

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Maybe the revolution *had* begun, Judy said to herself the next day. For the first time, she was considering taking seriously what previously seemed like so much radical fantasy. “Revolution Now!” was a phrase that had been as over the top as “Off the Pig!” a great blood-rushing rallying cry, but no one was going to really kill a policeman. This was Central Illinois University, not Watts.

But now it could be true. It really could be true. She worked at the corner of the binding of her Western Civ book, pulling out strings of fabric. Students were dead at Kent State. Dead! Four of them shot by the National Guard. She still couldn’t get her head around it. She drew the threads out one by one, pulling them up the full length of the book, separating the spine. This was too much, way, way too much. She hadn’t even been able to cope with Wil being gone, so soon after Michael, and now this. What would they have thought of this? she wondered. What could any rational person think of this?

The pounding rhythm of “I Want You” boomed out of the jukebox. Couldn’t anyone play another song? Her head started to throb in time with the song’s ominous, endless chorus, blotting out other sounds in the Tune Room as more and more people gathered to fill every table, lean against every wall space, and sit on every inch of the hard, wooden central aisle and the once-green carpet, now virtually tuftless with cigarette burns. She continued to play with the fabric, balling up the strands into makeshift worry beads.

“Revolution Now!” Achilles pounded the table, and the book shook. She lost her thread. Before she could react, he ran to another table, repeating the gesture with the cry: “We can’t stand for this!”

Judy watched him, amazed as he went from table to table with his fist pumped, knocking over books, kicking chairs, even punching arms—hard—for emphasis.

“What are we waiting for?” he shouted.

This laid-back guy who preferred talking to action was now the celebrity who had broken the news about Kent State and run, like Paul Revere, from the Union to the dorms to spread the word.

“They’re Shooting Us! They’re Shooting Us!”

The vein on his neck bulged. His face had darkened dangerously and contorted into a fierce scowl. If you could radicalize Achilles, Judy thought, anyone could turn.

Rage rose in waves around the packed room. People jumped in and out of positions from standing to sitting and back again, pacing up and down the center aisle, like lions in a cage. Banner paper had been hastily tacked on the walls with a scorecard: KENT STATE 4, CIU? She felt the room bubble and pop, knowing that at some point something would boil up and take form or burst. She knew she should absolutely be here, and absolutely not.

She turned back to her book to try to get a grip on her runaway mind but couldn’t. The music continued. *So . . . HEAVVVVVY*. They shot students! Kids! It was surreal. A bad trip. Initially, she assumed it was an absurd rumor. Surely, they had fired over their heads. Worst case, it had to have been an accident. When she realized it was really true, she felt responsible. The soldiers who had shot the kids were in the military, just as she was.

Her imaginary conversations justifying her position were no longer only with Michael or Wil. Now they were also with David.

“Don’t you see that just by being in the army you’re endorsing the war, like ROTC?” David would say, if she told him the truth. “Get pregnant to get out if you have to. A baby’s a bummer, yeah, but people are dying, and you’re tacitly saying it’s acceptable, right?”

She felt he was an agent of her conscience, like a lurking beast flapping about her, an angel of either white liberation or black destruction.

She heard a rustle and looked up to see David staring down at her from center stairs, as if he were reading her mind. When he was sure he’d caught her eye, he stepped up on a chair and stood with his arms wide.

“We have a plan,” he announced to the room. “There’s going to be an emergency session of the Student Senate tonight, right now.”

“A goddam meeting?”

“We should be in the streets!”

“It’s for the only thing we can do,” David said loudly but calmly.

Push-back continued to sputter at him.

“Kids are dead, and you want a meeting?”

“This is bull. We need an explosion. Match violence with violence.”

“It *is* a statement,” David answered. “Listen, I get it. You’re mad; you’re infuriated. But do you know why?”

“Because they’re fucking shooting at us.”

“Yes, and that’s bad. That’s unbelievable. But that happened yesterday. Do you know why you’re mad right now, this second?”

He let it sit for a minute. She watched him use the power of his full height as he stood stick straight, arms still out and raised above them all.

“You’re mad because you don’t have any power. You’re mad because you’re too young to vote but not to be drafted.”

“Yeah,” responded a few weak voices.

“You’re mad because you fought back, and they answered you with the lottery.”

“Yeah,” answered many more voices.

“You’re mad because now they are gunning us down, and you don’t think there’s a damn thing you can do about it.”

“Yeah!” The crowd bellowed back, and David watched as the match he lit took fire.

“You’re wrong,” he said. “You’ve got more power than you think. We are going to unite against the only thing we can. You’ve heard the calls to vote the war machine off campus. We’re going to get rid of ROTC, right now, once and for all. Tonight! We’ve tallied all the ballots and moved up the Student Senate meeting. We’ll show them we have a voice and we know how to use it.”

Judy’s heart sank.

Responses sailed back, half supporting and half incredulous.

“Is it *really* all we can do?” Achilles asked, a genuine question.

“All? What do you want, a riot?” David shot back. “More dead students?”

The two of them stared each other down in a moment of tight silence.

David then returned to the crowd and spoke again. “You don’t think this can be a movement that can spread, campus to campus, across the country? Don’t you see it can be a message to Washington that we aren’t going to allow them to continue to pull from our ranks for their dirty war? They Can Shoot Us, But They Can’t Recruit Us!”

“Come on,” he beckoned. “Say it! They Can Shoot Us, But They Can’t Recruit Us!” The crowd joined in. “They Can Shoot Us, But They Can’t Recruit Us!”

“We can do it.” He looked at Achilles, who had started nodding. “We have to do it.”

Judy realized she was nodding as well. Vida was right, the timing had caught up with the concept. Yes, David would use anything, but this time it made sense. The killing, all the killing had to stop, and this is where they could make that start to happen.

“Yes, we *have* to do it,” Achilles shouted back

Cheers of agreement drowned out the boom, boom beat of the song.

“Yeah!”

“Right on!”

“Let’s do it!”

David let it run for a while.

“Listen,” he waved his hands. “They moved the meeting to the ballroom so we can all get in. Quick, get up there.”

They followed Achilles, streaming up the stairs to the second-floor ballroom. David slowly stepped down from the chair and held his hand out to Judy. She took it and looked up into his eyes.

Her head was still pounding so loudly she couldn’t even hear the lyrics. There was nothing but the throbbing base along the floor, pulsing up the length of her body and settling right behind her eyes, louder and louder. If ROTC went, WRAIN would be next. Her life, as she’d planned it, would be over. But when David pulled her hand slightly, she stepped over the line with him and headed up the stairs.

The Union ballroom had been reconfigured to accommodate the crowd, with tables arranged in a large U. The student senators sat ready for action. Student spectators jammed around them in every chair, in all the aisles. It was as if the whole school wanted, needed, to be part of it. Their previous factions were all mixed up: the Greeks, the Trots, the Blacks, her group. Kent State had made them one.

“We have a vote at last,” Wizard said, once the meeting had been called to order.

As the newest senator, he jockeyed for the honor to call for the motion: ROTC was to be eliminated from the CIU campus as a symbol of the “aggression without representation” of the war in Vietnam. Various senators, including Donnell, stood up to speak of the government that was now murdering the very students it was recruiting to fight that war.

“It might only be a token victory,” Wizard said, “since there are only twenty-six students enrolled in ROTC at CIU, but still, it’s twenty-six fewer body bags. This is our statement.”

“We’ve got the ballots! We *do* have a voice, we *do* have a vote, after all. All those who agree, say ‘aye.’”

“Aye!” came the response, loud and forceful. The crowd cheered. David, Vida, and even Lori, were cheering. Everyone. Judy started to cheer. It felt great.

“It’s our hope,” Donnell said, standing up, “that this will be the beginning of a movement that will spread across the country, a meaningful rebellion and a message to Washington.”

“Yes!” David yelled, raising his fist. He didn’t even seem to care that Donnell had taken his line.

The cheers that joined him were deafening, the release of tension palpable. Judy felt tears brimming over. They were all tired, she realized, of feeling like victims passively sitting as kids

their age were being selected for service—or now, gunned down. For the first time, it seemed they all really believed they could make something happen.

She thought about Wil and September 14 and Michael and Howie and everyone else who had brought her to this moment and understood that, yes, it just had to all stop, now. There was nothing that wasn't worth making it stop. No one else could die. She started clapping like crazy.

Taylor Adams, the president of the Student Senate, called for order. An Alpha Delta business major, handsome and polished in his pressed slacks and shiny loafers, he had always been respected for his ability to handle the fractionalized Student Senate meetings, with a proven knack for being able to override even Donnell at his most obnoxious.

He paused for a long time scanning the crowd, then down at the table before him, and finally straight ahead, seeming to encompass the entire room.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I feel to join ROTC is an individual’s choice. Anyone should be allowed to make it. I’m going to have to veto this.”

The ballroom shrank into stunned silence. The crowd stood with their mouths gaping open, the senators’ heads whipped anxiously from side to side, trying to figure out what had just happened. Swanson stood in the back. It was hard to know what side he was on.

“No,” Wizard said, standing up. “Taylor, I’m sorry. But what may have seemed logical at some point is no longer viable. The stakes have changed. They’re shooting us. You talk about choice? The draft offers no choice.”

“If there was no choice *not* to go, why should there still be a choice *to* go?” Donnell chimed in and Judy recognized the argument.

Yes, now it made perfect sense.

“We just voted. Don’t you see that vetoing this takes away the only voice we have?” Wizard said. “How are you any different from the government not letting us vote at all?”

“I’m sorry,” Taylor said, as if he really meant it. “It’s done.” He slammed the gavel on the table.

Screaming and shouting merged into a loud, agonized wail. Judy felt the pressure rush back, and was afraid nothing would contain it now. Hundreds of students ran from the ballroom yelling, every fist clenched in defiance. And then, as they passed through the doors and filed down the stairs in front of the Union, Judy heard it—the sound of that first window breaking, a sound as terrifying as a rifle shot, a chilling signal that all bets were off, all order gone.

The breaking glass stopped many. Judy was paralyzed. The crowd stepped over the shards in front of the Union and split up, confused. A contingent headed toward town, but she was terrified of being in the middle of a fractured mob. Repelled and emboldened at the same time, and very, very frightened, she joined the group running for the dorms.

What was left of the ROTC office was being guarded by two rows of men in fatigues standing at attention, probably the entire ROTC cohort. She slowed as she passed, looking for Pete, and lost a step. She couldn’t make out which one he was. She was bumped into then drawn violently back into the crowd just as she saw his head turn toward her. There was no stopping as she was propelled forward.

Hundreds of them ended up in front of the electrical building, two stories of soaring glass windows through which you could see pipes and grid work, all the bones of what was needed to keep the campus illuminated. A nearby pile of construction debris from a new garden feature meant to soften the building’s appearance was irresistible. The first stone didn’t break the glass.



The second was bigger, more of a rock. It made a clean round pocket of a hole, edges white with splinters. After that, a shower of projectiles assaulted the building.

“Here’s my vote,” said someone, who threw a piece of metal that hit the building’s façade with a huge screech. Other’s followed, “Mine, too!” “ROTC off the goddamn campus!” “Stop the War with THIS!” “Remember Kent State.”

Judy saw David, Wizard, Lori, and Achilles pick up stones from the garden and hurl them, again and again, their rage escalating with each loud thwack. Three guys pulled the bowl of a birdbath off its pedestal and smashed it to the ground, then threw the pieces and the pedestal itself against the building to inflict greater damage. Huge sheets of glass hit the ground, shattering as students ran for cover. A street sign was knocked over and its pole and plates were used to finish off the remaining glass. Students were hanging out of the windows of the nearby dorms encouraging them with cheers, many rushing down to join them. It was a bona fide riot, out of control. Judy was appalled by the twisted, triumphant looks on the faces of people she knew, Meldrich, Donnell, even RoMo.

But there were no police, no sirens. It was as if they were letting this part of campus be sacrificed.

Judy and Vida made their way to Wizard’s dorm room, climbing in and out of his first-floor window to monitor what was going on. They heard a series of small, erratic explosions and watched as the electrical building went dark, their lights went off, and the eerie night descended like a heavy, opaque curtain over the campus. They stared out Wizard’s window at the blackness, until their eyes adjusted, and they could make out shapes and forms by the light of the nearly full moon. They heard shouts, thuds, and the scrape of metal against stone. People were running, yelling—no longer slogans—just to each other for safety.

Their entire group eventually made it to Wizard's room. They sent alternating sets of scouts to check out the source of shouts and unidentified sounds. RoMo began to scream hysterically when they heard a series of pops while Wizard was out.

Vida took her by the shoulders and shook her. "Get it together," she said. "We've all got to keep it together." Then RoMo hugged her, holding on tight for longer than Judy thought possible. Sheila was in the corner, huddled with her yarn, knitting furiously like Madame Defarge, while the guys paced in frustration and to keep sharp. "If this is the revolution," Meldrich said, "we need to be ready."