

Part I, Tomara: October, 1957

1/ Freddie

“Freddie is a scrappy little guy. He is ambitious. Ambitious men usually find a way to keep on keeping on. He came up the hard way. He does not expect life to be easy. You two will make out fine together in Florida or wherever you might end up,” said Marilyn Bloom during her telephone talk with her daughter Tomara (accent on the first syllable). “Besides,” she said, “you know what he calls himself. He is, you know, the eternal optimist.” At this time, Tomara had been happily married to Freddie Silver for twelve good years. “Where there’s a will there’s a way,” said Marilyn, quoting Freddie. This aphorism was Freddie’s very favorite saying.

A close second? “No risk, no reward.”

Forty-one, Freddie Silver was thin as a teenager running in a cross-country race. The family genes, said friends, sourced his trim physique. Look at his brother Arnold. Freddie had a preferable explanation. He was on the go-go-go all the time, often eating on the run. He never waited outside of a fully fitted kitchen like Arnold while his wife Shirley fixed him a triple-decker club with homemade sides. Freddie, by himself, might spread a thin layer of dark tuna on a slice of plain white bread. He slapped the sandwich together. He might fix a margarine sandwich. Freddie was five feet, five inches. His hair was light and curly. He had a strong chin, his eyes large and blue. His eyeglasses were the antique wire rims worn by his deceased father, when Ben Silver stitched the close work at his tailor shop. The wire frame pinched the skin above Freddie’s nose, leaving a red mark. The pinch itself was uncomfortable. To relieve the discomfort, Freddie regularly took off his glasses. Freddie was not wearing these frames either

to honor his father nor for sentimental reasons, however, but simply because he was a frugal man. He, frankly, saw no waste good money to replace them. He wore these same ancient wire rims all through the big war. Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without. Freddie cleaned his lenses at least twice daily, as if to erase the many scratches there. Whether the present prescription was likely upgraded to suit the state of Freddie's eyesight, who knew?

As for Freddie's more complete and extensive vision of his future? It was a secret for up until now, not only from Tomara but from the world.

On the seventh of October 1957, Freddie telephoned Tomara from his spacious office at Wagunquett Waste during the late morning. Later on this same day would occur the worried conversation between Tomara and her mother about a future with Freddie, a segment of which opened this narrative. Freddie never liked small talk on the telephone or in-person. He quickly dropped a bomb on his wife as if he were Pappy Boyington, she the once glorious city of Berlin. The explosion had come out of the wild blue yonder as far as Tomara was concerned. He had unloaded his business, Freddie told her. He had sold Wagunquett Waste that he had built up over a tough dozen year period. He was getting more than his full asking price. From whom? From his competitor, Larsen. Freddie dropped a second bomb. He had written the biggest check of his life to some guys from Great Neck, Luchin and Van Levine, he said, his voice steady. A check of \$60,000 made him a partner in a real estate development in south Florida. Oh, by the way, he had quick-sold their lovely four-bedroom on Searcher Street. The Silvers were moving to Coral Sands, Florida. This informative talk by Freddie was the first that Tomara had heard of any of this strange news. "Standing still is moving backwards," Freddie told her, sounding more cold-blooded than normal.

Six hours after Freddie's bomb blast of a phone call and talking with her mother in Providence, Tomara let Freddie know how she felt about standing still, losing her home, and the family shuffling off to Florida. She was not happy about it. At eight thirty on this evening, Daniel and Nicolette, eleven and seven, were in their separate bedrooms when Freddie and Tomara slipped onto a beige leather couch in their living room. Thirty-eight, Tomara had a pretty face, shiny hair, heavy legs, and a college degree with Honors. She wore a floral A-line and a pair of low heels. A green ribbon fastened her shiny dark hair into a ponytail. The gold locket around her slim neck held a miniature Kodak of Freddie and the kids. Tomara was, by nature, a patient and genial woman. Life in Wagonquett, she said, was good. Why might they wish to move? She was mistress of a fine home with a large backyard, where the neighborhood kids played so nicely. She loved to see them there. She had a generous budget for running the house, had a maid. Her children had friends, they were happy. She had plenty of time to read through her deceased father's library, preparing herself to be a professional writer, maybe a novelist. She had her book club, her thoughts, and her friendship with Marielle. She was not a climber. She never coveted an upscale mansion in Providence nor dreamed of a Florida condo. She had grown up in Providence, knew it for what it was. Florida, who knew what?

The Silvers moving to Florida?

Tomara had lost the argument with Freddie before it started, as if a well-read Amazon battled a down-sized Hercules, Tomara's many personal strengths were useless during this time of peripety for Freddie. During this turn-around of a hard-headed man, this about-face, neither the sway of sentiment nor Tomara's common sense nor moved Freddie. What might be said or done by her to divert him from his sense of euphoria. He soared as high as a B-17. Freddie was so excited in body and soul down to the most private of parts, in fact, Tomara herself was

betting (who never bet) that she had conceived a third child, given the sudden frequency of the event. The daring of the Florida deal absolutely fired Freddie up. Its sense of risk quickened his insides. More compelling than its sense of risk, or than his desire to quit small town Wagonquett, or the lure of wealth in Florida, however, was Freddie's further secret goal and ambition to which we have alluded earlier, his quest so to speak. Coral Sands was not merely to be an El Dorado, his city of gold, but only a step on a long ladder to his higher ambition. The ladder was grounded in south Florida for now, while the glamorous track at Hialeah (Freddie's "new home away from home," according to Tomara) was less than an hour's drive from Coral Sands.

The track at Hialeah had its races all year round, Freddie presumed, before he looked at its racing calendar. Sitting in his large office at Wagonquett Waste in October of 1957, Freddie presumed a paradisaic and an eternal summer in south Florida, never having been there. "Never engage in a presumption without the facts," was the favorite saying of his close friend Theo Tipton, among the lawyer's insights into the unknown. Hialeah, of course, had its own limited racing seasons like any track. Never mind its often coldish winters and the frequent summer hurricanes, South Florida's heavy tropical rains frequently made for a sloppy track and a still less predictable race.