

Prologue

“. . . crossed hearts and promises. . .”

Present day, New York, NY

Maybe we are through. It droned in Pat’s head like a chant, propelled her blindly along Broadway in the April twilight. She didn’t smell the bus exhaust, the dirty dogs languishing in their day long steam bath, the greening scent of new spring that hung tentatively in the evening air. Indifferent to the chill, Pat’s trench coat flapped open like sails in the breeze. *Maybe it’s time.* It was her occasional refrain, but how could that be the answer?

Oblivious to blinking crosswalk signs, Patricia Reid followed the crowd—stopping or going with the packs of pedestrians who challenged cars for the right of way. At the corner of 40th Street she pounded the hood of a Jeep that came too close when the light turned green. “What the hell’s wrong with you!” Pat glared at the driver, but she never really saw him, or heard what he yelled as he sped off. There was too much wrong and it whirled in her head. Truth was, she’d felt it coming, tried to blow past the rough spots, sure they’d take care of themselves. And they had, more or less—until now.

A lawyer—first thing in the morning I’ll call—who? Pat knew *their* lawyer wouldn’t touch it—too much invested in *them*—too personal. But hadn’t they been together too long to be talking about separate attorneys, who was entitled to what? When did the ‘stuff’ outweigh decades of trust?

For several strides Pat walked next to a slim matron, wielding a cane in one hand, a cigarette in the other and for the first time in years Pat wanted one—smoke sticks Marcus used to call them when he would bug her to quit. She wanted to suck the heat and the burn into her lungs, blow out the smoke like a dragon. She settled for a deep drag of second hand smoke,

remembered when crossed hearts and promises used to be enough, and kept walking.

As kids all any of them had was scraped knees, and dreams that took them on separate journeys for a while. But ten years ago Gayle and Marcus had come back into her life. It was like Pat got back her right hand and her left, the two halves of her heart, the friend who was her sister and her partner in a business they had grown from nothing, together. And the husband who was her friend, her lover, her safe place. How could she be on the verge of losing one of them again?

Pat felt the phone vibrate in her pocket and kept walking. She'd had enough talk for one day. And she hadn't changed her mind. This wasn't their first fight. Since they were kids, they had disagreed too many times, about too many things to count. It certainly didn't stop because they loved each other. But there was no yelling this time, just mean, hateful words. This may not have been their nastiest quarrel, but was it really their last?

Less than a block later the phone quivered again, and again before she walked another two. There was so much going on now, so much at stake she couldn't afford to brush off.

She yanked the phone out— saw the number and almost hit 'ignore', but something— the need to go another round? the need to have the last word— again? the hope for an apology?— she didn't know what it was, but she answered.

“Yes.” Pat's tone was flat, challenging, cold. And she had no warning the temperature would drop so suddenly, flash-freeze her anger. “Where. . .? I'm on my way.”

Pat waved frantically for a taxi, wanted to stand in front of one, make it stop. Finally a cab pulled over. “Madison and 101st.” She willed the lights to stay green, the traffic to clear, but it seemed to be taking forever, like they were driving over shifting sand. Perched on the edge of the seat, she prayed for this to be all right and tried to remember that even a bad day has good parts.