

PROLOGUE

July 1988, Broken Harbor

Harry's death was utterly like him: orderly, decisive, and oddly considerate. He sailed to Maine without telling a soul—left a note saying he was going on a business trip but of course he wasn't. He picked up his boat in Marion and sailed overnight to Broken Island, seven miles off the coast of Maine, near the Canadian border. It's a big boat, over fifty feet, but it has all kinds of gadgets so it wasn't hard for someone like Harry to do it alone. Actually, he wasn't entirely alone. He had stopped at the New York apartment and picked up Gus, the big black Newfoundland, to keep him company on this . . . this journey, I guess.

He got there late in the afternoon, furling the sails, and set the anchor with his usual care. Then he fed the dog and had something himself, down below. Put the dishes in the sink and opened a bottle of wine, which he took up into the cockpit. A very good bottle of wine, but he only had the one glass. It was a sacrament, I imagine; he didn't really drink.

No one was there so I can't tell, but it looks as if Harry sat there for quite a while, with Gus at his side. I see them with great clarity: there is Gus, with his huge head on Harry's lap and Harry calmly looking around, his hands working the thick black fur around Gus's neck and ears. Or I see them both, sitting up now, looking at the beach and that remarkable shoreline, the sun going down over the Cut. It *is* the loveliest place. Then he shuts Gus down below.

One imagines the intimate business of getting Gus down the steps. Harry stands at the bottom of the companionway, and gets his arms around him (a face full of fur, legs every which way; Gus's great face is interested but relaxed: they've done this a hundred times). Then he picks him up, all hundred pounds of him, and gently sets him down on the cabin sole. Sets out some water. Harry put him below because he didn't want him to see. Or more likely, he was afraid the dog would jump in and try to save him, as Newfies are bred to do.

Then, after he had lowered the guardrail on the starboard side, he got the Camden marine operator to call the sheriff, Bud Wilkerson, over in Hanson, and told him what he was about to do. Hung up before Bud could say anything, but wanted him to know so he'd come out and get the dog. Then he put on his commodore's cap—an old-fashioned hat with a small, shiny visor and a narrow crown, the kind worn in the Navy in World War I. Do you remember the photos of Admiral Sims? Like that. That was one of a number of affectations at the Great Arcadia Yacht Club of New York, Boston, and Mount Desert, of which Harry had recently been commodore. That and the pips, the four raised brass-and-enamel symbols of his rank on each epaulet. Then Harry sat down on the gunwale with his back to the water. And blew his brains out.

Here's an interesting thing. Just before he did it, he tied a float to his leg. When he shot himself, his body went over the side, as he intended. Not a drop of blood in the boat. But it

floated. So my friend Bud wouldn't have to dive for it when he got there. Imagine thinking of that, in the closing moments of your life.

Well, Harry—my brother, Harry—had a weakness for order. More than a weakness, a passion. He was a subtle man, entirely capable of making his way in a dark and uncertain world. But his great passion was for order. That was the real business of his life: not making an astonishing fortune as a very young man or becoming a cabinet officer, but preserving order. Against the sweet, dark pull of the Labyrinth, as it spins away, under the city, under our lives.

CHAPTER I

GOD'S LAUGHTER

The seeds of that passion were planted when he was a kid, in our chaotic shingle-pile house by the sea, and they were nurtured secretly, urgently, by Harry in hostile ground. Hostile because our parents were not orderly people. Charming and loving, when at all sober, but not orderly. He shaped his character against a background of drunks making speeches, playful grown-ups falling down at croquet. Lovely manners punctuated with the occasional slap, somewhere upstairs. And screams. Real, flat-out crazy-person screams.

We were a handsome family in decline. We lived in a grand house on Peaches Point in Marblehead, which was in trust so it could not be sold. But there was lawn furniture in the living room, and the gardens running down to the water had gone to jungle. The television was on in the afternoon and there was drinking all day long.

Our mother, Sarah, was very beautiful and had great charm, great style. But she was not useful. As a mother, she

was not as useful as the five Newfoundland dogs that ran more or less wild around our house. And they were not useful at all, until Harry took them in hand when he was nine or ten. Housebroke them and made them mind. By the time he was fifteen, he was taking care of all of us, the dogs and me, anyway. He must have had remarkable gifts because we were all pretty well behaved and happy. He tried to take care of our mother, too. Had been trying, desperately, since he was a little boy. But that had not gone so well.

Harry finally gave it up as a bad job when he was sixteen. Suddenly lost patience, I had always supposed, and simply ran away. He told me, much later, that he talked to me about it for a long time the night he left. Explained to me why he had to go and why he couldn't take me with him. It was obvious: he was sixteen and I was six. He promised to come back and get me when he could. Which he did.

When I was sixteen and she was forty-four, our mother died of her excesses. From having been very popular, in a raffish, untidy way, our parents' lives had suddenly gone toxic, after Harry left. They became the kind of people whom one no longer saw. Solitary drinkers, alone and separate in that big house. Some people were surprised that a woman that young and attractive should drink herself to death. I was not surprised. I thought that's exactly what she had in mind. Our father died a year later, in similar circumstances. I don't know what he had in mind. He had been a heavy-drinking absence in our lives for a long, long time.

As a result, neither Harry nor I really knew him. So we were both astonished when, at his interment, there appeared, unannounced, an honor guard of Navy-enlisted men and an officer, in dress blues, with rifles and an American flag. He had won the Navy Cross, among other medals, during the war and the Navy never forgets that one. So, at the end of the service, the officer stepped forward and read the citation describing

what our father had done—an act of truly extraordinary bravery and competence. The enlisted men fired their rifles, carefully folded the flag, and gave it to Harry and me. Then they disappeared as mysteriously as they had come. We knew our father had flown a fighter off carriers during the war, but *this*? What was one to make of this? I was merely surprised. Harry wept. *Harry!* That was astonishing.

Harry had been loaned a big sailboat the summer our mother died, and we sailed Down East for a fortnight. To Broken Harbor, actually, among other places. I felt as if I were coming home, not running away, and so it turned out. Those weeks and the months that followed were among the happiest of my life.

In the fall, he sent me away to boarding school. As if he were my father, not my brother. Visited every other weekend. Urged me to row, to write, to work hard. He was very popular with my friends, who thought him wildly romantic. He was more than romantic to me. He was a Hero and a Rescuer. I simply adored him all my life.

I was a bright kid—bright enough for those days, anyway—and Harry sent me to Harvard (where he had gone) and then Harvard Law School. Not the Business School: he saw I would make a lawyer, not a businessman. He was right about that, as so much else. I actually made the *Law Review*, vindicating his instinct. Once I started to practice, Harry and I were more like brothers again. I did a stint in the US Attorney's Office, then joined a big firm. I worked like a lunatic and made partner pretty fast. We assumed, after that, that we would lead orderly lives. We would marry and have children and all that, but we would always be together. And we would never hear another grown-up scream as long as we lived.

Harry and I were almost unnaturally close, like in *The Corsican Brothers*, the Dumas novel about brothers who can feel each other's pain, even when they're hundreds of miles apart. But we were very different, too. He was a Hero and a Rescuer, as I say. I was not. He saw a God-created world, lit with bright colors and certainty. I . . . well, I was a lawyer. The law is not a field for absolutists. It is not a matter of finding the Way, the Truth, and the Light. It is a matter of getting from over here, someplace, to a spot over there . . . lit only by your own intelligence and your adherence to a set of rickety, man-made rules. I confess that I think it a high calling, and I believe in those rickety rules with all my heart. Because I think that's all there is.

The *practical navigator*, Harry used to call me, with a blend of kidding and respect, because I was more practical and cautious than he. It's from the name of a book by a Salem sea captain named Nathaniel Bowditch. It was published in 1802 and instantly became the definitive work on ocean navigation. It stayed that way for the next 150 years. It was still used at the Naval Academy during World War II. Men who could navigate were said to "know their Bowditch." I actually knew my Bowditch, which was an anachronism by the time I learned it, but I liked the idea. Liked the tie to my Salem roots and to a set of rules.

My devotion to the rules was partly a matter of personal taste, but it was also philosophical. I believe that life is mostly a game, which we make up, in the *absence* of Divine Guidance. If that's right, the rules make all the difference, don't they? No rules, no game. Once little kids start running from first base, over the pitcher's mound to third, they're going to lose interest pretty soon, and want to go home. Except for this: There is no God and there is no home, there is only the game. So we better not cheat.

I used to tease Harry about his worldview and especially about his God. "If your God created this relentlessly humorless world, Harry," I once said, "I want no part of Him."

“Humorless?” Harry perked up at that. He only half listened to these rants.

“Yes, Harry. Humor is at the heart of the human condition. And your God has none! Or—if He does—it is so cruel and remote that He and I will never make each other laugh.” Pause for effect. “At least, not intentionally.”

Harry loved that line, laughed out loud. “You see Him giggling, do you, as He dangles us, spiders over the flame?”

“Of course. He’s a psychopath.” Harry nodded, considered it. But he still believed. At least until he popped that big black Sig Sauer in his mouth at the end. At that point, who knows?

I have that weapon on the desk beside me as I write, and I confess that a couple of times I have carefully put it in my mouth, to see what it was like. I didn’t care for it. And it did not make me think of God.

Bud called me as soon as Harry called him from Broken Harbor, and I set out for Maine at once. Not because there was any hope, just to be there. By the time I got to the little airport in Hanson, Bud was back from Broke, with a heartbroken Gus at his side, waiting by his pickup truck—with the bubble-gum light on the cab and guns in the rear window. He shook his head, unnecessarily. “He’s gone, Doc,” he said, his voice full of sorrow. We’d become close in the course of the Minot affair.

“Let’s go take a look,” I said, and we got in the truck.

There’s no coroner’s office in Hanson so a suicide would normally go to the local jail. But Bud said he couldn’t bear the idea of Harry going back in there again, so he just took him home. The way everyone was taken home, in the old days of “laying-out rooms” and “coffin corners.” When death was more familiar. Bud wasn’t a toucher, but—at the door to his house—he put his big arm around my shoulder, gave me a hug. “Awful damn sorry, Doc. Awful sad.”

Harry was lying faceup on Bud's dining room table, with towels wadded around the back of his head, which was pretty bad. Gone, actually; the bullet had been a hollow point. The table was covered with towels, too, because his uniform was still soaking wet. Salt water never dries.

Harry left a note. There were two, in fact. One for his wife, Mimi, and one for me. Mine read:

My Dear Tim:

I love you very much, now as always. My only doubts about this come from the fear that you will somehow blame yourself. Do not, I beg you. There is absolutely nothing more you could have done. You have been superb, through all of this. Through our whole life, in fact. I could not have had a better brother.

You will find that I have left most of my estate to you. Please do not give it away. Get married and have children, perhaps. Lead the best life you can, after all this. I hope you will marry Cassie. Or someone like her, if that doesn't work.

I have more than taken care of Mimi and think she will be all right. But look after her. You need not marry her, as brothers sometimes do, but I care for her a great deal and hope you will keep track, at least until she remarries.

Would you be good enough to take Gus? He was never really Mimi's dog and he will do better with you.

I love you so much.

Harry

I had Harry cremated in his Arcadia uniform. He was no longer a member of the Great Arcadia, to say nothing of being its commodore. But that's all right, he was entitled to that. He was entitled not to go naked into the dark water, like the victim of a sex crime or a murder. Although he was both of those things, as well.

The undertakers didn't like the uniform. They particularly didn't like the half-inch, half-round pips on the epaulets. I think it is like metal in a microwave . . . bad for the oven. But the undertaker had his price and Harry was cremated in his uniform, pips and all. When I got the canister of ashes to pour into the sea out at Broke, there were some hard bits that rattled like stones. There are often bits of bone, I understand. But this was different. These were *the pips*.

My first thought had been to douse Harry's sailboat, *Silver Girl*, with kerosene, put him aboard, and touch her off . . . a Viking funeral. Bud had patted me on the back and said to calm down, we weren't doing that.

So we all went out to Broke in the *Betsy B*, Bud's big lobster boat—Bud, Mimi, and I. And two friends, Frank Butler and Cassie Sears, the "Cassie" Harry referred to in the note. I asked Mimi if she wanted to do it, wanted to put him over the side. But she said, "No," in that little Jackie Kennedy voice of hers, "I can't." So I took her hand in one of mine and, with the other, poured Harry into the sea. The bottom there is sandy, as I well knew, so Harry will turn to sand pretty quick.

But the pips, all melted down and looking like spent bullets, the pips will last a long time. The pips, man. A comic thread in this sad story. A line to make God laugh.