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WESTPORT



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To my grandchildren,
an endless source of joy and optimism

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I was once lucky enough to serve as the general counsel of a large investment manager in Westport, Connecticut, where I worked with extraordinary people. Like all lawyers for private clients, my duty to protect client information never ends, but the good news is that it doesn't preclude me from using my imagination to write a novel. *Westport* is a work of fiction; it's made-up. And although my former colleagues are not in the book, I will always be grateful for their friendship and all they taught me.

PROLOGUE

The sun was now fully above the horizon and Ernie Sosa could see the outline of Long Island across the Sound, which meant the best part of his day was finished. He had squeezed in almost two hours of fishing by starting while it was still dark. His family would eat fresh flounder for dinner, and now it was time to get to his real job.

The route in and out was tricky for a midsize motorboat like Ernie's *Pride and Joy*—the name stenciled on the back. Seymour Rock could eat your boat. And it was hard to spot that small pile of stone early in the morning, especially in late October, so Ernie Sosa cut his engine to a crawl as he headed for the Connecticut side. The water near shore, still warm from baking all summer, was giving off morning mist like a steam iron. That, plus the fact that Seymour Rock sat low and directly in the path to the Saugatuck River harbor, made it a dangerous hazard for a boat like his.

Not today, rock, Sosa thought. He would just barely have enough time to dock his boat, change, and make it to his job at Newman's Own, the charitable food company based in Westport. But he still wasn't going to hurry past "the rock" and risk the boat it took him twenty years to buy. So he watched carefully as Seymour Rock slid by the left side—and, yes, he knew it was called *port*, but he still couldn't get used to saying fancy boating stuff.

He saw it, even with the mist. There was something long and red on the rock—a kayak, canoe maybe. *Who the hell would leave their boat out here?* He quickly looked around. There were no other boats or people. He squeezed his hand on the throttle handle, trying to force himself to motor past and make it to work on time. *Goddammit.* Ernie eased the throttle back and gently steered toward the rock. He could use a boat pole to grab and tow. It was the right thing to do. *Five minutes late isn't a disaster.*

Ernie paused his boat a few feet from Seymour Rock, throwing two fenders over the side in case a swell carried him against the rock face. He reached out with his pole and hooked the back end of the canoe. It was entirely up on the rock, about a foot above the waterline. He began to pull the canoe toward the water so it could slalom onto the Sound without flipping over. It didn't move. *Wow, a lot heavier than it looks.*

Ernie's second pull on the pole only moved his boat closer to the rock. He made sure his third yank was short and sharp, pulling so forcefully that his boat swayed. That did it. One end of the canoe slid toward him and slapped the water. Suddenly he couldn't breathe.

Ernie was looking down at a fully dressed middle-aged woman with short brown hair. She was lying on her back, with her head toward him, under the rear crossbeam. Her legs stretched out toward the front of the canoe, which was still stuck on Seymour Rock. He started to shout, "Lady!" but stopped. There was no lady here anymore. Her eyes were closed and her throat was cut wide open. Around her head, the canoe was filled with partially congealed blood. Ernie dropped the pole and grappled for his radio, his heartbeat pounding in his ears.

CHAPTER ONE

Nora Carleton took a drink from her travel mug and stared out at the Long Island Sound, which was like yellow glass in the morning sun. She really should be getting to work, but the same thing that made her turn right instead of left from her driveway was keeping her from getting off this bench at Southport Beach. She lifted the steel gray mug toward her mouth again, but stopped short this time to study the faded gold and blue circular logo. The eagle in the middle was almost gone. As was the red, white, and blue shield. *God, I miss that work.*

It had been two years since Nora left her job at the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of New York. She moved only fifty miles away, but it seemed like another planet—Westport, Connecticut, and a job at the world's largest hedge fund. She liked the people at Saugatuck Associates. They were brilliant, honest, and sometimes funny, but most of them had never known what it was like to have a job where you were supposed to do good, to rescue the taken or stop evil people from harming the weak. They had never been the organized crime prosecutor she once was. They worked ridiculous hours, as she had in the government, but it was to make money for the firm's clients, and for themselves. Sure, many of the assets were retirement funds for teachers or firefighters, and making money for those folks was good, but

even that moral bank shot required squinting past clients like Middle Eastern oligarchs and genocidal authoritarian governments.

Nora was careful how she talked about this at work—it wouldn't do for the firm's general counsel to be badmouthing the business—but some of her friends there knew what was eating at her. Her mentor and boss, Chief Operating Officer Helen Carmichael, urged her to try to find meaning through the "kibbutz theory." There was a moral purpose, Helen argued, in the collection of people who had come together to work at Saugatuck. They cared for one another, shared a goal of excellence, and promised to tell one another the truth at all times. Whether they made shoes or invested money, she said, the community itself was a source of meaning. And in a world where lying seemed to be epidemic, a culture based on truth above all else intrigued Nora. She took the job mostly for the money and the location, but it was a benefit that the place apparently despised liars as much as she did.

Nora liked and trusted Helen, who was kind and protective of "her people," but she wasn't persuaded by the kibbutz argument. Of course, even with Helen she didn't say so. But she didn't have to. After all, the company's founder, legendary investor David Jepson, had explained the shared commitment to honesty this way: *You don't need to say everything that's on your mind, but if it's on your lips, it better be what's on your mind.* So Nora couldn't lie about it, but she kept quiet about her growing doubts, the ache that kept her staring out at the Sound when she should be making the short drive to her office. It wasn't on her lips, but it was eating a hole in her heart.

Still, the money *was* damn good. She ran her fingers through her hair and smiled. With Nora's starting bonus and the money her mother made from selling the family town house in Hoboken, New Jersey, they had purchased a big house in Westport. Sure, it was close enough to

Interstate 95 that the dull roar of traffic was a constant feature. But it was a "*water* feature," Teresa Carleton routinely insisted, with a smile. "Our waterfall." Nora didn't find it so charming, but the third generation of Carleton women in the house—eight-year-old Sophie—did. "Nana's waterfall," she called the noise, which grew louder on her short drive to school, then somehow disappeared as they passed under I-95 to the lush campus of Greens Farms Academy on a former Vanderbilt estate overlooking the Sound. Nora liked to joke that rich people had found a way to pay the highway noise to move only inland, so as not to mar the sparkling vistas along Beachside Avenue.

She took another sip from her aging Department of Justice mug and laughed at her own moping. There was no disputing that life on Connecticut's "Gold Coast" had been good to them. Sophie was thriving in the second grade at GFA, with small classes and deeply committed teachers. Sophie's father, Nick, lived nearby with his new wife, Vicki, and had the good grace not to mention that Vicki's extremely wealthy father had helped Nora get her job at Saugatuck Associates and paid Sophie's tuition at her fancy private school. But Nora knew it, and was grateful, both for the help and that it went unspoken.

She and Nick had never been a great couple, even when they were dating in Hoboken and created Sophie by accident. But they agreed Sophie was a gift and easily cooperated to move her between their Westport homes on alternating weeks. She missed the "nesting" days in Hoboken—before Nick got married—when Sophie lived with Nora's mom, leaving Nora and Nick to take turns staying in the "nest" with Sophie. Teresa continued to be a huge help with Sophie, while also volunteering in Bridgeport, a less wealthy, very diverse city nestled up against the rich, predominantly White towns that gave the Gold Coast its name. Her family was happy and thriving. Things were good.

Nora imagined her mother's voice. *C'mon Debbie Downer, time to get to work.* Smiling, she levered her six-foot frame off the bench and stepped to the sidewalk, stomping her feet to get the sand off her shoes. She backed the car out and steered down Beachside. She would drive past Greens Farms Academy—Sophie was at Nick's this week, so he had taken her to school—and parallel to I-95 until she reached the Saugatuck, and the firm's modern fieldstone and glass offices on the bank of the river.