

CHAPTER ONE

September 1999

My name is Colin Patrick. For twenty-nine years before this story opens in 1999, I had been chasing love, luck, and stability, but swinging wildly and missing big in my search for the good life when I came across a copy of *Runners' World* on my boss, Bridget Maloney's, desk in the newsroom of Philadelphia's Channel 7.

The magazine was open to a story about the explosive growth in women's running since 1972 when after a series of confrontations between women and race officials the Boston Marathon relaxed its rules and permitted women to compete.

"Women's running?" I said to Bridget as she sat at her desk to read the story. "I didn't know you liked sports."

"The Boston Marathon is planning a celebration of women at the 2000 Boston Marathon next April as they usher in the new Millennium and Roman wants us out front on the women's angle," she said. Steve Roman owned the station, but other than the huge portrait of himself he insisted be hung in the lobby he was a distant figure to me. "When 20,000 competitors toe the line at Boston on April 17, 2000 to start a new century, a third will be women. That's our story, sweetie, how so many women run today, yet so few know the history of women's running."

“I didn’t know you were a jock.”

“I love news. Pack your camera gear. We have a press conference at City Hall. Then we’ll go to the track at U Penn to get tape on women runners for a feature I want to do.”

I had other things I wanted to discuss with Bridget; namely, images that had begun to nag me in the mirror in the morning: sputtering shopkeepers, bumbling accountants, stammering non-profit executive directors, all with sins to conceal and me with my camera poised to beam them onto the nightly news as Bridget shoved a microphone under their chins.

“Do you ever wonder, Bridget, if this is the day we send a bugger down a deep dark hole they never come back from?” I said, alluding to the director of a Food Bank in South Philly who had dropped to his knees and begged us to go away that week.

“It may seem odd,” she said, continuing to read, “but for the first sixty-nine years of the Boston Marathon, until Roberta Gibb ran in 1966 and Kathrine Switzer was chased by Jock Semple in 1967, there were no female participants in the race.”

I reached for the magazine to get it away, but she slipped the magazine into her handbag.

“Do you ever wonder, Bridget, if any of the guys whose lives we break like glass might be innocent?”

“Maybe you need a change of scenery,” she said with a wink. “Take the van, baby. I’ll meet you at City Hall. Brown starts her Council meetings at 11 am sharp. Don’t be late.”



Bridget Maloney was a stunner as well as a crack investigative reporter. Late 40s, blonde, she had legs like a thoroughbred. Though she was single (separated from her husband in Boston according to scuttlebutt around the office,) I had never seen her date. Stories abounded, however, about her ability to impale a macho guy with

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a single sidelong glance. She possessed a keen intuition to match her physical gifts as well. Certainly, nobody doubted her talent. She had worked at Channel 7 three years and owned enough hardware, Emmys and other awards, to fill an aisle at Home Depot.

She was my best friend as well as my boss since she had hired me six months earlier. I was in Philadelphia at the time only because that's as far as my money and the bus from Chicago would take me after I got canned in the Windy City following a confrontation with the news director.

I couldn't take my eyes off her the morning I stepped off the bus from Chicago and spotted her on Market Street setting up for a remote. Her Gucci skirt switched side to side as she walked sending a signal to the world: step aside, people, I own this ground I'm moving across.

"I was at Channel 10 in Chicago," I said as I strolled over to her, stumbling from the too-many beers I'd had on the bus. I don't know why I pulled my Red Sox rookie card out of my wallet—twisted and faded as it was. Maybe it was the intuition I had that beneath the impenetrable shield she wore as a cover to the world she was kind.

She studied the card a long moment, a good sign.

"You hirin' cameramen, lady? I'm a good cameraman."

"Go away. Before I call a cop," she said.

So much for kind!

Two days later, I was sleeping on a bench at the 30th Street train station, still in town, when she tapped my boot with her dove gray Ferragamo shoe.

"Need a wake-up call, sweetie?" That's what she called me, sweetie, as I sat slouched on the bench waiting for a train to Miami, since I hadn't tried the south yet.

"So what is it exactly you told Sam Edwards, the news director at Channel 10 in Chicago, he should put up his butt?"

"You talked to the Prince of Darkness?"

"I'm a reporter. That seems your pattern, to burn your bridges."

"I have opinions."

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“Sam says you’re incorrigible.”

“He means incorruptible. There are lines I won’t cross.”

“Still follow the Red Sox since your playing days ended?”

“How do you know so much about me?”

She handed my baseball card back to me, which I didn’t realize she had kept. “I research my subjects. That’s what I do in addition to breathing.”

“I’m a subject now?”

“I saw you play. You banged a double off the Green Monster the day I was at Fenway. So you want a job? Talk to me.”

“I need a job, but I don’t talk about anything anymore that requires my emotional involvement.”

“Oh, my, sweetie, you do need my support.”

That night I slept in a hotel, my first real bed in weeks, compliments of Bridget, and two days later Channel 7 hired me as her cameraman.

“Why are you doing this for me?” I asked as I cornered her near the watercooler that first morning.

“When you interrupted me on Market Street, I liked your eyes.”

“How could you see my eyes? I was half asleep.”

“I saw the other half. I’m taking a chance that you can find your swing again. But don’t blow this, sweetie, it’s not like you have any bridges left to burn.”

We became inseparable after that, like two birds slicing through the crystal air, wingtip to wingtip.

Little did I realize, however, that she had another reason for hiring me: she had a plan for me, one that was about to send my life into a spin again, bigger than my collapse with the Red Sox.

The next several months with her would put me in the middle of the biggest women’s sports story of the year, a women’s story in a sport I knew nothing about, but even if I had known all the details about the intrigue to come I would have been powerless to resist Bridget.

For if there is one thing true about me, it’s this: put me in the

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company of a strong-willed woman in motion and I will fall under the gravity of her spell every time.



I was halfway to City Hall when the phone rang in the news van. It was Roman, Jr, the owner's son and the station's lead assignment editor.

"Reroute to Franklin Park," he barked. "An item just came in about obesity in America."

"Oh, wow, Junior, stop the presses."

Junior (he hated it when I called him Junior) was a pasty-faced kid with an instinct for the jugular and a newly-minted MBA from Penn, courtesy of his daddy's dough. I knew he didn't like me, which had been my liability at the three other stations where I had been fired in nine years since an injury cut short my baseball career: I could not conceal my disdain for prissy boys who flaunted their silver spoons.

"I want you to capture recreational runners, rollerbladers, whatever, in contrast to obese examples."

"Examples, Junior? We talking human beings here?"

"I want your tape on my desk in an hour," he said, ignoring my tone, and click went the phone because he knew I would never push back so hard as to jeopardize my gig with Bridget.



I shot a close-up of a 300-pound man draining a 32 ounce Slurpee, along with a shot of a young couple in purple balloon pants wolfing Nachos when suddenly my shoe crunched something soft on the path, a pink fanny pack, and I picked it up.

When I looked up I saw a trim blonde girl, mid20s, the fanny pack's owner. She was jogging in place in front of me, her blonde ponytail bouncing side to side off one shoulder then the other.

She wore a tight red halter, microfiber of some kind, and red shorts that hugged her perfectly sculpted hips. I glanced at her midriff bare, and her flat stomach, beaded with tiny crystals of sweat, then I heard her voice, clear, but with an edge.

“Can I have my pouch back, *please?*” but as I lifted my camera and pointed it at her, her tone became very sharp, “Hey, what are you *doing?*”

“I’m going to put you on the news tonight,” I said, focusing my camera on the terror showing in her amazingly blue eyes. “I need footage of fit people.”

“I don’t want to be on the *news!*”

“Wait!” I called, but she turned and I watched her long trim legs carry her away, her blonde ponytail slapping shoulder to shoulder again as she sped off down the path.

“Hey! What about this?” I said as I held up her fanny pack, but as quickly as she had appeared she disappeared around a cluster of bushes at the entrance to the park.

When I opened the pouch I found no indication of her name, only three bucks, a gold medal with blue lettering, “Boston Athletic Association, 1951,” and a number for a road race with big red lettering, “F-1.”

F One, she must be good, I thought as I returned to my van, followed by my next thought: how does a guy get a chance with a girl like that?



As soon as I got back in the truck, Junior came on the radio again.

“Media 17. Change your route again. I want you to go to City Line Ave. and the Pike.”

“I told Bridget I’d meet her at City Hall for a Council meeting at 11.”

“That meeting’s been canceled. The City Council President got in a car wreck.”

“How bad?” I didn’t know the Council President, Priscilla Brown, but she was a Hillary Clinton type, feisty, good copy.

“Real bad. I’ll have Bridget meet you at the scene.”

It was bad. I saw that immediately as I approached the crash site where a cop waved my news van through the morass of traffic before directing me to a spot between an ambulance and a shattered vehicle, a Honda Civic.

This was Brown’s car, obviously, and I craned my neck to catch activity inside the ambulance, but I couldn’t see through the tinted windows. The Honda, on the other hand, looked like a crushed can. That along with the slow turn of the ambulance at the top of the block told the tale: Priscilla Brown, Philly’s rising political star, could not have walked away.

“Colin?” Bridget shouted, as she rapped on my driver’s side window. “Junior wants us to go to Haverford County Day School. He’s got an angle for us.”

The school, on the grounds of Haverford College, was about ten minutes away. “What’s there?”

“Just drive,” she said, as she hopped in on the passenger side. “We’ll see when we get to the school. Hurry.”

A guard waved us through the gate at Haverford as the van’s squawk box reported the news on Priscilla Brown, that she was DOA at Pennsylvania Hospital. Bridget motioned to me to drive up a winding, tree-lined path, to a building where the sign read, “Day School.”

“Park here,” she said. “I’ll call the station.”

A bell rang inside the school and I removed my camera as a dozen small children, seven or eight years old, came running out to play for recess.

“What’s our story?” I said to Bridget.

I could hear Junior as she got him on speaker: “Brown’s kid goes to school there,” he said. “Get him on tape for an exclusive before the other stations get there.”

I grabbed the phone out of Bridget's hand. "Are you out of your fucking mind, asshole!"

"Give Bridget the pictures she needs for this story or you can pick up your money, son," he said loud enough for both of us to hear.

"I don't need your goddamn money," I shouted into the phone, and I set my camera on the ground.

"Colin," Bridget called, but I walked fast along the path to the gate. "Where you going?"

"Screw Junior and the horse that brought him," I shouted over my shoulder as I picked up speed heading to the gate, but she jogged after me and caught me quick.

"Three stations, right? And this will make four you burned bridges at."

"The boy lost his mother, for Chrissakes, Bridget, and Junior wants us to put him on the six o'clock news."

She grabbed my arm. "Junior's a termite. Why throw your life away again?"

I felt my heart pounding. The only sound was the laughter of the children playing on the hill.

"Because I had this happen to me," I said looking her straight in the eye.

"What?" she said, and she let go of my arm. "What are you talking about? Happened to you? What happened to you?"

"Never mind," I said, but she chased me again and caught me at the front gate.

"Wait," she said, as she spun in front of me and blocked me with her slender frame. I could feel her breast against my arm and smell her perfume.

"I don't have a lot left, Bridget. But what I do have I want to hold onto."

She looked deep into my eyes, then she pulled out a pad of paper and scratched a name and a number. She tore the page from its sheath and pressed the paper into my palm.

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“What’s this?”

“A number.”

“For what?”

“For a guy at a station in Boston.”

“Boston?”

“Stan’s the news director there, tell him he owes me one,” she said, and she tapped my hand with the note. “I’m building you a new bridge, kid.”

“I don’t need your bridge.”

“Oh yes, you do,” she said, and she kissed her fingertips before pressing them to my cheek ever so gently, then she smiled.

“Trust me, sweetie.”

CHAPTER TWO

It was an 0 and 2 count I recall vividly as I toed the infield clay at Fenway Park waiting for the pitch that night in September 1990. A cold drizzle leaked from the charcoal sky as Roger Clemens, our pitcher, looked in for the sign and I tapped my glove thinking: hit it here!

I had passed up a scholarship to Notre Dame for the chance to sign with the Boston Red Sox in June after high school, but the bet looked like a smart one as I hit .356 in twenty-one games following my September call-up and already the front office had dubbed me, at 19, their “shortstop of the future.”

“This is the preview, the coming attraction,” the general manager told the Boston Globe in 1990. “We put the kid in the middle of the action, but he plays like he’s been up here his whole life.”

How long ago since the fly ball that cut short my career with the Red Sox?

Ken Griffey of the Seattle Mariners waved his bat, as I shaded him toward third base—an eon ago—expecting Griffey to slap the pitch.

But he popped it up.

I remember the arch of the ball as I scooted on the grass behind the bag at third and I glanced away one second to gauge my distance from the spectators’ rail. When I looked up again, searching the black sky illuminated by lights, I found the ball dropping fast and I raised my glove. But my ankle did not follow the pirouette with the rest of my body; instead, my cleat locked under a brace that fastened the rail

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to the field and a moment later I felt the crunch from my hip down, like a bat splintering, as I tumbled into the laps of scattering fans.

Torn ligaments, broken fibula, decimated ankle: the doctor's report testified that my leg had passed through a butcher's shop.

Nine years ago, almost ten. An eternity!

I played in Puerto Rico the next winter and the Red Sox gave me three seasons in the minors to find my quick bat again, but the soft tissue in my ankle never healed and that was it—my life had ended in foul territory in the rain in Boston at 19.

My mother had a favorite saying when I was growing up: everyone has a diamond inside them, she said. Though most people cake their diamonds with bitterness, pride, and regrets, their diamond is still there, shining at the center, waiting for them to discover it.

Challenging words, but the box score on my life was showing “E” for “Error.”



I bounced around the country for six years after the Sox let me go searching without success for a passion to replace my love for the game. I worked at a series of jobs, including stints as a television news cameraman, a trade I had learned from my dad who had been one of the best news shooters at NBC in New York.

“If you want to be an eagle, you’ve got to fly like one,” my mom had always told me, so I kept going, pushing ahead, because I wanted to be an eagle.

She had great energy and a wonderful laugh. That’s what I remember most about my mom, the way she would throw her blonde head back and laugh in response to the ladies who sat with her at my little league games when I was a boy. They would chide her for giving up Europe and Asia and other places she had trekked as a foreign correspondent for UPI to be a mother in Hicksville, New York editing the community weekly.

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“You don’t understand,” she would tell the ladies. “This is what I’ve chosen. Family is everything to me.”

I was nine when she died. My father, who had survived a bullet in the Korean War, barely survived the loss, and I doubt I have yet.

I don’t know why women’s ambitions fascinate me more than men’s, but they do. Male posturing, designed as it is to gain an advantage, has always bored me. But a woman with a mind of her own and the kick to back it up, I will surrender to every time. Maybe that’s why as the days in Boston turned to weeks without producing traction still I couldn’t get Bridget Maloney out of my mind, and I wondered: did I make the right choice leaving her?



I found an apartment over a tavern in Revere, north of downtown when I arrived in Boston. The place had 35-cent beers and a portrait of JFK on the top shelf. The room was cheap, which was good, but the ladies who came out at night in hairnets to shout their husbands off the barstools (and their husbands who resisted) got to me. I clung to a loftier view of relationships, so I found another place—this one over a tavern in Dorchester, south of downtown—where they let me tend bar for extra cash. The floors of the apartment tilted higher at one end than the other, same as the first apartment, but at least it was quiet at night.

The luxury came at a premium, however, so I had to take a second job with a temp agency, one of those Work Today/Get Paid Today outfits, to make the higher rent. The temp manager, Friar Tuck with a nose ring, gave me the address of a storefront in the South End with instructions to create a mailing list for a celebration of women runners planned for 2000 Boston Marathon and the turn of the Millennium the next April.

“The clock doesn’t start till you get there,” barked Tuck, and off I went.

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The sun broke through the clouds as I descended into the subway that wet October morning. I decided to get off the T at Park Street and walk across the Commons for some fresh air, and that's when I said aloud, to no one in particular, "What am I doing here?"

I knew all about the need to "uncake" our diamonds. But Boston, why did I come back to Boston? I knew the answer. It's not the troubles we experience in life that shape us, it's our response to the bitterness, pride, and regrets that consume us that determines whether we will "uncake" our diamonds.

I came back, I knew, because this is where I had lost my way.
And this is where I needed to uncake my diamond.



At the South End storefront, a dank, cluttered room, my boss, a guy with Thom McAn shoes and a lime green suit, waved me in.

"What's your name, kid?"

"Colin Patrick."

"Sit over there, Pat. While I find the Yellow Pages."

"The temp manager said you needed me to create a mailing list for a video on women runners."

"Bigger than that. I want a list of all the companies in Boston that do business with women."

"Who are we looking for?"

"We're not looking for anybody. We're making a mailing list. It's the Boston Marathon that's looking for the first girl."

"First girl?"

"Yeah, the Runner in Red who ran the Boston Marathon in 1951. People think a girl snuck into the race back then. Some girl in a red hood. A sponsor paid the B.A.A. a ton of bucks for the right to promote the 'Runner in Red' when he finds her."

"What's the B.A.A.?"

"The Boston Athletic Association, which conducts the race," he

said, as he found the phone book propping up a leg of the couch and gave a pull. "Until 1972 the B.A.A. didn't let girls into the Marathon. That's when old guys headed up the race committee. But the girls got tired of the old guys' crap and by the 1970's they started fighting the sod busters."

"I thought you said a woman ran in 1951?"

"They don't *know* if one ran that early. That's why a sponsor, some bigwig business guy, paid the B.A.A. a ton of bucks for a sponsorship so he can make a big deal out of the 'Runner in Red.' He shelled out enough smackeroons, he must think he can find her."

"What do I do?"

"You make the mailing list so I can get the bigwig business guy to make a big deal out of me."

"Sounds to me like the big wig business guy wants to bait women. What's his real deal?"

"Look, pal, I don't pay you to think, I pay you to stuff. So get working, OK. I got to go to a meeting."

With that he was gone and I was leafing through the Yellow Pages trying to gauge which firms sold to women when the lyrics of a Moody Blues song on the radio hit me and I thought of Bridget again: "*I'm looking for a miracle in my life...*," the song said and I was struck how funny it is that a lyric can pierce our shell of consciousness when my boss banged his way back through the door.

"Shit," he said, and I watched him stand sideways against the window shielding himself as he followed the movements of a man in a raincoat and a policeman across the street.

"Oh, Christ! My fuckin' luck," he said, as the man in the raincoat checked the addresses of storefronts.

"What?"

"Nothin'. Look, you never saw me, OK."

With that he ran to the back of the room, searching for a way out, as across the street the policeman and the man in the raincoat walked our way.

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A moment later the two were forced to pause to let a limo pass, as a line of cars trailing the limo beeped their horns, and news vans and trucks with placards reading, “Finn for Governor,” created an additional obstacle.

“Where’s Sylvester?” the man in the raincoat asked me as he stepped through our door a moment later, while the policeman, a burly sort, stood behind him.

“Are you the B.A.A.?”

“DEA,” he said, and my brain tried to sort it out, but all I could come up with was Drug Enforcement Administration.

“The DEA?”

“That’s right. Who are you? Can I see some identification.”

I handed him my wallet, but as he studied the picture on my license I realized Sylvester or whoever had disappeared out the back door had more important worries than getting the mail out.

Before the man in the raincoat could ask another question, however, things got really strange, as a tiny, beady-eyed guy in a tattered coat walked up to our door whistling. The instant the dirty little guy saw the cop he turned and ran, while the cop—responding like a ball off a bat—bolted out the door behind him. Raincoat flapping the DEA man chased after them and I stepped out onto the sidewalk to watch, confused as hell.

It was the shots that got everyone’s attention.

Two shots rang out as pedestrians ducked behind mailboxes, mothers with carriages screamed, and the press hopped from their TV vans with cameras and a new focus greater than covering the governor’s campaign. Meanwhile, up the street in the center of the intersection the dirty little guy lay spread-eagled in the street while the cop, whom he had fired off a round at, stood over him with a gun to his head.

“What was that all about?” I asked several men in business suits who rushed down from their offices to join the throng on the street, held back now by police reinforcements.

“Drugs,” said a thin man.

“Must be that new ring from Central America, did you see the big story in the paper Sunday?”

“No, what story?” said a guy with a snub nose. “I didn’t see the paper.”

I listened as the thin man told how some government officials in El Salvador, former army generals, were working in partnership with a drug cartel to expand their operation into the US.

“How do you know this is that?” said snub nose.

“I overheard *him* talking,” the thin one said, and he pointed to the DEA leader who stood in the middle of the street coordinating the local police as they frisked the dirty little guy and hustled him into a cop car.

“Unbelievable,” said snub nose. “No sooner do the Feds shut down Florida than up pops Central America.”

Suddenly the DEA leader walked toward me, motioning for me to join him in a tan sedan sitting at the curb.

“Me?” I said, mouthing the word, and he nodded.

Bald, muscular, in his 40s, he said his name was Clinton (“Like the President, but different party, different worldview.”) He questioned me for more than an hour, taking notes about my whole life, but it was the baseball that finally convinced him I was straight.

“I saw you play. At Fenway. You could go in the hole and get ‘em, couldn’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“What happened?”

I told him about my ankle.

“Damn poor luck, ain’t it,” he said, as his partner—the cop who had ducked the shot—held up a cell phone. Clinton looked at me, his face very serious. “Word to the wise. Don’t go poking your nose into this kinda business, I don’t care how down you think you might get.”

“Don’t worry,” I said, but before he climbed out of the car to take the call, he said, “You’re Kenny Patrick’s kid brother, aren’t you?”

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“Yeah.”

“I remember Kenny had a brother in baseball.”

“Yeah,” I said, surprised that someone from Boston knew Kenny who was a New York cop, a good one.

“I palled with Kenny in the Marines. He’s a solid citizen, your brother.”

“The best.”

“I’m sure you miss being in the action. But keep your nose clean, kid, ya hear.”

I continued to hang around and watch after he drove off; in fact, I was the last to leave before police cleared the intersection. Most of all I couldn’t take my eyes off the TV van and the cameraman. Clinton had nailed it!

Oh, to be in the middle of the action again!

It was then that I reached into my pocket for my wallet and found the scrap of paper Bridget had given me.

The one with Stan, the news director’s, phone number.

CHAPTER THREE

It was a bright blue spring day on Long Island in New York the day of the accident.

I was nine and I had a ball game that evening. My mother had chores for me to do after school, make-work kind of stuff, things that would make me late for my game. I complained, but she insisted I do every last task before leaving for the ballpark on my bike.

I blamed her, saying it was her fault I was going to miss batting practice. I kept pestering her for a ride until finally, she relented, and I grabbed my cleats. They were muddy from a game earlier that week, and I set them on the dashboard to show her how mad I was that she had made me late.

As we drove she asked me nicely to take my dirty shoes off the dash, but I said I had no place to put them, and that's when she leaned over to slap them off.

"I told you to do something, young man," she said, as we passed through an intersection at Old Country Road and Jerusalem Avenue. An airline mechanic returning home from JFK fell asleep at the wheel, and he ran the light. He barreled into us, hitting us hard on my mom's side at 50 mph according to the police report later.

I saw my mom's face one last instant as the car on her side crumbled like a kid balling foil from a pack of baseball cards.

For three months after that I didn't talk, even after I came out of a coma, since there was nothing I could do to make it better, to undo what I had done, and I didn't want to talk to anyone again, ever.

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“It was an accident,” Kenny said, and I was grateful that he never blamed me for shattering our family. He even gave up his wrestling scholarship at Villanova in Pennsylvania to come home and be close for me.

But I didn’t believe him that it wasn’t my fault, and I have never believed anyone that I wasn’t to blame for putting my goddamn shoes on the dash.



The receptionist at Channel 6 in Needham outside Boston told me Stan was busy, but he’d see me after his conference call ended.

“You can sit in the lounge and watch TV while you wait,” she said, pointing to a room off to the side.

I sat down to watch as a segment called “Lead up to the New Millennium: A Women’s History of the Boston Marathon,” played on the station’s waiting room TV. About 1000 runners, all men, lined up in the street in Hopkinton for the start of the race in 1971 as half a dozen women lined up for photographers.

“It had been four years since Jock Semple chased Kathrine Switzer down the road in the 1967 Boston Marathon, calling worldwide attention to the issue of women’s exclusion from the Boston Marathon,” said a commentator. “But by 1971 women still were not permitted to run and six young ladies have come to the start today to show their displeasure with the rules and run in the race, including the race co-director’s daughter.”

I watched as the gun went off and a duel developed in the race between Pat McMahan of Boston and Alvaro Mejia of Mexico, but at intervals the video cut to the six women sprinkled among the field and to one in particular, a blonde women with a Boston College singlet leading the women’s contingent.

Then down the final straightaway came Mejia who had pulled ahead of McMahan and he raised his arms in triumph. But that shot

cut quickly to the broader field and to a shot of the blonde woman from Boston College as she opened her lead on the other women in the final miles on Beacon Street. The film showed her barreling down the straight-away toward the finish line as the commentator and the crowd went wild, “Here comes Gallagher, the race director’s daughter, she’s on pace to break the women’s world record for the marathon, unofficially of course since women are not allowed to participate formally. But nevertheless she is pouring it on, in a time close to three hours, faster than any woman has ever run a marathon, and uh oh, here comes her father, Pop Gallagher, the race co-director. He’s on record saying he won’t allow a breach of the rules and he’s moving to a place in front of the finish line. Oh, boy, looks like we may get a confrontation, since everyone knows Pop Gallagher will protect the integrity of the Boston Marathon....”

At that moment Stan, the news director, came into the lounge. I assumed he was Stan, because he said, “Are you Colin Patrick, the kid who wants to see me?” I nodded as I continued to watch the video with the blonde coed steaming toward the finish when all of a sudden the official called Pop Gallagher, her father, jumped into the street in front of the coed and waved his arms to block her.

“Bridget Maloney gave me your name,” I said, one eye on the TV. “She said I could see you for a job.”

“You know Bridget well?”

“I worked for her for six months as her cameraman in Philly.”

“You know her well and you don’t recognize her?”

“Huh?”

“That’s Bridget,” he said, pointing to the TV. “And that’s her father blocking her at the finish line of the 1971 Boston Marathon. It’s a fairly famous shot in running circles. I trust you’re a better cameraman than you are a sports historian.”

OMG! I didn’t say the words, but my face showed the shock. I stepped closer to the screen for a better look as Bridget squared off, her face inches away from the sour-faced curmudgeon who blocked

her, and it *WAS* her. That was *Bridget!*

“Oh, my God!” I said, and Stan smiled.

“Come this way. You can tell me about all the other close friends you have.”

I followed him to his office, but I walked backward so I could watch the screen and watch as Bridget, *MY* Bridget, melted under the glare of her father, Pop Gallagher, and stepped away from the finish line before crossing it, failing to finish the race in 1971.



Stan was a tall, stocky African-American with bright eyes and an honest face. He had outtakes from the history video of the 1971 marathon and he gave me the full background on Bridget, showing her running with the track team from Boston College to practice for her Boston Marathon run. The clips showed her practicing on the track with two guys, one identified by Stan as Jack Maloney, who Stan said was her estranged husband, and a guy who looked vaguely familiar.

“I know that guy,” I said, meaning the one who was not her estranged husband. “I think I do anyway.”

“You should, if you worked in Philly. That was your boss, the station owner, Steve Roman.”

I offered another OMG face as I failed to make the connection between the huge portrait of Steve Roman in the news station lobby in Philadelphia and this shot of a trim, young guy—a top runner—in the 1971 video clip.

“If I hire you, as you tell me Bridget wants me to, he’ll be your boss here as well.”

I saved the OMG face, but said, “What?”

Stan told me how Roman had made a fortune on Wall Street and was buying up television stations, starting with two, one in Philly and the other in Boston, “Including this one, Channel 6. He has a pattern.

He likes to own stations where Bridget works.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Roman owns a marketing company that bought a sponsorship from the Boston Marathon as part of celebrating the new Millennium at this year’s race. He wants our station to lead the search for the Runner in Red and he wants Bridget to come up from Philly to lead the project.”

“When’s she coming?”

“In a week. She’s in NY now with Roman planning strategy to find the Runner in Red and make a big PR splash out of it.”

The confusion showed on my face as he muttered, “Ah, neophytes,” then he grabbed his clicker for the TV screen on the wall across from his desk.

“Let me show you a little history. You look like you’re new to school.”

“I’m baseball. I don’t know anything about running.”

“Obviously.”

He showed clips from a Boston Marathon with the date “1966” stamped across the top. It showed a woman, “Roberta Gibb,” as identified on the screen, running among the men and crossing the finish line in 1966 in 3 hours and 21 minutes.

“Bobbi Gibb was the first woman to complete the Boston Marathon. She snuck into the race in 1966 and beat more than two-thirds of the men’s field. The media went crazy. There’s a story about a reporter from the Herald who felt he was giving up Pulitzer Prize material when his editor had him tank his prose on Kenji Kenimara, the men’s winner, to write a story on Gibb.”

“Why weren’t women allowed to run?”

“AAU rules that governed the sport suggested women could hurt themselves if they ran more than 200 meters. That was the world back then. The Boston Marathon had to operate under those rules or lose the AAU sanction.”

The next clip, “1967” showed a young woman in grey sweats,

identified as “Kathrine Switzer,” being pursued by a burly man who hopped off the press bus to chase her down the road.

“Who’s that guy?”

“That’s Jock Semple. He and Pop Gallagher were running rivals in the 30s and 40s. They became co-directors of the Boston Marathon in the 50s and oversaw the race together. Jock passed away in 1988, but Pop was a bit younger and he’s still around. He’s in his 80s today, but he was stripped of his title as co-director after his skirmish with Bridget in 1971.”

Again Stan put the scene up on the TV, the one with Pop Gallagher and Bridget squaring off eyeball to eyeball at the finish line.

“They canned Pop in 1971, why didn’t they can Jock in 1967 for what he did to Switzer?”

“Jock made himself public enemy number one with the female gender in ’67, that’s for sure. But he was smart too. He repented and he embraced women’s running after his confrontation with Switzer. He became a strong advocate for the women, and he even took to training top women runners, such as Patti Catalano. Women embraced Jock, including Kathrine Switzer. Pop on the other hand never made his peace, though he does train high school kids today. He has softened, I think, and a lot of people love him for all the good he did for the marathon over the years. But he never made peace with Bridget, and she never made peace with him.”

I shook my head, trying to absorb it all.

“So there you have it. Bobbi Gibb and Kathrine Switzer broke the ice for women runners in the mid-60’s, but if Bridget can prove that a woman ran in 1951, fifteen years before Bobbi Gibb, that will call for a total rewrite of women’s running history. That’s what Roman wants, he wants us to cross the finish line first on that story.”

“Can you play the scene again? The one where Bridget approaches the finish line and Pop jumps in front of her in the ‘71 race.”

“Sure,” he said.

“What did Pop say to her?”

“What do you mean?”

“Play it again, take a closer look,” I said and he played the scene two or three more times, with the shot of Bridget barreling forward the finish, about to cross the line, when three feet short of the line Pop leans in front of her and has words. Whatever words they were, they froze Bridget more than his flailing arms did, and she recoils, not from the windmill of his arms, but from his words.

“Wow, you’re right,” Stan said. “He does say something to her. I never noticed, I’ll ask her when she gets here. When I ask her what she wants me to do with you.”

“Do with me?”

He held up the slip of paper with his name on it, the one Bridget had given me in Philly, the one I had passed onto the receptionist for Stan.

“Obviously she wants me to hire you. But for what? I assume to help her with Runner in Red, but give me a call next week and I’ll get you an answer.”



My head was spinning!

Bridget was not just a runner, but a champion runner. A Boston Marathon historical figure, a freakin’ radical focused on breaking the gender barrier with Gibb, Switzer and other women pioneers. And taking on her father to do it! Now she was focused on the Runner in Red, a hunt for the first woman who quite possibly ran the Boston Marathon fifteen years before history knew there had been a first female runner.

But why? For revenge? To show the world there was one woman her father *couldn't* stop?

I needed answers so I stopped at the Boston College library on Commonwealth Ave on my way back to Boston. I learned that the Runner in Red was indeed a legend created after a group of Canadian

Runner in Red

runners in the 1951 Boston Marathon claimed they saw a woman “wearing red” running beside them during the marathon.

Their claim caused a great ruckus at the finish line in 1951 as reporters circled the Canadians for details. Had they been able to prove what they saw, the runner in red would have been the first woman to run a marathon on American soil. But Pop Gallagher, the race co-director, doused the flames of any scandal when he said the runner in red had been Tim Finn, a member of his Dorchester Athletic Association marathon team. Pop produced Tim at the finish line wearing a red sweatshirt with a red hood over his D.A.A. singlet and Tim, who had placed ninth in the race, securing victory for the D.A.A. team in the team category, said, “Yes, that was me wearing a red hood.”

The Canadians continued to protest. They even took their claim to newspapers in Toronto, prolonging the story for a few more days, but Pop continued to insist the “Runner in Red” had been Finn and because “Pop was the staunchest champion of the rules God ever created,” wrote the Boston Globe’s Jerry Nason, the dean of Boston sportswriters, that did it.

The story never got legs, beyond becoming an urban legend.



I got in my car to head back to Dorchester after finishing at the library when I saw *her!*

She was a hundred feet down the road, and I hit the brakes. It had to be her: *blonde ponytail!*

She stood next to her disabled car on Commonwealth Ave. She had the car’s hood up and I pulled in behind her and walked gingerly, thinking ah, serendipity!

That’s what the world gives us when it wants to be kind.

“Trouble?” I said. I couldn’t believe how gorgeous she was. Long and tall in tight fitting jeans she wore a red t-shirt on that warm fall

day. But all I focused on was her unmistakable trademark, her blonde ponytail. I had last seen that precious commodity flying back and forth across her shoulders in Philly as she had sped away from me and out of my life. Forever, as I had believed, until now!

“My car,” she said. “It stopped, I don’t know what to do.”

“Here, let me take a look,” I said, and I made “hmmm” sounds like a doctor examining a patient.

“Do you know what the problem is?”

“I do,” I said, and I took a shot. “These old cars, like my sorry case back there,” and I pointed to my car, which I had bought battered and bruised off a gas station parking lot after arriving in Boston. “Before the electronic ignition systems, these old cars worked off a set of points, which need to have a proper gap. I suspect the gap between your points collapsed.”

She looked at me like I was speaking Greek, but all I could see were her blindingly brilliant blue eyes. I pulled out a parking ticket from my pocket, the one I had just gotten after overstaying my research in the library, and I used the thickness of the ticket to reconfigure the gap in her points, and VOILA! It worked.

I asked her to start her car again and presto it turned over. Through the windshield I could see a huge smile suffuse her face—directed at *ME!* I looked in the back seat of her car, at the countless boxes she had stacked back there.

“What’s with all the baggage? You moving?”

“My mother just gave hell to my father again. I was staying there, but she’s hopelessly cruel to him, and I’m going to Dorchester to live with my grandfather.”

“Dorchester! That’s where I live,” I said, looking for any connection possible.

“Really, where in Dorchester?”

“I live above an entertainment establishment. Where do you live? Possibly I could follow you home to make sure your car doesn’t break down again.”

Runner in Red

I saw the processing of that offer play out in her brain, but ultimately she decided I wasn't a stalker and she smiled. "That would be great, thank you!"

She scribbled on a piece of paper and handed the page to me: "Ellen Crutchfield. 183 Minot Street."

I took the paper, as horns blew and trumpets blared. It was like a Hallelujah chorus concert right there on Commonwealth Ave in front of sandwich shops, auto dealer storefronts and computer fix it joints.

Just then a car pulled up, and pulled in behind mine.

"Ellen?" said a man in his 60s, a gray-haired hippy in a jeans jacket with his own ponytail, gunboat gray, under a ball cap. "You all right?"

By that, he meant "with *me*."

"Yes," she said, beaming. "I called you. But you didn't need to come actually. This nice guy fixed my car, he said he'll follow me home."

"No need for that," said the aging hippy. "I'll take you in my car. Then I'll come back and get your car after I get you home safe."

He turned to me and said, "Thanks for your help," his tone perfunctory, hardly warm.

"No problem," I said, and several moments later blonde ponytail was pulling out of my life again, this time with an aging hippy.

Still, she offered me a smile and a cute wave out the passenger side window as the hippy's sedan sped away.

I watched her go and my spirits sank to a new depth, until I realized what I was holding in my hand and I beamed larger than I could ever remember smiling. I opened my hand and stared at the paper, with her fine delicate writing.

I had her address.