

CHAPTER 1

the end

PRESENT DAY.

The vintage aircraft made of metal tubes and aged fabric, its mahogany propeller slicing the salted sea air, flew past the last sliver of Fire Island on its way to the darkness of the Atlantic Ocean. Roy Higgins sat comfortably in the open cockpit of his Boeing-Stearman, a plane he bought sixty years before. His wedding photograph, framed in oak and shaped by his hands from the tree where they first kissed, lay in his lap.

Sarah Higgins was gone.

She was his compass, his companion, his life, lover, friend, and wife. Without Sarah, Roy wanted nothing of this world. She had been ravaged by Alzheimer's, the colorful memories of a shared life stripped from her one by one until she neither recognized her husband nor knew her own name. Life, as the wedding photo, was faded sepia.

He would not follow scripture or the words of Father Paul Joseph Flannery, the parish priest of Our Lady of the Snow, on their wedding day fifty years ago: "Unto death do you part." Death would not part them. Roy would follow.

"Aircraft squawking one-two-zero-zero, three-thousand feet, three miles south of Ocean Beach, state your intentions," the New York departure controller asked. Roy turned off the radio and the transponder.

The blip on the controller's radar disappeared.

"The future is yours, Jeremy, and so is she. Take care of her. To the defiant, to the rebels, and to the journey. You'll be fine. I promise. I promise! I'm going to be with my Sarah now," Roy said. He looked down toward the Atlantic Ocean. "We are all of the sea," he muttered.

No plane, however fast, can catch the setting sun. Through his arthritic hands the familiar rhythmic vibration of the Stearman's engine comforted him as he piloted toward his final end.