changed clothes and slipped downstairs to the lobby.

From the building's front entrance, the doorman hailed a taxi and Collins rode down to Fraunces Tavern on Pearl Street. With the practiced ease of a regular customer, he took a seat at a table in the corner

and waited. A moment later, Stephanie, a barmaid, recognized him and came to the table. "Having your usual tonight?"

The question caught Collins by surprise but he managed to ask in a causal way, "And what is my usual?"

"Strawberry daiquiri."

"Yeah," Collins grinned, surprised that she remembered. "A strawberry daiquiri." The truth was, he'd never tasted a daiquiri—strawberry or otherwise—but he saw it once in a movie and, being the only drink he could remember, he ordered it when he needed the appearance.

In a few minutes, the barmaid returned with the drink and set it on the table before him. He lifted the glass to his lips as if taking a sip, then set it aside. When she was out of sight, he rose from the table and moved quickly through a service door that led to a narrow hallway in back.

At the far end of the hallway he came to an exterior door. He pushed it open and entered an alley in back. As Collins stepped away from the door, Sheldon Glaser moved out of the shadows to the right.

A large, burly man, Glaser was not much older than Collins but he'd seen far more of life and in a much harder way. With deep lines that creased his face and prematurely gray hair, he had the appearance of being much older. That evening, buried beneath a felt hat and heavy woolen overcoat, he seemed almost twice his age.

"Thought you weren't coming," Glaser said with a British accent.

"Got held up," Collins replied. It wasn't exactly true. He'd been caught up in tossing the ball with his son and forgot about the meeting, but he wasn't going to explain that to Glaser.

They walked up the alley a little way from the door, then Glaser turned to face him and said in a hushed tone, "As you know, the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry has been meeting the past few weeks in Washington."

"I read about it in the *Times*."

"Our delegation to those talks has been instructed to reject Truman's suggestion that a hundred thousand Jews be allowed to immigrate to Palestine each year."

Collins looked at him with surprise. "Your prime minister rejected the suggestion?"

"Yes."

"Why would he do that?"

"Our Foreign Office insisted that your government help implement the proposal by providing troops to assist in policing the region. Truman made no offer of such help and signaled he didn't want to flatly refuse, but would if pressed."

"You have the mandate," Collins said. "It's your responsibility to police it."

"Yes, but our prime minister won't implement this latest suggestion on his own."

"Why not?"

"Because he likes being prime minister, and he doesn't think he can retain his office while supporting the Jewish cause without US help."

"So, he wants US involvement to give him political cover."

"Something like that." Glaser nodded. "Right now, as he sees it, the key to his political future lies in pleasing the Foreign Office more than in pleasing the Americans." He glanced at Collins with a wary look. "As you know, Ernest Bevin and much of the staff at the Foreign Office don't like Jews."

"I'm becoming more and more aware of that," Collins noted. "But I thought Bevin was favorable to the Jewish cause. He courted Jewish support during your most recent election."

"Only as a means of getting Attlee elected as prime minister."

"So now that Attlee's in office, they're both showing their true colors."

"Yes," Glaser nodded.

"Have they announced their decision yet?"

"No. They won't do that for another two or three days."

"Why the delay?"

"Bevin thinks responding now would be too soon and might be seen as an affront to your president. They're concerned that responding

too quickly might make it seem as though they already had their minds made up before Truman ever offered his proposal.”

Collins looked over at him. “Did they?”

“Yes.”

“Why?” Collins asked with a hint of frustration.

Glaser glanced around and lowered his voice further. “They knew what Truman would say almost from the moment he decided it.”

Collins looked concerned. “They have an informant in the White House?”

“Yes.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know,” Glaser shrugged, “but I’m working on it.”

“Think it could be Steelman?”

“No.” Glaser shook his head. “Not Steelman. He’s solid. Listen, here’s the part I really wanted you to know. When they announce their plan, they’re going to say that they are limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine to only fifteen hundred per month.”

“That’s only eighteen thousand per year,” Collins protested.

“Yes,” Glaser agreed.

“They already have a list of applicants twice that long.”

“Three times,” Glaser corrected. “The current waiting list is three times that amount.”

“So, their decision means no Jewish refugees from Europe will be accepted.”

“It would seem so,” Glaser conceded.

Collins shook his head in dismay. “The British aristocracy always goes back on its word,” he muttered. Then just as quickly he turned to Glaser with a conciliatory gesture. “No offense intended.”

“None taken. But I would say,” Glaser reminded, “this is consistent with the white paper we issued earlier.”

“But,” Collins countered, “it’s not consistent with the Balfour letter. And it’s the same thing they did to the Arabs during the Great War—made a deal with Hussein for an Arab Middle East and all the

while Sykes and Picot were making a secret deal to divide the Middle East between France and England.”

“Yes, well, you must consider,” Glaser reminded him once more, “that we are your closest ally.”

“And the Jews ought to be your ally as well,” Collins rejoined.

“Yes, but they hate us.”

“Only for the way they’ve been treated,” Collins quipped.

“Small consolation.”

Collins sighed. “It’s 1946. We’ve fought two worldwide wars already this century. You’d think we’d be in a better place by now.”

“Well,” Glaser replied, “we’re dealing with centuries-old problems. And we’re not going to solve any of it standing here in the cold tonight. You’ll pass the word?”

“Yes, of course. You’ll find out the name of that informant in the White House?”

“I’ll do my best.”

“We’ll meet again?” Collins asked expectantly.

“I’ll contact you,” Glaser replied. “Same way as usual.”

“Be careful.”

“Ah,” Glaser smiled. “Careful is for the weak. I prefer adventure.”

Collins watched as Glaser moved past him and made his way to the street at the opposite end of the alley. A car came to a stop in front of him. Glaser opened the rear door, ducked inside, and the car drove away.



As Glaser disappeared from sight, Collins returned to the bar, where he found the daiquiri still sitting on the table where he left it. The barmaid was gone so he stepped to the bar and offered to pay the bartender. “You didn’t touch it. Something wrong with it?”

“Nah,” Collins said with a wave of his hand. “Not in the mood for it anymore. What do I owe you?”

The bartender held up his hand. “Keep it. I got plenty more where that one came from.”

Collins gave him a nod. "Thanks. I appreciate it."

As he started toward the door to leave, Collins noticed a man seated at a table to the left. Their eyes met and for a moment Collins was certain the man had been watching him since he came in from the alley. He pushed the thought aside, opened the front door, and stepped out to the street.

In the middle of the block Collins moved from the sidewalk to the street and raised his hand to hail a cab. Moments later, a taxi came to a stop just a few feet away. Collins opened the rear door and crawled inside. From his seat in back, he glanced to the left to see the man from the bar standing at a pay phone not far away. A shiver ran up Collins' spine and he scrunched lower in the seat, doing his best to stay out of sight.



From the bar on Pearl Street, Collins rode uptown to an apartment building on Madison Avenue. Though the hour was late, a doorman greeted him with a tip of the hat as he entered the lobby. Collins took the elevator to the fifteenth floor and made his way to an apartment on the north side of the building. There he rapped on the door with his knuckle and waited.

In a moment, the door opened and William, the butler, appeared. "Mr. Collins," he said with a note of surprise.

"I need to see Mr. Ginsberg."

"It's rather late," William said with a hint of condescension.

"I know it's late," Collins said with a hint of frustration. "See if he can give me a moment. It's important."

"Well, if you insist. Wait here while I check." Then he pushed the door closed.

As the owner of American Foreign Steamship Corporation, Morris Ginsberg was quite wealthy and a longtime client of Fortas, Brown & Hoffman. Collins had been assigned to his files since joining the firm. The two men got along rather well, and as their relationship grew,

Collins took on more and more responsibility for Ginsberg's business with the firm. When Collins made partner, he took control of it all.

A moment later, the door opened and Ginsberg appeared. From the butler's remark, Collins expected to find him in a robe and pajamas but instead he wore a white shirt with the top button undone and brown tweed pants held in place by suspenders. His round spectacles were perched on the bridge of his nose, and he held the business section of *The New York Times*. Though in his late seventies, he had intelligent eyes and a regal air about him that instantly commanded respect.

"What's the matter?" he asked with a troubled look.

"We need to talk."

"It can't wait until tomorrow?"

"I had another meeting with Glaser."

Ginsberg's eyes opened wide in a look of surprise. Without hesitation he stepped aside and gestured for Collins to enter, then took him by the elbow, guided him down the hall and into the study. When they were alone he asked, "What did Glaser say?"

"As you know, British and American negotiators have been meeting in Washington in an effort to work out an arrangement for Palestine that they can both support."

"Yes," Ginsberg nodded. "I was just reading about it in the newspaper. What about it?"

"Truman proposed allowing Jews to immigrate at the rate of one hundred thousand per year."

"That is a number Ben-Gurion will accept."

Collins shook his head. "It isn't going to happen."

"Why not?"

"Glaser says the British have decided to reject the American suggestion and propose instead a rate of fifteen hundred per month."

"That's only . . . eighteen thousand per year."

"I know," Collins nodded. "I told him the same thing."

"Why would they set it so low?"

"I don't know how they arrived at that number, but in order to

agree to the hundred thousand, they wanted the United States to commit troops to help police the mandate area.”

“They never intended to agree to the hundred thousand,” Ginsberg scoffed. “They made its acceptance conditional on the help of American troops merely to cover their senseless position. The Americans were never going to agree to participate at that level. When will they make their announcement?”

“Glaser said in two or three days.”

“You’re certain this information is reliable?”

“Reverend Thornton vouches for him, and the things he told us before all turned out to be exactly as he said.”

“Yes,” Ginsberg said thoughtfully. “Then we must inform Tel Aviv at once. I’ll get dressed and send a telegram tonight.”

“Just write it out and I’ll take it,” Collins offered.

“You’ll do that? Don’t you need to get home to your family?”

Collins checked his watch. “They’re all in bed by now. It’ll be okay. There’s a telegraph office on my way.”

“Well, okay,” Ginsberg conceded. “Give me a minute to compose a message.” A desk sat near the window opposite the door. He made his way to it and took a seat. Collins scanned the books on a shelf while he waited.

“Okay,” Ginsberg said a few minutes later. He rose from the chair and came around to the front of the desk. “This should do it.” He handed the note to Collins and gave him a pat on the back. “Thanks for doing this.”

“It’s my pleasure,” Collins replied.

“Ask them to send that message immediately to David Ben-Gurion. You know the address?”

“Yes,” Collins then turned toward the door and was gone.



It was late when Collins arrived back at the apartment building and as he rode up from the lobby he thought of all that had transpired that day. The note from Rev. Thornton, meeting Glaser in the alley,

relaying the news to Ginsberg, stopping at the telegraph office to send a message all the way to Palestine. A smile broke over his face. To the infamous David Ben-Gurion, no less. It felt good. Like he was part of something. Something big. Something important. Not like the importance of the business he handled for his clients. That was personal business. Transactions and negotiations that largely affected only the client. But this . . . this was something different. This was something bigger than himself. Bigger than the practice of law. Larger than the ebb and flow of daily existence. And far more rewarding than anything he'd done since . . . since putting on that army uniform and heading off to fight the Germans in North Africa. This was putting action to the sermons he heard on Sunday. Doing what others only talked about. Helping the Jews find a homeland in Palestine. That was something bigger than life itself.

Olivia was waiting as he came through the apartment door and met him in the hallway with an angry scowl. "Where have you been?" she demanded in a coarse and caustic whisper. "Do you know what time it is?" She was dressed in a gown and robe scrunched tightly against her body by her arms, which were crossed in front. Her brunette hair was down and fell limply to her shoulders but her eyes sparkled with anger.

"I was taking care of something for a client," Collins gently pushed the door closed behind him. "And yes," he continued, "I am well aware of the time."

"What could you possibly do for a client at this hour of the night?" Before he could respond, Olivia's face lit up with a look of realization. "You've been drinking." She sniffed the air and jabbed at him with her index finger. "I smell alcohol on your breath."

"I haven't been drinking," he defended.

"I smell it," she argued.

"I put the glass to my lips to make it look like I was supposed to be there, okay? But I never took a sip."

"To look like you were supposed to be there?" She trailed after him as he moved past her toward the bedroom. "Why were you in a bar, looking like you were *supposed* to be there?"

“I was just trying to look the part,” he sighed. The sense of elation he’d felt earlier was now totally evaporated. “I was just trying to look the part.”

“The part?” she railed as they reached the bedroom and closed the door. “What part?” She followed him toward the bathroom. “The part of an unfaithful husband meeting a woman at a bar while his wife’s at home taking care of the kids?”

He turned to face her. “No,” he answered more sharply than he intended. “I didn’t meet a woman. I didn’t meet anyone in the bar. I just wanted to look like a guy who comes to a bar for a drink.”

“Why?” she asked, her voice rising in pitch.

“So maybe no one would notice me,” he explained.

A frown wrinkled her forehead. “What are you talking about? Why were you there?”

He slipped off his jacket and hung it over the suit rack in the corner. “I was there to meet someone.”

“Ah-ha,” she chortled. “You did meet someone. I knew it.”

“I met someone, but I didn’t meet him in the bar.”

“Then where?”

“In the alley behind the bar.”

“The alley?” Olivia had a look of horror. “You met a *man* in an *alley* at *night* behind a bar?”

“Stop it,” Collins complained. “He had some information. My client needed it. I met him in the alley to hear what he had to say.”

“What kind of information?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Why not?”

“Because it’s the client’s business, not mine. I can’t talk about it.”

Olivia threw up her hands in frustration. “I can’t believe you expect me to swallow this.” She turned away, shaking her head as she moved toward the bed. “You leave us here alone all evening. Then come slinking back at . . .” She paused to glance at the clock on the nightstand. “Two in the morning. Won’t tell me why you were out. Or who you were with. Or why you had to meet in an alley.” She reached her side

of the bed, threw back the cover, and looked up in his direction. "What am I supposed to think?"

"That I was doing what I said. Taking care of something for a client." He dropped his shirt in the dirty clothes basket. "It's late. We need to get to bed."

"You need a shower first."

"I know," he sighed as he turned toward the bathroom. "I know."