



ply ignore her. Much of this, she knew, had to do with Herbie. “See what you rescued me from, sweetheart?” she said to the photograph on the coffee table, a smudged snapshot of a middle-aged man. “Do you think they would have been kinder to me?”

“Can’t make tea today. Maybe tomorrow.”

She felt the beginning of a headache. Sarah had hoped her move to the retirement community six years before would have eased her tendency toward tension headaches. “Shady Acres,” her nephew dismissed it during his only visit, but Sarah took great pleasure in furnishing her small condo and organizing a tiny flower garden. Her pension plus Social Security provided enough to get by on. It was just that—well, she hated to admit it, but some of the women in the community drove her up the wall. Cliquey, bossy and interfering, they were the same types she had disliked since high school. And it wasn’t just Bea Bernstein. She could deal with Bea. It was women like Annie Clurman, who introduced herself the day after Sarah moved in, explaining that she and her husband lived in the large unit across the street. Three bedrooms, she stressed. “After the house in Short Hills, we simply couldn’t trade down. Are you married, dear? Or—”

“Widowed,” Sarah said. “Herbie died 10 years ago. Pancreatic cancer.”

“It’s so hard for widows,” Annie said. “Thank God my Irving is well. He was in publishing.” Probably had a newspaper delivery route, Sarah thought, but smiled sweetly. “Our son is a physician. With the Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. They live in Wellesley, Massachusetts. It is very upscale. Do you have children?”

“One daughter. In California.”

“Grandchildren? After all, your children are your children, but I always say you’re nothing until you have grandchildren. Did you and Sammy—”

“Herbie.”

“Do you have grandchildren, dear?”

Which was how Sarah’s granddaughter was born.

THEY MET AT A COFFEE SHOP on George Street, the drag that divided the main campus from the women’s studies school. Sarah, who

had attended evening classes at Hunter College’s urban campus in New York for years, loved traditional college towns.

THE GIRL WAS NO MORE THAN 19, AND A YOUNG 19 AT that, still protected by baby fat, skin shining from late adolescent oil and acne. Her eyes were mature, though, and guarded, and Sarah wondered why her lids had come down so early, a sharp defense between a vulnerable soul and the real world.

“About this award,” the girl said.

“The Herbert and Sarah Rabinowitz Award for Undergraduate Poetry. My late husband and I both loved poetry.”

“Could I ask, I mean, why did you choose my poems? It’s not like I applied.”

Sarah gave the practiced response. “It’s still a new award. Next year, perhaps, we’ll institute a formal application process. This year, well, I saw some of your poems in the student literary magazine and was very taken with them.”

“My roommate says it’s a hoax.” Barrie raised her eyes and looked defensively at Sarah. “She Googled the...the...”

“The Rabinowitz Prize.”

“She says it doesn’t exist, that it’s a scam. She says I shouldn’t trust you, you’re a swindler and it’s going to cost me money.”

“Oh, the award is real all right. It’s not well known because this is our first year and, frankly, I don’t understand anything about publicity. But it is not going to cost you anything. In fact,” Sarah opened her handbag, “there is a cash prize of \$250. And a certificate.”

She handed the dumbfounded girl an envelope. “I remember what it was like to be a student. Extra money is always helpful. Oh, there is one thing more.”

“What’s that?” Suspicion was back in the girl’s eyes.

“A lot of young women lose their voices. I hope you keep writing. You’ve been published in the college literary magazine...”

“And in my hometown

