

## Prologue

Of all the guests congregated inside Touro Synagogue, no one was more delighted than Miriam Hartman, mother of the groom. She was sitting in the front row with tissues in hand, her husband to her right, the bride's mother — a close friend — to her left. *If only Noah had married a nice Jewish girl like Sarah all those years ago, Miriam thought, his life would have turned out perfect, just the way she had planned. Instead, his life was ruined by that shiksa Robin he had insisted on marrying against her wishes. She and Jerry tried to nip it in the bud before it was too late, but Noah was stubborn, some nonsense about butterflies and the way she looked at him. For the life of her, Miriam could not understand why Noah never listened to his mother, because after all, she only wanted what was best for him. And at this point in Noah's middle-aged life, Miriam concluded, Sarah was best for him. With all the bad decisions he had made throughout his life, proposing to Sarah appeared to be the only redeeming one.*

Relishing in subdued victory, there was no need for Miriam to ever take credit for the role she had played in getting the two of them together. For all Noah knew, running into Sarah at the premiere of **Sand Dollar** happened by chance, or perhaps even divine intervention — if you believe in that sort of thing. However, there was nothing divine about it — not that time anyway — because Miriam had secretly planted her there.

Miriam was wearing a wide-brim chapeau with beige satin sash, tulle, and rose clusters. She had on a brown silk Carolina Herrera gown with sparkling gold beads and lace trim, an exquisite emerald butterfly-shaped broach pinned on the shoulder. A spectacular 22-carat emerald-cut diamond engagement ring eclipsed her finger, and long crystal-shaped emerald earrings dangled beside her slim neck. Sitting beside her, her husband Jerry resembled an eighty-year-old James Brolin, tall and thin, with manicured white hair and a commanding presence. He was wearing a black Brioni tuxedo accessorized by the black cane resting against the side of the pew.

The synagogue was filled to capacity by half the membership of Spring Valley Country Club, all wearing tuxedos and gowns for this black tie affair. It was a who's who of Rhode Island's most prominent Jewish community. Up on the *bema*, two thousand large white rose-heads adorned the white *chupah*. Standing underneath it, the rabbi gave Jerry a friendly nod, acknowledging the temple's most generous benefactor. Just to the right, Noah was standing beside his best man, his brother Scott. They were wearing white formal tuxedos with tails on their jackets, white bowties, and white *yarmulkes* on their heads.

The conductor raised his baton, and the ten-piece orchestra started playing **Canon In D**. Heads turned as all eyes focused on the first bridesmaid walking slowly up the red-carpeted aisle in a wine-colored gown. After all six bridesmaids took their place on the *bema*

to the left of the *chupah*, the superlative performance of Pachelbel's masterpiece was concluded, and there was silence.

As the orchestra began playing **Here Comes The Bride**, all heads turned back down the aisle toward the entrance with anxious anticipation. Sarah was a beautiful, young woman, no doubt the most beautiful bride this congregation would ever see.

Fifty pounds overweight with a silver cross bouncing around her neck, Robin rushed through the front door into the synagogue in ripped jeans and a Block Island T-shirt. Stopping dead in her tracks, her eyes scanned the room. All five hundred congregants sitting in the pews were staring directly at her. Turning her head slowly to the right, she suddenly was aware of Sarah standing just a few feet away in a long, white wedding gown, a mortified look on her face behind her sheer, white veil. The orchestra's music came to a grinding halt.

Noah's smile, which had been filled with anticipation, turned to curiosity as he raised his hand above his eyes to see who had just entered, his jaw dropping at the sight of her. He looked at his brother standing beside him, speechless.

With a look of embarrassment, Robin turned around and escaped through the large, wooden front door. The guests started buzzing and heads turned as they tried to make sense of it all. Glancing around nervously, the maestro looked at Miriam for guidance, who motioned with her hands for him to continue. He raised his baton, and, to the tune of **Here Comes The Bride**, Noah ran down the aisle toward the door. "Don't worry," he blurted out to Sarah as he ran past her. "I'll be right back!" With a bewildered look on her face, Sarah pulled off her veil and looked across the synagogue at her bridesmaids. The chatter from the surprised guests grew steadily as everybody stood up and headed for the exit. With a rustle of expensive silk, Miriam fainted to the floor.

Noah ran down the flight of red-carpeted granite steps, past the line of white stretch limousines waiting out front. He caught up to Robin walking quickly down the sidewalk.

"Hey... what the hell are you doing here?" he exclaimed, grabbing her arm.

"I'm sorry, Noah," she said, wiping a tear from her eye, turning to look at him. "I never should have come here. I'm such a fool." Shaking her head, she glanced at the white stagecoach with two white horses. "Go back to your fairy tale wedding," she sobbed, running across the street.

Noah continued his pursuit, dodging traffic and catching up with her on the other side. "HEY!" he yelled, walking briskly behind her, grabbing hold of her again. "You still haven't answered my question. Why are you here?"

She looked at him lovingly. "It's not your fault... There's no reason why we couldn't have stayed married. The medication... the psychiatrist... God, I don't even know where to start," she said, covering her mouth and looking off.

"I don't believe this," Noah said, shaking his head. "Don't tell me *you're* the one who needs closure, because if you do —"

"No... no, that's not it. I made a big mistake... I never should have left you."

"Let me get this straight. You came all the way down here just to tell me you made some kind of big mistake?" She nodded. "A mistake," he repeated, throwing his hands up in the air, looking away. "A mistake?" he questioned, looking back at her, seeking confirmation. "Don't you think I know that already? Huh? I wanted to hate you so bad, but I couldn't stop loving

you long enough to hate you. If there were any way I could have erased your memory from my brain, I would have done it in a heartbeat. But not a chance of that... not with my heart refusing to let go. I would have given my *left lung* just to hold you in my arms for one more day, just one day. Thirteen years... and not a day gone by that I didn't pray you'd come back, look into my eyes, and say the words that you just said to me," he said, turning his head away, looking across the street at Sarah and the rest of the wedding party filtering out of the building.

"NO... No, I can't do it. Sarah's a good woman and a good friend. She'd never leave me; she loves me. I'm sorry, Robin," he said, looking back at her. "You're too late. In case you haven't noticed, I'm getting married today," he said, turning and walking away, forcing himself not to look back. Anxious to rejoin his bride waiting for him on the other side of the street, he stopped at the corner and waited for a few cars to pass. Stepping from the curb, he heard Robin shout.

"What did you just say?" he asked, his foot landing back on the sidewalk as she ran toward him.

"I remember," Robin said, out of breath as she reached him.

"You *remember*?" he said incredulously. "What could you possibly remember?" he asked, staring at her, waiting for the answer.

The beauty from within her soul shined brightly through her loving eyes as she looked deep into Noah's now melting eyes.

"I remember — I love you," she said in a soft voice, nervously biting her lip.

There it was... she actually looked him in the eyes and said it. As Noah heard these words coming out of her mouth, tears formed in his eyes. After all these years, Noah finally got the closure he so desperately needed.

Letting out a scream of anger, he turned and walked straight out into the street in front of a taxicab coming to a screeching halt, almost hitting him.

"GODDAMN YOU !" Noah screamed at her, slamming the hood of the taxi with his fist.

"HEY !" yelled the taxi driver out the window.

"How do you do that?" Noah asked her. "How do you just stand there and tell me you love me? Like... like the last thirteen years never existed. Like you somehow traveled back in time to when I last held you in my arms, and... and everything's still the same, just the way you left it. What do you expect me to do, Robin? What do you — " The lump in his throat prevented him from saying anything further. He shook his head and looked away, a tear rolling down his cheek as Robin opened the taxi door and jumped in.

Cars were beeping their horns, blocked by Noah standing in front of the taxi in the middle of the road. He looked over at his bride on the other side of the street, and then looked back at the woman he truly loved, crying inside the taxi.

*Now what?* he thought.