
CHAPTER ONE

TOP SECRET

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
OFFICE OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Transcript of interview with Mr. Hyman Schneider

Also present:

Special Agent A. Maynard

Special Agent in Charge M. Reed

HYMAN SCHNEIDER:

The fiasco began when Sol Zelig's kid stopped by my Manhattan penthouse late one evening with the worst idea I've ever heard. And what a fiasco that was! You don't need me to tell you that. The damage caused—the lives lost and property destroyed—boggles the mind. It simply boggles the mind. I think in your circles you'd call that a *cluster* fiasco. Am I right?

My apologies. I'm an old man. I get carried away. You're busy people and so am I. I'll cut to the chase.

Back to that fateful evening. This was about two months ago. Sol Zelig's kid pitched me the worst idea I've ever heard.

Trust me, I hear a lot of bad ideas. Young CEOs swarm to me like bees to a flower. Confident and dreamy-eyed to a man, they'll promise you the stars in heaven above to get their seed money. But you'd better be careful. If you can't tell the good investments from the bad, they'll sting you. They'll sting you bad.

I'd known David Zelig since his bar mitzvah. He'd filled out into a handsome young man with thick dark hair that needed a cut. He got his looks from his late father. If only he'd inherited his business sense, too.

It was his great-grandfather who started Zelig Pictures, you know. The Zelig progeny no longer ran the studios. David Zelig, the last of the family line, loved the industry but his heart wasn't in management. He wrote screenplays—spy stories and conspiracy thrillers. The executives never greenlit his scripts for production, but rejection didn't get him down. Zelig Pictures was still his family's private company; he should never want for money. He should've been lazing on a yacht somewhere, sipping margaritas and chatting up pretty young women. Or so I thought.

Instead, he'd turned up here. He sat right over there where you're sitting, his hands fidgeting with his whisky glass. After a minimum of small talk, he pitched me the mother of all bad ideas. The pitch was so bad I had trouble wrapping my head around it.

I said, "You mean like a secret society?"

"*The* secret society," David told me. "The Elders of Zion. The one the Gentiles have always accused us of running. They already believe we control the world. What's stopping us?"

Had this been anyone else, I would have kicked him out. But David's late father had been a close friend. Over the years, he'd gotten me out of many a tight spot. The least I could do was steer his kid away from a colossal mistake.

“David,” I told him. “Why on God’s green earth would you want to get mixed up with such nonsense?”

A fire burned in the kid’s eyes. “You read the news, Hymie. There’s been one synagogue shooting after another. It’s like open season for anti-Semites, and law enforcement is powerless to stop them. Maybe it’s time we took matters into our own hands.”

The kid had good intentions, but he needed to calm down. So I poured him another shot of Balvenie and told him a story.

Two yids are sitting in a Berlin coffee shop in the nineteen thirties. One is reading a neo-Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer*.

“How can you read that garbage?” the other yid says, outraged.

“Why not?” the first yid replies. “When I read the Jewish newspapers, I learn that the Jews are poor, persecuted, and at each other’s throats. When I read this paper, however, I discover that the Jews are wealthy and united, they control banks and are taking over the world. Which story do you prefer to read?”

I hammered home my point to avoid any misunderstandings.

“It’s a myth, David,” I told him. “A delusion. Jews are too busy bickering among themselves and worrying about what their Gentile neighbors think of them to pull off anything like a global Jewish conspiracy.”

He said, “I’ll settle for a national one.” This, you understand, was one very stubborn young man.

“There is no Elders of Zion society pulling the strings of history,” I told him. “Never was. Never could be. The ‘Jewish world domination’ fantasy is riddled with contradictions. It’s as irrational as anti-Semitism itself. People have hated Jews for promoting democracy and for promoting communism, for being rich and for being poor, for sticking to themselves and

for trying to assimilate. In times of change and uncertainty, the haters look for scapegoats and they blame the Jews. But it's all in their pickled brains. They pick on us *because* we are powerless.”

The kid still wasn't backing down. “But what if we weren't powerless? What if we worked together and fought back?”

“David, do you have any idea how difficult it would be to run a secret organization? Think about how many people would need to keep their mouths shut. That's why all those conspiracy theories are wrong. Governments are barely competent enough to govern, never mind hide aliens or fake moon landings.”

Your organization excluded. I have great respect for you and your fellow FBI officers.

M. REED:

That's “agents,” Mr. Schneider. We call FBI employees agents.

HYMAN SCHNEIDER:

Thank you for pointing that out. Agent sounds much sexier, doesn't it?

[LAUGHTER]

Where were we? Right. Conspiracy theories.

“It's a fool's errand,” I told him. “Forget about it. You don't need the money. And as for power—power is just a bull's-eye painted on your head. It's not worth it, David.”

The kid deflated like an old party balloon. He seemed weighed down by all the world's problems. Only later did I learn the true reason behind his crackpot scheme. You see, David had just lost Zelig Pictures. The last remaining Zeligs had been cheated out of their family legacy and all that went with it. David knew this for a fact but he couldn't prove it. And so his mind had filled with conspiracies.

“I'm glad you turned to me for advice,” I told him. “I'm flattered. And I'm sorry to be so blunt. But cheer up, for

God's sake. Find something better to do with your time and energy. For example, you could find a nice young woman and settle down. Your father would have liked that."

David Zelig sighed. Then he shook my hand and left. But do you think he listened to me? Ha! If he had, we wouldn't be sitting here, would we?

CHAPTER TWO

“David Zelig, to what do we owe this *rare* honor?”

David stiffened when he heard the familiar oily voice. A smiling middle-aged comb-over sashayed toward him from the other side of the Lincoln Center foyer.

Rare honor. The implied criticism was well-founded. All his grown life, David had avoided the showy fundraisers of the Jewish American Public Initiative, the non-profit known by the unfortunate acronym, JAPI.

All around him, gray-haired donors in Canali suits gorged themselves on finger food and snatched wine goblets from floating trays, while their Botoxed wives lectured trapped diplomats on politics. Through the tall French windows, the skyscrapers of Manhattan loomed over Central Park, their myriad yellow eyes leering at David as the evening sky faded to black.

The sudden urge to flee gripped David as Gerry Cantor, the JAPI chairperson, swooped down on him like a smiling vulture, but David held his ground. Tonight, Gerry Cantor was just the kind of man David had wanted to meet at the JAPI Northeast Gala—a man with connections to powerful

Jews.

David suppressed his gag reflex at the fawning smile and shook the outstretched hand.

“The honor is all mine, Gerry.”

Cantor wrapped David’s hand in both of his to prevent his quarry’s escape. “I’ve been trying to get a Zelig to speak at our events for decades. Our foundation deeply appreciates your family’s leadership.” By “leadership” he meant money. Would the chairperson still swoon over him once he learned of the Zelig family’s recent financial troubles?

The man’s doublespeak triggered David’s mean streak. He pointed at the poster depicting the evening’s entertainment, a ventriloquist from Vegas. “Is that meant to be ironic?”

Confusion swept Cantor’s face. “What do you mean?”

“You know. Ventriloquists—people who put words in their dummies’ mouths.” The chairperson maintained his look of blank noncomprehension, so David elaborated. “At a fundraiser for a partisan lobby group. I hope the show won’t offend the politicians.”

A hint of annoyance passed over Cantor’s face like a speeding cloud, then his gracious-host persona bounced back. “We prefer the word ‘education’ to ‘lobby.’”

“I’m sure you do.”

Cantor launched right into a proposal. “What about the JAPI Convention?”

“What about it?”

“It’s two weeks from now. We’d love for you to deliver the keynote speech. People are tired of seeing the same old fogeys every year. It’s time they heard from the new generation.”

“It’s time,” whispered the simultaneous translation in David’s brain, *“for the new generation to renew their families’ pledges to the JAPI coffers.”*

David’s brow prickled with sweat. The very thought of

delivering a speech before the conclave of Jewish philanthropy triggered a panic attack.

Cantor had hit him with a large ask. David had attended the annual convention in Washington over a decade ago as a curious teenager tagging along with his father, and he had no intention of repeating that mistake. But he'd do well to ingratiate himself with the showrunner. Soon, David would hit back with his own even larger ask.

"What's the theme this year?"

Cantor framed an invisible banner with his hands. "Protect America's Minorities."

Now that was a cause David could rally behind. At last, a Jewish organization was facing the Hydra of anti-Semitism.

"I like it. It's about time we did something about those synagogue shootings."

"Synagogue shootings?" Cantor said, aghast. "No, David. We're talking about African and Latin Americans. We're talking persecuted minorities—those who suffer from systemic prejudice and racism. Not Jews! America has treated us very kindly."

Being gunned down in a house of worship wasn't David's idea of kind treatment, but he let the comment go. Was Cantor the wrong man for the job or had David approached him at the wrong time? During the fundraiser, the JAPI chairperson was on set and in character. But on a different soundstage would Cantor sing a different song?

"Gerry, I need a favor."

"Anything, Mr. Zelig. Name it."

"Can we speak in private?"

Cantor swallowed hard and nodded, unable to deny the request of an important donor, but probably sensing a dressing down by the young heir. He led David behind a curtain and into a side room jammed with stacks of padded conference chairs.