

CHAPTER 1

Brooklyn Heights, New York. Monday, October 11, 1965.

GLOOM AND DOOM suited me.

Yuri Konstantinov, my Russian mentor and dance partner spent these days in jail. All rehearsals for his new, full-length ballet *Colors Of The Rainbow* were canceled.

I'd won the Red Rainbow role in this new ballet after competing against three-hundred-and-twenty-two girls for the opportunity and now, nothing. I'm afraid to face Aunt Lucy who sent me to the audition. Am I embarrassed? Yes! I never got the chance to dance on a real stage in front of a real audience. I'd joined the union at the start but my professional career never happened. I'm a failure at seventeen.

My sweetheart David flew to Hong Kong on business. He hasn't telephoned or sent a telegram to say he's arrived. And once, he sent me flowers from a Madison Avenue florist and Mrs. Pace hid them in her bedroom thinking they were hers. I hoped for another bouquet but nothing so far.

Finally, I got what most girls have every thirty days after months of waiting. Why the delay? Because as an athlete, we women over work our bodies. The side effects have turned me into a cranky witch on a broom.

Life isn't a bowl of cherries like mama used to sing. It's the pits. I'm staying in bed and not moving.

Knock. Knock.

I groaned, “No.”

Knock. Knock. Knock.

“Go away!”

Bang. Bang.

My bedroom door flew open and daddy’s jaw dropped.

“Sarah! What are you doing in bed? It’s twelve o’clock noon.”

I rubbed my eyes.

A police siren screeched by on the street below. Dad raised his voice over the squeal. “Half the day is gone!”

I ducked under the covers mumbling, “I don’t care said Pierre.”

Dad walked in my room. “Get up, Buttercup.”

I peeked out and saw him opening the venetian blinds.

“Hey,” I shielded my eyes.

“Hay is for horses,” he said.

“I’m no horse,” and slapped a pillow over my face.

Dad cleared his throat. “I brought you from the deli, lean pastrami on rye and two kosher dills but what do I find?”

I dropped the pillow. “What?”

“A lazy girl in bed. That’s what.”

“Why not? Yuri’s locked-up. David’s gone. I’m alone.”

Dad spun around. “Alone? What am I? Chopped liver?”

“Geez, daddy, I meant ...”

“I know what you meant. Ball’s-on Brooklyn, get up and get dressed.”

“No! Mama wouldn’t make me. My stomach hurts.”

“Your mama’s not here, I’m in charge.” He stormed out and slammed the door. The windows rattled.

I threw the battery clock. *Bang!* It bounced off the wall and rolled.

“Doggone.” I slapped my forehead.

I picked up Mickey Mouse and held him to my ear. He ticked and the alarm worked. The only damage was the cracked glass over his shoes. I hugged Aunt Lucy's gift for my eleventh birthday and climbed into bed.

Dad opened the door and stomped back in so loud, the windows rattled again.

I put Mickey on the nightstand and laid down. "What now, Dad?"

"Two can play the same game."

"Huh?" I sat up. "What game?"

He waved the New York Daily News in my face. "You want I should stop working? Okay, I have a pimple on my nose, I quit my job."

"You can't. That's not fair."

"Says who? You?"

"They canceled my ballet, I can't dance if there's no performance."

"So? How would you like to make thirteen pounds of coleslaw, two dozen Jerry Lewis sandwiches and deliver the shit to Crown Heights in four feet of snow?"

"It's seventy-five degrees outside. It's Indian summer."

Dad harrumphed. "Well ... it snows in January, everybody knows that." He stepped closer to the bed. "Pumpkin, I can't stand seeing my fighter take a fall. Get up. Get dressed."

"My legs are stuck. They only move if I dance with Yuri."

Dad waved the newspaper again. "Not if your partner's face is on the front page and he's the prime suspect in a murder." He shoved the front page under my nose.

I whimpered, "But he's innocent. How can they print that?"

"Reporters have credible sources and the NYPD qualifies as a legitimate source. So Sarah, you'd better consider Brooklyn College cause you're goin', I guarantee it."

“No, I’m not. I hate school. I’m wanna die.”

Dad threw his hands in the air dropping the New York Daily News. “Hear that?” he said to the ceiling. “She wants to die. A regular Bette Davis.”

I held my throat. “I’m gonna die.”

“Take acting at Brooklyn College, you’ll get all A’s.” He leaned forward to pick-up the Daily News when he stumbled over my dance bag and pink throw rug. *Ka-boom!* He laid on the floor.

“Daddy?”

“Whoa,” he groaned as deep as a bullfrog. “Wasn’t expecting that.”

He reached for the newspaper and took it slow standing up.

“Daddy, are you okay?”

“Like hell I am.” He kicked the dance bag and pointed to the bunched-up pink rug. “Throw that piece of fluff in the garbage.”

I giggled.

“You think that’s funny?”

“No, daddy, please.”

“Please, what?”

“It’s hard to go on.”

“No, it’s not.” He made a time-out sign. “You cry two hours like we talked last night then it’s finished. You stop bawling like a baby.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Bullshit, Sarah. You scrunch up your face and bite your tongue. Get your head out of your ass.”

“But, but ...”

“No buts.” His nostrils flared. “I never raised a spoiled brat. Rothmans’ are proud.” He circled the room. “We don’t wallow in self-pity.”

“Mama does.”

“That’s different. Mama’s not a Rothman. She’s a Stein.”

I searched Daddy’s face. “How do I quit loving something I gave my heart and soul to?”

Dad hesitated a moment then spoke in a softer voice. “You don’t quit loving something. You switch focus.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“No, it’s not. I played tenor sax for Tommy Dorsey’s Band but I got over it.” He stuck his tongue out.

“You,” I blinked several times. “Played with Tommy Dorsey? No.”

“Yes. I was a big man on the grandstand. I played Swing at the Latin Quarter and toured the U.S. I was something.” He fisted his hands on his hips. “Wearing a new, not rented tuxedo, I put Brylcreem ‘a little dab will do ya’ on my hair.”

I chuckled, “But you’re bald.”

“Now I am but when I married your mother.” He ran his hand over his shiny head. “I had gorgeous wavy hair. I quit touring nightclubs when mama had a baby. No more fancy white dinner jackets and shiny black, patent leather shoes.”

I blew my nose. “You’re making this up.”

“No, ask Aunt Lucy for the photograph. She saw me at the Copacabana playing in Tommy’s band before your mother said stop traveling around the country working occasional gigs and get a steady job. It’s Al’s Deli or I leave you.

“Oh, daddy, I’m so sorry.” I bit my lip. “Your gigs are now thirteen year old Bar Mitzvah boys in Queens and wedding anniversaries in the Bronx.”

“My tenor sax,” said dad fingering an imaginary sax. “Plays Tenderly and Melancholy Baby, fifty times a year.” He dropped his hands and stared out the window. “I hate Melancholy Baby.”

His stooped shoulders made him look older than fifty-five.

I swallowed the bullet. “Okay, you win. But don’t beat a

dead horse and smother me in guilt.”

“Like your mother?”

“Yeah. Don’t be mama.” I swung my legs over the bed and sat forward.

Dad reached for my shoulders and planted a kiss on my head. “A smart girl. You’ll do real good in college just like your brothers and sister.”

“Stop with the college. It ain’t over till the fat lady sings.”

“There ain’t no fat lady. The man’s going to prison.”

“He can’t, daddy.” Then thinking back to that night, I shuddered. *Yuri and Mr. Kreisler did punch each other in the Osborne lobby and sometime later Mr. Kreisler was dead.*

Dad started to leave but stopped at the door. He turned around. “Don’t be a fool, Sarah. Think strong. You’re tough.”

“Maybe,” I sniffled.

“I know so, Tinker Bell.”

“Then what do I do since I can’t cry and I can’t dance?”

“My laundry, Max and Jeff’s laundry and mop the kitchen floor.”

“Like a servant?” I wiped my eyes on my sleeve. “And milk the cows and feed the chickens?”

“Yeah, smart ass, and paint the barn and build a fence.” He smiled. “Lollypop, just do my laundry and I’ll buy you Sicilian Pizza on DeKalb Avenue when I finish the deliveries.”

“Sicilian?” I sniffled. “Thick-crust, three cheeses and order meatballs and spaghetti in Rao Marinara Sauce.”

“Sicilian Pizza and spaghetti. Is that enough?”

I rubbed my nose. “For today. Thanks, dad.”

“You know Sarah for many years in Russia, Jews were forced to live in an area called the Pale of Settlement. Your mother and I were born in the Pale, in Odesa, Ukraine which is a port city on the Black Sea.”

“Bubbe told me, “Odesa is a beautiful city.”

“Yes it was and did Bubbe tell you Jews couldn’t study at universities, own property or leave the Pale of Settlement to travel in Russia or anywhere in the world?”

“No.”

“In America, Jews can do it all.”

My eyes filled with tears.

“So what’s it to be, Sarah?”