

Prologue

Ten Years Ago

As the moonlight painted a glistening path across the water behind the Harbor Yacht Club, fifty-four-year-old Sarah Harrington's eyes scanned the outdoor party, a serene smile gracing her lips. It was the kickoff of Memorial Day weekend and she was looking forward to having the family together for another summer. The unseasonable chill in the air was the only possible hint of the deadly turn this night of celebration might take, but Sarah's thoughts were focused instead on her children and how quickly life was moving.

How was it even possible that her baby boys—her twin sons, Simon and Ethan—had graduated from college? A sense of awe washed over her as she watched Simon twirl his girlfriend, Michelle, expertly on the dance floor. Ten feet away, Ethan and his girlfriend, Annabeth, danced hand in hand, ring-around-the-rosie style with Sarah's third child, twelve-year-old Frankie.

A flicker of memory transported her back to the days when motherhood seemed like an elusive dream. She and Richard had married fairly young, right after he graduated from law school. He was twenty-six at the time. She was twenty-four. They both knew they wanted children, but they were in no hurry. He was building his career in Boston. She was a budding artist. Their family would grow

when it was meant to happen. Seven years later, he was a successful law firm partner. She had landed a regular spot with an art gallery in Manhattan.

They were more than ready for a child. More than ready to stop waiting patiently. She was so devastated when the first round of in vitro failed that Richard wanted to stop trying, to spare her another heartbreak. Father Hogan from Saint Cecilia suggested an adoption consultant another couple from the parish had used.

But the second try at the clinic worked and then some. The first ultrasound showed two eggs sharing a single placenta. Identical twins. Not as common as fraternal twins, but still an increased possibility with fertility assistance. Just like that, she went from having no babies to two. And ten years later, when Sarah was forty-three, little Frances gave them a delightful surprise. Then the Harringtons were five, as Sarah had always wanted.

The twins, such proud and doting big brothers, were the ones who quickly decided that their beloved baby sister wanted to be called Frankie. Sarah wasn't certain about allowing it. She assumed the boys said it because they wanted a little brother instead. But the name managed to stick for good, even though Frankie never became the tomboy her brothers may have yearned for. Tonight, she wore a dress she had selected from the department store herself after Sarah told her that the theme was a "summer white party," meaning everyone would be wearing white. Sarah had never seen a dress with so much satin and tulle outside of a wedding. Frankie could not have been more thrilled.

Oh, how happy Sarah was that this party to celebrate Simon and Ethan's accomplishments had turned out so splendidly. The boys were strikingly handsome, their dark hair and tanned skin contrasting with their matching white outfits—collared shirts, linen blazers, skinny jeans. The clouds that had threatened to move the entire affair indoors had cleared. And though Simon and Ethan weren't exactly exuding brotherly love, there were no outward signs of the conflict they'd been having the last couple of days over that ugly

business about Annabeth. From the smile in Ethan's eyes, Sarah was fairly certain that the girl wasn't going anywhere. Maybe Richard would eventually see that, too, and come around. Maybe seeing how sweet she was being with Frankie tonight would change his mind.

"A candy for your thoughts."

Sarah had been so overcome by sentiment that she hadn't even noticed her best friend Betsy approach. They had met at an art camp in the ninth grade and were instant friends. They'd known each other so long that they couldn't remember which one of them had decided that a penny wasn't enough to trade for your innermost thoughts. Candy it was.

They weren't twins, but they had both managed to buy the same tailored white pantsuit for the party. Rather than flip a coin to see who had to return the purchase, they decided to embrace the fact that they obviously both had impeccable taste.

Even in matching outfits, no one would ever confuse the two friends. Betsy was five-foot-six, with an athletic build, and frequently referred to Sarah, small-boned and five inches shorter, as her *pint-sized pal*. Sarah, as usual, had opted tonight for an understated but refined look, choosing a white silk tank and classic pearls to coordinate with her pantsuit. Her chestnut hair, already slightly kissed by the sun from their time at the beach house, was swept back in a loose bun with a few playful tendrils to frame her heart-shaped face.

Betsy, always the gutsier of the pair, had gone with a white tuxedo-style vest instead of a blouse. Her gold statement necklace arguably violated the all-white dress code, but Betsy always knew which rules to follow and which to bend. Her blond hair, streaked with threads of silver, cascaded in gentle waves around her shoulders.

Watching her boys, Sarah thought about how they, too, might appear very similar—physically identical, in fact—on the surface, but were so completely different. Simon the Harvard graduate would start Columbia Law School in the fall.

He'd had his life planned for as long as she could remember.

He announced in sixth grade he wanted to be a lawyer, just like his father. When Sarah and Betsy had proposed, half jokingly, that perhaps one of the twins would like to take Betsy's daughter, Michelle, to a ninth-grade dance, Simon had leapt at the suggestion. The two had been together ever since.

Ethan was more of a free spirit like Sarah. *Or at least the free spirit I used to be*, Sarah thought. He finished U Mass Amherst on time, but not without a stern talk or three when he wanted to quit. He was a talented guitarist who dreamed of being a working musician. Richard told him he may as well buy lottery tickets for a living.

As for girlfriends, Sarah suspected there were many, even though she never met any of them—not until Ethan met Annabeth in Harbor Bay last June. She and Richard assumed it would be a few weeks of Cape Cod flirting until Ethan resumed his senior year, but instead, Ethan had developed a focus for the young woman that he'd previously shown only for music. *It will all work out for them*, Sarah told herself. *For all of us. Of course it will.*

How could she sum up all of these thoughts for Betsy and her offer of candy?

"Look at them, Betsy. I know I'm biased, but they're just perfect. When I think about how much I love my children, and how quickly they've grown up, I think my heart might literally burst."

"Well, let's certainly hope it's not literal. Bad for your health and would be quite a mess to clean."

"Perhaps an overly graphic choice of words," Sarah conceded.

Betsy wrapped one arm around Sarah's shoulder and gave a quick squeeze. "I know exactly what you mean. It goes by so fast. I still think of Dennis as my little boy, but he told us today he's planning on law school. He's starting to study for the entrance exams already. So we'll both have another generation of lawyers in the family."

"Where is Dennis by the way?"

"With my notorious early-bird of a husband. Don't be upset, but Walter was practically falling asleep at the table, so I gave him permission to go home. If I had to guess, Dennis would have stayed lon-

ger if the bartenders hadn't carded him when he tried to get a drink. His twenty-first birthday is in October, and I can tell he's counting down the days."

"Hopefully the day will come and go with less fanfare than the twins stirred up." Simon and Ethan had asked to spend their birthday weekend at the beach house alone with two friends. Sarah and Richard only found out about the raging party of almost a hundred college students when they got a call from their neighbor about a group of kids who had snuck into their backyard to jump in their hot tub. "Look at your Michelle out there with Simon. So smart and beautiful and grown-up already."

"If I had to guess, we two birds might have a wedding to plan in the not so distant future."

"It's certainly only a matter of time," Sarah said. "But knowing Michelle, we won't have a single bit of sway. That girl is even more stubborn than her headstrong mother."

Sarah noticed Betsy's gaze move from the Harrington children on the dance floor to Sarah's husband, Richard. He was talking to Howard Carver, one of Richard's two law partners at the small firm he founded when he walked away from big-firm practice. The other was Betsy's husband, Walter. Richard and Sarah were the first to announce thirteen years ago that they were building a vacation house on the Cape, only two short hours from Boston in Harbor Bay. Sarah soon convinced Betsy and Walter to do the same. Howard, seeing a good investment opportunity, soon followed.

Richard and Howard both held martini glasses half-filled with a dark liquid. Manhattans, if Sarah had to guess.

"Have you made any progress with him?" Betsy asked.

"Not tonight, Betsy, of all nights. Look how happy they all are. That's all I wanted out of this weekend." Richard's eyes connected with hers as he registered that they were looking in his direction. He smiled, his blue eyes gleaming with energy even at this distance. She felt herself returning his admiring gaze instinctively—the way she always did, the way he expected.

To any outside observer, it would look like a scene from a fairy tale. The perfect graduation party for the perfect twins from the perfect family.

Two hours later, as thirty-six-year-old Jenna Merrick drove past the Harbor Yacht Club, she could see the twinkling white lights from the party. She rolled down her car window to take in the sounds of laughter and music soaring above the coastline. The Harringtons, always so kind, had invited her to attend. She had been tempted. She'd worked the yacht club before as catering staff, but had never actually been a guest. But how would it look for the local diner waitress to show up at a fancy summer party with the vacation-house crowd? And what would she possibly wear?

Maybe it would be a Cinderella story. She'd find her future prince at the ball. Or maybe not and she'd end up standing alone in a corner or, worse, handling requests from people who assumed she worked there. If someone asked her how she knew the twins, what would she even say? *From the diner and then somehow ten years ago, I became their family's summertime dog walker and sitter?*

Jenna had declined the invitation, offering instead to give Bacon a nighttime walk during the party as her graduation present to the boys. She was actually there nine years earlier when the kids had named the boxer puppy. The family's previous dog, Picasso, had passed away the November before, and the grief had passed enough for the Harringtons to welcome a new canine friend.

Continuing prior tradition, Sarah wanted to name the puppy after an artist. She narrowed the list to Warhol, O'Keeffe, and Pollock. Simon, the same kid who had mastered at a young age the fine art of requesting a menu substitution politely, asked his parents if he and his siblings could research other options. Onto the Internet they went. As Simon read aloud a list of artists the children had never heard of, he reached Francis Bacon. Sarah explained that he was an Irish-born portraitist known for his dark, unsettling paintings of the

human figure, but all the kids cared about was his funny last name. Their delighted giggles were even louder than the sound of tonight's graduation party. Bacon the Boxer it was.

When Jenna reached the Harringtons' house, she stopped at the gate and entered her personal passcode into the keypad. As the gate slid open, she took in the grandness of the house that awaited. It had a traditional rambling Cape Cod shingle exterior with a gable roof but was three times larger than the neighboring homes. The lush, manicured gardens burst with color. The nights she spent alone in the home with Bacon were like a luxury vacation.

Her key was in the front door when her stomach tightened with a sudden unease. Something felt different.

The night was completely silent. Even when she closed her eyes to try to hear something—anything—all she came up with was a faint thump in the distance, likely music bouncing off the water from the yacht club.

Instead of turning the key in the lock, she rang the doorbell. She heard the resulting chime clearly, even from the front porch. And yet, the night silence returned immediately.

Where was Bacon?

Bacon had an uncanny ability to sense who was at the other side of a door. And to Bacon, all humans fell into two camps—friends and strangers. Strangers were assumed to be home invaders and were greeted with a thunder of deep-throated barks that would send the toughest of criminals running for dear life. But with friends, Bacon was pure joy, whining with the anticipation of an imminent playdate.

Bacon was a nine-year-old dog, which was getting up in years for his breed. Maybe he had lost his hearing or his magic people-detecting skills. But it might be worse. She didn't want to find him that way. And how would she possibly break the news to the Harringtons about their sweet boy, Bacon?

She had no choice. She couldn't exactly call the police because of a dog's silence. She turned the key and pushed the door open

slowly, steeling herself to find him if the worst had in fact happened.

She saw the blood immediately, and then the bodies. A broken strand of pearls was spilled in the blood. Richard was facedown, but Sarah's eyes were open, frozen in death with confusion. It wasn't until Jenna began to scream that Bacon joined her, howling in anguish from the back of the house.

The dog knew his mom and dad were gone.