

## Prologue

# Someone's Son

*Bomber Boy*, Sarah kept silently chanting. The dark-eyed young Boston Marathon bombing suspect kept hovering, all night, on the birth room TV. Below him, Sarah lay in wait. In labor, two months too soon. Timing, intently, her own breaths.

*Bomber Boy: one, two, three—*

His blurred, sullen face kept mixing up, in Sarah's stunned mind, with the equally sullen face of her nineteen-year-old stepson PJ—maybe in police custody by now?—and with the big-eyed face of the little boy blown up days before at the Boston Marathon finish line.

*Bomber Boy: four, five, six—*

All those boy faces mixed with the fierce, fuzzy ultrasound face of the baby boy inside her. A swirly close-up seemingly taken in outer space but really in an inner space she'd never quite believed she had—until him. His unformed, creamy astronaut face. The face that she and Paul had awaited for years. A baby too late, and now tonight, too early. Where *was* Paul?—

TEENAGE JIHADIST? the TV asked, then a rush of shakily filmed gunshots. MASSIVE MANHUNT UNDERWAY.

*And*, Sarah told herself sadly, *he was someone's son*.

“I’m turning off the damn TV,” her husband Paul announced behind her bed curtain in his deepest supervisor voice. He was back in the birth room, back from handling whatever—Sarah was scared to ask—was going on with PJ. “It’s upsetting my wife.”

*Bomber Boy: seven, eight, nine—*

“No,” Sarah managed between breaths. The boyish suspect in profile in his white cap flashed yet again onscreen. She didn’t want it—him—to go away. Because, she decided dazedly, he had become *it*. Her ‘fixed object,’ the object the birthing class instructor had told them to choose and ‘focus on’ in the birth room.

He did look—didn’t he, in those unfocussed finish-line shots?—like Paul’s son PJ. Defiant teen-boy stance; flat dark stare. So damn young. Surely he hadn’t really done it.

*Bomber Boy: ten, eleven, twelve—*

Sarah squeezed shut her eyes, like a kid making a birthday wish. A healthy, full-term baby; the biggest, simplest wish of Sarah’s thirty-five-year-long life. But nothing about getting her son—her and Paul’s son—had been simple. Nothing had gone according to *What to Expect*, that battered paperback knocked off their bed earlier on this very night in the impulsive love-making they never should have dared in her seventh month. The dog-eared book, spotted with fresh blood by the time they got out the door. They drove through panicky traffic- and siren-filled streets, hearing the radio reports of BOSTON IN CHAOS, and BOMBING SUSPECTS REPORTEDLY ON THE RUN.

A siren behind their own speeding car. PJ in the backseat hoarsely urging Paul to drive faster. Sarah beside Paul, holding onto her belly. Paul steering headlong into what he’d dubbed the “Rotary of Doom.” Then the jolt, the bump. Paul crashing onto Doom’s central island, into its To BOSTON sign.

Blue and white Belmont Police car lights fitfully flashed on Paul’s stoic profile and grey-flecked beard. His hair still curly and dark like his son PJ’s, and like that of the bombing suspects: those digitally-enhanced, instantly-famous faces. Photos released by the FBI earlier this same day.

Birth day? Or would the Belmont Police somehow halt this premature birth? Behind her in the backseat, as the police car door slammed, Sarah felt man-sized PJ duck down. God, what-all *was* going on with PJ?

Protectively, Paul and Sarah faced those blaring lights together, PJ cowering behind them. Did he still have the jackknife, which only Sarah had seen, in his jacket? Would he use it this time?

Paul and Sarah stiffened like the true culprits. Both of them, Sarah

sensed through her pulsing pains and the pulsing lights as the cop approached their car, bracing for the worst. *Maybe*, the unquenchable optimist in Sarah thought, *this would bring them together?*

*Bomber Boy: thirteen, fourteen, fifteen—*

In the beeping monitor light of the birth room, in the pulsing dark of Sarah's squeezed-shut eyes, Paul screamed open her bedside curtain and snapped off the nonstop TV news. Sarah blinked her eyes and it—he—was gone

The hovering Bomber Boy.

"No . . . I . . . I need him," Sarah managed, pointing a shaky finger to the screen. Paul gaped at her like she was losing it. *Bring him back*, Sarah wanted to say. But she was panting, straining with a new contraction.

"He's fine. He's going to be fine," Paul muttered to her. Meaning PJ? The baby? The bomber?

Paul took Sarah's sweaty hand in his steady one. He squeezed Sarah's fingers, so their wedding bands pressed together. Gold, hard as bone. Sarah shut her eyes again, sucked under once more, picturing the boy face that had somehow become PJ plus the bomber plus her baby.

*Bomber Boy: sixteen, seventeen, eighteen—*

Past midnight now, on this marathon birth night. Mutely, Sarah squeezed Paul's hand back. Gold to gold, bone to bone. At least, this night of nights, she felt closer to him than she'd felt in months. She and Paul were braced now—pulling together like Boston, Sarah hoped—against the blast of disaster they'd awaited their whole, holy-wedlocked life.