

CHAPTER 1

“I don’t understand why we need to tell them anything. Why can’t we leave it between us?” Teddy stood on the sidewalk, not budging.

Siobhan knew he would say that. Anything to get out of a conversation with her family.

“Just get in the car.” Siobhan threw the last of the shopping bags behind the front seat of Teddy’s new black roadster. Sliding into the passenger seat, she slammed the door so hard that the car rocked side to side.

“Hey, take it easy on my baby!” Teddy had one foot lodged in the gutter and the other planted on the curbstone. Pulling a chamois cloth out of his back pocket, he wiped at a spatter of dust on the hood. As he buffed the shiny black paint, he made each circle wider than the last, until the remaining specks disappeared.

“You should be thinking about the other baby. You know, the one we hope to adopt, not this toy that cost most of the advance on your latest comic book.” She loved how he still behaved like a teenage boy spending his allowance as soon as he got it on the latest Call of Duty video game or obscure vinyl record. But she couldn’t help it; she had to tease him about this extravagant car he bought on a whim.

“‘Graphic novel.’ You do that on purpose.” He flung his red fleece on top of the shopping bags and jumped into the driver’s seat.

“And where’s that new car smell? I think your Old Spice aftershave is overpowering it.” She laughed.

“It’s your father’s. I found it in the medicine cabinet. Thought it might help me win him over.” He did that thing with his eye, half a wink, half a squint, that always made her smile.

March 17, 2007. Bunker Hill Street bustled with families getting ready for Charlestown's Evacuation Day. Her father, Joe Maloney, said it was really a day for Boston's large Irish population to celebrate Saint Patrick's Day. He would say this every year.

Deep navy clouds loomed over the tightly packed houses on the narrow street. Although only a few blocks from fashionable Monument Square, this blue-collar side of Charlestown remained overlooked for decades. Until now. In the last few years, young couples had migrated from Boston's Back Bay and South End and now owned most of the homes in the neighborhood. With their move back from New York, Brooklyn to be exact, Siobhan and Teddy added to the influx.

In their final weeks in the Brooklyn brownstone, Siobhan and Teddy packed up their life of fifteen years, as they prepared to move to her family's home in Charlestown. It wasn't that she didn't want to move back home; it was that she had built a life in Brooklyn, and soon this phase of life would be over. Where she met Teddy. Where they tried to start a family. The modern art they collected during their strolls through New York's Chelsea district lay stacked against the wall by the front door, ready to go to the local consignment shop; the paintings wouldn't work in the old house at the top of Bunker Hill Street. And Teddy wouldn't stop talking about having sex in her teenage bedroom once they got there. "Creepy," she said. That room, the one with the blue and yellow wallpaper, would be the baby's room. And he'd just have to settle for having sex in her parents' former bedroom.

Dressed in a kelly green sweater with white piping around the crew neck and cuffs, Siobhan felt sweaty already. The pullover was a hand-me-down from her mother, who used to wear it to the Irish sing-alongs at Lacey's Pub down by the monument.

Siobhan waved to a man across the street wearing a green Celtics T-shirt. His arms flailed as he corralled his kids into the back of his SUV. The children, two girls and a boy, pressed their faces painted with shamrocks against the rear window. Within seconds, Siobhan could see only green streaks smeared across the glass.

“Say hello to your father for me! The old neighborhood misses him.” He waved his keys in the air.

“We need to get out of here before the townies get liquored up on Pabst Blue Ribbon and Guinness.” She lowered the window, a faint ray of sunshine hitting her cheeks.

Moving into her parents’ house was inevitable. How could she leave Aunt Peg alone now that her parents were living in Concord with Hannah? The house had good bones. But there were enough boxes from four generations on the third floor that it would take weeks to sort through. When she ventured up there that first day home, she rummaged through the contents of a few of them. Clothing from her grandparents, some still wrapped around wire coat hangers, took up a whole corner of the room. Underneath one box, she uncovered a white garment bag containing her great-grandmother’s satin wedding dress; half the glass beads had fallen off, but it was still beautiful. When she found a box of old photo albums, she spent a good hour flipping through old snapshots from her parents’ early years together; she ran her fingers across a photo of her parents out at Castle Island in Southie and one of them in Montreal on their honeymoon. And now, she was the keeper of it all.

Teddy couldn’t find the air conditioning control amid the dashboard’s buttons and dials. When he found the right one, he cranked it up, the cool air hitting his face. “Wait. I forgot about Peg. I guess I had too much going on this morning getting things together for the party.”

“Hannah swung by and picked up Aunt Peg last night. I’m sure she had the time of her life getting pampered out there in the mansion.” The corners of her mouth turned up. “And if she were here, where did you expect to put her in this two-seater? On the roof?”

“I’ll have to thank your sister. As much as I don’t want to thank Hannah for anything. Why is she so smug anyway? Sometimes, it’s hard to believe you have the same parents.”

Teddy turned the key in the ignition. The engine hummed, but he turned it off a moment later. “What I mean is ... I don’t know if we even have to tell them anything about the adoption. It’s not like it’s going to make a difference.”

“Why did you do that? We’re going to be late! And Max is at the window. He’s going to start barking.” Siobhan looked away to avoid direct eye contact with their dog.

The oversized Labrador retriever stared at them from the first-floor window, his paws smacking the glass like he was digging an imaginary hole.

“I just don’t want to get into any heated arguments today.” He traced the stitching in the leather wrap of the steering wheel. “I can feel it already, all the way in Concord.”

“Look, they’re my family. They’re opinionated. I get it. But they’re going to be part of this adoption.”

“Whatever you say. You’re the boss.”

“Hardly.” Shifting her body to get a good look at him, she paused for a moment then blurted it out. “Does this have something to do with your family, the way you’re acting right now?”

“Something like that.” He brushed his fingers across his chin. “And then all those questions from the adoption agency. Can’t they tell we’re good people?”

“You’re not making any sense right now. Of course they need to ask questions. And Ellen from the adoption agency is asking what’s taking us so long to fill out the basic forms.”

Maybe it was the move from New York. Or the renovation of her parents’ house. But Teddy was not being Teddy.

“I need you to tell me something. And don’t just say yes to shut me up. Are you in this with me? The adoption?”

“Yes. Of course. It’s just a lot.” He looked straight ahead.

She thought she saw a smile, but it might have been air escaping through his clenched teeth. “Okay. I trust you.”

While Teddy maneuvered the car out of the tight parking spot, Siobhan turned to look at the old house. It needed a fresh coat of paint. She put “paint house” on her growing mental list, after “pick out baby names,” and then, right after that, “talk with Teddy about his mother.”

Siobhan slipped on her black sunglasses and leaned back into the headrest. “Let’s get this over with.”

The Maloneys, with their booming voices and over-the-top reactions, could be a lot. It would be nice if they got excited about the adoption and celebrated it.

Teddy extended his hand and hooked his pinky finger around hers.

“We’ll get through this. Together.” He flashed a grin at her before returning his gaze to the road.

Heading down Bunker Hill Street, they passed the few blocks that formed Siobhan’s insulated world when she was a child. Her mother would say if she got as far as the Schrafft’s Candy building, she had gone too far.

Away for fifteen years, she was home.

She stretched her arm out the window, the light wind stroking her palm. If she never brought up the adoption again, would he even say anything?