

### Praise for *The Summer Club*

“Put on your summer whites and tuck *The Summer Club* into your beach bag. It’s an irresistible journey.”

—Susan Wiggs, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Hannah McKinnon returns with her latest juicy, unputdownable read about an exclusive New England enclave and a summer that will change everything. Don’t miss this delectable summer treat that is as enjoyable as, well, a day at the beach!”

—Kristy Woodson Harvey, *New York Times* bestselling author

“I couldn’t put the book down, and the ending had me surprised and moved to tears.”

—Nancy Thayer, *New York Times* bestselling author

### Praise for *The Darlings*

“A perfect beach read! I loved it.”

—Pamela Kelley, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Nantucket Restaurant*

“Part delectable family drama, part testament to the various ways in which love blooms, Hannah McKinnon’s *The Darlings* is an absolute treasure of a novel . . . Slip this one in your beach bag and share a copy with a friend.”

—Kristy Woodson Harvey, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Wedding Veil*

“In the vein of J. Courtney Sullivan, Elin Hilderbrand, and Jennifer Close, and contrasting picturesque coastal perfection with the messiness of real life, this multigenerational saga sets familial obligations against the freedom of new opportunities, all wrapped up in a heartwarming bow.”

—*Booklist*

Praise for *Message in the Sand*

“A sweet story about a small town, and the one summer that changes everything for its inhabitants. Right now, more than ever, we need stories about resilience, strength, and how the people we see every day have the power to change our lives—the latest novel by Hannah McKinnon delivers.”

—Brenda Janowitz, author of *The Grace Kelly Dress*

“A gripping, heart-wrenching novel of domestic fiction by Hannah McKinnon . . . In this gripping, emotional story, a shattering tragedy upends the lives of two young girls and those in their orbit.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

Praise for *The View from Here*

“A warmhearted yet clear-eyed look into what brings people together and what tears them apart, this makes a delightful case for shaking off childhood roles.”

—*Booklist*

“Warmhearted and a perfect beach read.”

—9to5 Toys, “Best New Summer Books”

Praise for *Sailing Lessons*

“If you are a fan of sisterhood-themed beach reads by Nancy Thayer and Elin Hilderbrand, then McKinnon’s latest engaging standalone needs to go on your summer-to-be-read list.”

—*RT Book Reviews*

Praise for *The Summer House*

“Sure to appeal to fans of Elin Hilderbrand and Dorothea Benton Frank, *The Summer House* is an intriguing glimpse into a complicated yet still loving family.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

“Charming and warmhearted.”

—*PopSugar*

Praise for *Mystic Summer*

“When two roads diverge . . . take the one that leads to the beach! Hannah McKinnon delivers a charming gem of a novel in *Mystic Summer*. I adored this book.”

—Elin Hilderbrand, #1 *New York Times*  
bestselling author of *The Identicals*

Praise for *The Lake Season*

“Hannah McKinnon’s lyrical debut tells the story of a pair of very different sisters, both at a crossroads in life. McKinnon’s great strength lies in her ability to reveal the many ways the two women wound—and ultimately heal—each other as only sisters can.”

—Sarah Pekkanen, *New York Times* bestselling  
coauthor of *The Wife Between Us*



# The Wash-Ashores

Other Books by Hannah McKinnon

*The Sandy Page Bookshop*

*The Summer Club*

*The Darlings*

*Message in the Sand*

*The View from Here*

*Sailing Lessons*

*The Summer House*

*Mystic Summer*

*The Lake Season*

For Young Adults

(As Hannah Roberts McKinnon)

*Franny Parker*

*The Properties of Water*

# The Wash-Ashores

*A Novel*

HANNAH McKINNON

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*For Cape Cod, whose lovely arm reaches into the deep blue sea.  
To Chatham, whose wild dunes and sparkling harbor and Main  
Street confections have long been our family's stuff of dreams.  
And to my wild wooly family who makes the pilgrimage,  
summer after summer, chasing the memories.*



# Holly

From her perch on the dock Pleasant Bay shimmered in the evening light like the pearly-pink inside of an oyster shell. Holly dangled her feet over the water. Beside her, Bruce settled onto the wooden planks with a sigh, and she rested her hand on the dog's broad soft head. Not far out, sailboats bobbed at their moors. Along the shore a handful of clammers bent over the shallows with their rakes and buckets. The scene was at whole odds with the knot of nerves in her stomach.

She glanced back at the steep wooded trail she'd just come down. At the top of that trail, nestled among the pine trees, sat the Cranberry House Inn. Her grandmother's inn, now hers. Sort of. The inn she'd inherited; only Francine hadn't died. Yet.

"Just pretend I'm dead and gone," Francine had said with a shrug. "It's the only way to find out for sure."

"You want me to pretend you're *dead*?" It wasn't the first crazy idea her grandmother had come up with.

“Unless you can think of a better way to do this.” Then, as Francine fiddled with a vase of hydrangeas Holly had just painstakingly arranged, pulling out one stem, then another, before yanking out the whole bouquet and swapping the vase altogether, “You won’t even know I’m here. I promise!”

Holly had winced. Taking over the inn was everything she’d worked for. It was one reason she’d gone to grad school for her MBA, and another reason she’d come back; but the ultimate reason was the connection she felt to this old house, and its bittersweet history that had started long before her own young life had.

Built in 1853, the Victorian had lived many storied chapters before Holly’s grandparents had turned it into an inn. Growing up, Holly had loved listening to her grandparents’ tales about the house’s past. She knew all its iterations the way one knows one’s own ancestral heritage. By then her grandfather had accrued several artifacts that had stayed with the house, discovered and kept by one owner and passed down to the next. They were stored in an old trunk in the foyer, locked for safekeeping like a treasure chest. Inside the trunk was an accounting ledger from a shipbuilding business dating back to 1850, written in calligraphy. A box of black-and-white photos that had been left behind in the attic by cranberry boggers. A crackled hand-painted sign that read **CRANBERRIES, 10 CENTS A BOX** found in the attic of the small barn that their gardener, Oliver, now stored equipment in. And, most haunting to Holly to this day, a single dusty white patent leather child’s shoe with ribbon ties, found in one of the walls years ago when the electricity was updated. Even as a girl these artifacts felt sacred to Holly, and each time her grandfather unlocked the trunk and lifted its creaky lid, she held her hands

out with reverence to receive each article one at a time. He never had to tell her to be careful.

Originally, the house belonged to a merchant in the ship-building industry, Josiah Spicer, who specialized in clipper ships. Known for their sleekness and speed, the ships came to be in sudden demand on the global market in the 1850s. As his wealth accrued, the merchant desired a stately home close to the shipyard in town, but his wife, Anna, a nature enthusiast who preferred privacy for their family, fell in love with the view from the cliff and convinced her husband to build the family home there. The location on Pleasant Bay allowed him to easily travel across the cove by boat to the shipyard. Of the five children the merchant and his wife had, their last, and only daughter, Adeline, had died at a young age. Holly had long wondered if the little shoe belonged to her. Stricken by grief upon her death, the merchant and his wife commissioned an artist from New York to come paint a beautiful fresco on the parlor wall of a little goldfinch fluttering above a sea of pale pink clouds. Faded by time and flaking away from the plaster, only remnants of the fresco remained; still, it was Holly's favorite detail of the house.

After the merchant passed away and his wife went to live with a son in Boston, the house was acquired in 1890 by an enterprising local cranberry farmer. Captain John Harwich, a retired fisherman, had witnessed the rise of cranberry bogging up and down the arm of the Cape, and by then had bought up almost fifty acres for farming. The marshland across the street from the inn was among them, and when the grand house went up for sale he employed some of his riches to scoop it up. Eventually the house was passed down to his son. By then, the family had planted many bogs, from Dennis to Chatham to Orleans,

as the peat soil and coarse sand along the coast provided optimal growing conditions. Business boomed and Harwich found himself building bog houses along the outskirts of his farm properties to house his workers, including an influx of Cape Verdean immigrants fleeing famine. By then, the Harwich family were leaders in the cultivating business, and the big house became known as the Cranberry House. Photos from that period showed the windows, moldings, and trim work painted a deep red. By the time her grandparents stumbled across it on a visit to the Cape, the old house had been empty and for sale for some time. Both locals and summer people thought it too big and in need of too much work to make it a sound investment for a private residence. At that point, it was destined to be torn down and the property divided. Fixing it up and turning it into an inn had been Holly's grandfather's enterprising idea. Back then he was young and strong and stubborn, and what he lacked in funding he had ample supply of in the manpower from friends and family. Holly had long loved the story of how her grandparents brought the old house back to life and, in doing so, started their own new chapter. Turning it into her own next chapter felt right; if only she could pull it off.

The truth was, this was not just a trial-run summer for Holly's management skills. She knew her grandmother needed convincing that taking over the Cranberry House was a good fit. Because if there was any doubt, an envelope with a lucrative offer from a local developer was tucked away in her office desk. "Don't worry about that nonsense," her grandmother had insisted when Holly first stumbled across it, batting her hand at the air as if shooing away a nuisance fly. "I told that Mr. Sullio I'm not interested. By now he's probably found some poor

other old house to tear down and turn into condos.” Here she’d grabbed Holly’s hands and squeezed them. “*You* are the future of the Cranberry.”

How Holly hoped that was true. It wasn’t just about her ability to take over; the inn needed to make more money and fast if it was to survive. And she had this summer to turn things around.

Now, feet dangling over the water, she felt her breath begin to steady as her gaze traveled along the shore. The cove, shaped like a horseshoe with a barrier island on one side, held a small sandy stretch of beach at its center, flanked by gentle slopes on both ends. The *arms*, her grandmother called them. “It’s like the sea snuck in to meet the land, and the land wrapped her arms around it.” Francine wasn’t alone in her romanticism of the place. There was something about this bay, beyond its ice age origin. Beyond the Nauset tribes that first fished its waters and inhabited its shore. Holly had felt it even as a young girl, and she felt it still: a connection to the wild grasses and the leggy shore birds and the brackish water that stretched beyond her own small history here. Its grandeur was not obvious, unlike the roaring surf of the National Seashore or the towering dunes of Wellfleet, to the north. Here the cove was snug, the beach slight. Its placid face proffered ripples more than waves. That suited Holly just fine. “Pleasant Bay speaks in whispers,” Francine told her as a child. “If you listen, you’ll catch what she’s saying.” At that gentle hour, the only sound was that of the gulls and the lap of water against the hulls of the boats. It was why Holly had come down here, to listen.

Since returning to the Cape three months ago, almost every moment had been consumed by renovation on the inn: restoring the floors, painting the rooms, ripping out old carpet, much of

it done by herself and the staff. The timing before the summer season was tight, and the budget even tighter. Between the work and the worry, Holly's body and mind ached in unison. Sitting on the dock with Bruce forced both to still; it was also where the memories seeped in.

How many summers had she spent traipsing along this shoreline with young friends, crab net in hand? And later, hunkered around bonfires with other teens, beneath August skies flush with meteor streaks? This was where Holly learned to swim the first time she came to stay with her grandparents, a visit that turned into an annual trip to the Cape, summer after summer. It was the beginning of her second self, whose skin she lived in only from June to August but somehow sustained her the rest of the year she was away. A girl marked by the bay, with a freckled nose and sun-streaked hair, who fearlessly boated and biked and swam with a pack of other summer kids, so unlike the shy, quiet girl who returned to school in New York each September. It was why she was back here now, not just on the dock at this early hour, but back in Chatham, this time to stay. If only she could make it work.

Her mother, Claire, thought all of this was a terrible mistake. Unlike Holly, she harbored little sentiment for Pleasant Bay or the inn, despite the fact it was where she'd met Holly's father on a summer trip of her own. The inn and the Cape were where he'd grown up, and Claire did not possess the same visceral connection to the area that Holly and her father had shared. She worried that the loneliness of a long offseason would be hard to live through, its isolation not healthy for a thirty-year-old young woman looking to shape her future. She also worried the toil of running an inn would prove too much. Holly knew her mother's

worries held water: the winters here were long and quiet. She also knew they did not end so much as shatter, with the arrival of Memorial Day, as an urgent trail of traffic snaked up the mid-Cape highway signaling the incoming tourists like locusts. “They will suck the life out of you,” Claire warned her daughter. “The clients get more and more demanding each year. Why do you think Francine is retiring?”

“Guests,” Holly gently corrected, as her grandmother insisted they think of them. “And probably because she’s eighty. It’s a miracle she’s kept working this long.”

“It’s Yankee stubbornness is what it is.” Holly could sense her mother checking her watch. Claire’s phone calls were like this: crisp and brief. Data shared, calculations made, projections offered. It was the same way she ran her accounting firm in New York. Holly knew her mother loved her, but the two were made of such different stuff. In private moments, she wondered if her stuff came from her father. But that was a subject not to be brought up, despite the years he’d been gone. It was just too painful.

“You’ve got a master’s degree in business,” her mother reminded her.

“Exactly. Which neither Franny nor Poppy ever had. Between my degree and all my summers spent here, how can this venture not be a good fit?”

Her mother sighed. One trait they did share was a propensity for exasperation. “I hope you know what you’re doing. You can always come home if you don’t.”

That was what her mother had never grasped and Holly didn’t have the heart to tell her; their tidy life in the New York suburbs had never felt like home. Not like the Cape did. Here is where Holly’s memories ran deepest: it was where she’d learned to sail a

Sunfish. Swim with the tide. Fall in love with Stephenie Meyer's books. Fall in love with a summer boy. Learned to drive Poppy's truck up and down Route 28. Had the longest relationship of her life so far—with a summer boy named Ben. And years later, said goodbye to that same summer boy, whose memory chased her. She glanced across the bay in the direction of Ben's house, a wave of sadness coming over her: it was still there, even if he was not.

Holly tucked her knees beneath her chin and hugged them tight. The last time she'd seen Ben he had told her he was getting married. It was the last time her heart had been broken. It was also their goodbye. Holly shook her head at the memory. That was what her mother didn't understand. The most important hellos and goodbyes of her life had taken place here. That sense of home would never change for Holly Goodwin.

When Francine had called her at NYU that fall, just before graduation, Holly understood why before her grandmother even spoke. It was a quiet understanding they'd always shared, the wish that the inn stay within the family. It was part of the family, after all. A family made smaller when Holly's father died suddenly in a car accident when she was only twelve, and again, when Poppy passed two summers before. Now, it was just the three women who made up the family; three generations of stubborn, strong-willed women who'd borne more than their fair share of loss.

Through those losses the Cranberry House had been there, but like them, it had not gone unscathed. For years her paint had been peeling away from its decorative trim. Each summer her porch steps had a little more sag in them. "Just like my back," Francine liked to joke. But the roof was no joke, and something Francine muttered about when she didn't think

Holly could hear. Then there was the interior; elegant as it was with its original architectural details, it needed a serious spruce. When she arrived in January, it had taken Holly a month just to convince her grandmother to rip out the tired carpets. An overdue update to operations proved to be a whole other matter. Francine still used a guestbook with pen and paper. Email had been an affront enough; she balked at online reservations and spreadsheets for accounting. God forbid entering the realm of social media. It was one thing for time to stand still on the bay, Holly tried to explain to her grandmother; it was another to operate like dinosaurs.

Now, after months of toil, they were ready to open for the season. Each of the ten bedrooms was luxuriously made up, the grand four-poster beds donned in crisp Egyptian cotton and the marble bathrooms gleaming. Downstairs, the original walnut parquet floors were polished. Fresh-cut hydrangeas filled the vases of the lobby, and piano music tinkled softly in the background. Behind its swinging door, the kitchen would be humming as Greta whisked cranberry scones from the oven and set out ramekins of honey butter and gooseberry jam with tiny silver spoons. Just outside, Oliver would be whistling as he watered the vegetable gardens and filled baskets with produce for their new farm-to-table menu offerings. Already the bean bushes and pea trellises were bursting with fresh greenery, their vines laden with heavy pods and string beans. Rows of romaine and radicchio lined the raised beds like little leafy soldiers, each procession dotted with marigolds to organically keep pests at bay, with garlic and leeks as backup. Holly knew the heirloom tomatoes would follow, always a guest favorite. Linus, her uptight assistant manager, would be at the reception desk going over reservations

one last time in his latest summer suit, reserving his dazzling smile for the guests despite Holly reminding him the staff could benefit from it as well. Everything was ready and everyone was in place. All, except for her grandmother. Francine was shored up a few miles across town at her friend Bee's house, and God willing, there she would stay. This was her idea, after all. Now it was Holly's turn.

Holly glanced back at the wooded trail. Tomorrow morning, the Cranberry House would open its historic doors to the first guests of the season. The grand old house would sigh happily, just as Holly and Francine did at the start of each summer. The screen on the front door would slap gently closed behind each arrival, ushering them into its cozy vestibule the way her grandmother used to welcome her. Into its cool Victorian chambers awash in soothing blue and white tones, where cocktails were served before dinner in the parlor room by the fireplace. Where the chess table stayed set up by the bay window just waiting for players. Where the salt air breeze rippled the curtains, and windows stayed open all night. Time stalled at the Cranberry House and little changed, except for this season. This season Holly was at the helm.

Now, in the last throes of sunset, Holly inhaled the sharp scent of salt air. She scratched the thick brown fur around Bruce's collar, rousing him from his slumber. "Come on, boy."

# Greta

She did not need a man. A good sourdough starter, she needed. A slow-churned grass-fed butter for her *beurre blanc* sauce she needed. Even the homemade lavender spray she created from the garden (that Linus complained incessantly about when she asked him to spritz the dinner linens with it) she needed. But not men. Since she was a little girl in Gothenburg, Sweden, all the men in Greta's life had let her down hard.

She dropped the latest batch of earthy sourdough onto the marble with a satisfying *thwack* and began gently stretching and folding. First there was her father, Anders Karlsson. A man who stuck around long enough to give Greta a brother and two sisters before abandoning them all. Prompting Greta to create a new surname for herself that her siblings adopted as well. It was a practice not uncommon in her home country; Sweden was understanding in that way. Names are important. Beyond the shared genes she could not change, Greta could at least distance herself from her cowardly father with a new surname. Severing her connection to the family tree of Anders Karlsson was a

practical necessity, and if she could do it artfully, all the better. It was how her surname, Nyqvist, came to be. *Ny* for “new,” and *qvist* for “twig.” Greta like the botanical symbolism as much as she did the sound of it. A new bud unfurling, bending away from the branch that rooted it, and reaching skyward to the sun. As a young girl with three even younger siblings to help her mother care for, Greta often imagined herself that little twig. Sturdy, bending to the elements, but never ever breaking.

Greta survived her father’s leaving, even if it left a mark. What she had not anticipated was that other marks of the male-induced variety would follow. There was a stepfather, Hans, who followed her father’s departure around the very time Greta felt that the little branch of her family was finally growing strong again. Hans, who did not like children, now found himself under a roof with four who were not his own. What Hans did like was akvavit. Soon Greta’s mother joined him in that affection, and the alcohol flowed through the household if the happiness did not. Eventually Hans left, too, but the toll his time with them took on her mother did not. As Greta worked her way through secondary school, she found herself burdened more and more with caring for her younger siblings and running a household. The only thing that sustained her through it all was her love of cooking. In her upper secondary years, she focused her studies on the Hotel and Restaurant Programme. There, she found peace within the confines of recipes. Recipes provided certitude, a reprieve from chaos. The perfect internal temperature for oxfile steak was 135 degrees. A vigorous whisk achieved the sabayon for Béarnaise sauce. Molasses stabilized emulsion in a vinaigrette. A clean workspace. A sharp cleaver. *These things* Greta could control.

But the safety of the kitchen was not without one final dose of male-induced disappointment. That disappointment, perhaps the most insulting of all because she was older now and stronger, too, came from her final-year instructor at Högskolan Kristianstad University: Lars Asp. How thrilled Greta had been to work alongside the intimidating but renowned chef in her final year of culinary school. Lars was a god in the kitchen and a god to look at, but Greta paid little attention to that last part. That final semester she was too focused on winning the internship in America, at a prestigious Manhattan restaurant run by one of Lars's former colleagues, awarded to the highest-ranking student in the graduating class. It would change everything for her.

Though sharp and impatient with her at first, Lars began encouraging Greta during that final term. As other students strove to create modern dishes with worldly inspirations, Greta found herself reaching back into her own culture, drawn to experimentation with Swedish tradition. For one assignment she created smoked herring and pickled daikon dumplings accompanied by a lingonberry soy sauce, an idea sparking smirks and eye rolls from her peers. When it came time for tasting, Lars made a face before he even sampled one. Ignoring her artful presentation and chopsticks, he plucked a dumpling from the bowl with his fingers, dragged it through the sauce, and popped it indelicately into his mouth. He chewed, his expression not exactly shifting, to Greta's dismay. "Too much coriander in the pickling," he said, flatly. Then, "Otherwise ingenious."

Soon Lars began asking her to prep for him before class. He suggested cookbooks she should read, undiscovered bistros she should try in the city. He gave her permission to stay after class

and test new ideas in the kitchen. For the first time, Greta felt seen. She trusted Lars's expertise and input. She trusted him.

One night late in the term she stayed after class perfecting a dessert course for a final exam: a coconut crême brûlée dusted in key lime. Lars surprised her when he came in to retrieve a set of knives he'd left behind. When he stopped by her station and asked to try the dish, Greta held her breath and handed him a spoon. At first he gave away nothing, his mouth working. "I hope you're applying for the American internship," he said finally. When he strode out, tears sprang to her eyes. Perhaps all her work had paid off. Perhaps a new chapter in New York was within striking distance.

The next night Lars returned to the kitchen. This time he did not ask to try the pastry dish she was at work on. This time he peered over her shoulder, silent, as she whisked a chocolate ganache over the burner. At first Greta thought she was doing something wrong. As his silence stretched, she tensed, waiting for his correction. But when Lars ran his hand up the back of her thigh, she understood. Greta figured her chance at the internship was over the moment she spun around and dumped the hot pot of sauce down the front of his shirt and pants. She wasn't wrong.

Once more Greta was a small twig, freshly budded, branching toward an uncertain sky. But she tried to keep her face always turned to the sun. When she landed at Logan airport four summers ago, with neither an internship nor a job, Greta found herself making the rounds of the city, and later, the suburbs. No one good was hiring. No one knew who she was. The small printed ad for a chef at the Cranberry House she stumbled across one afternoon in a café was not what she'd traveled all this way for. It was halfway up the arm of Cape Cod, a place

she'd never even heard of. Its so-called restaurant was small and obscure. By all definitions, the old inn was, too. But it was a job. With a kitchen all her own. And a kind older woman named Francine as innkeeper. Greta figured she'd stay for one summer, then return to the city during the offseason. But when the leaves turned color around Pleasant Bay and the trees rustled in the autumn wind, Greta paused to consider. Her branch felt strong and steady; for the first time she sensed her roots beginning to deepen. She decided to let them.

Now, in the early hours of opening day in her fourth year at the inn, the sourdough had grown sticky beneath her fingers. She reached for a handful of flour and sprinkled it generously across the counter before shaping the dough into a bundle and nestling it into a bowl. Here, finally, Greta had what she needed. Freedom to run her own kitchen. A devoted local following she'd grown steadily in the last year and who had fallen in love with her unique menu offerings. Inn guests who rose early and filled the cozy dining room no matter the fine beach weather, thanks to her cranberry scones and honey butter. And a nurturing boss in Francine, who adored her no-nonsense approach and never asked her to change a darn thing: except once to trade out the pickled herring for cod (Americans had such timid palates). Greta had all the things she'd worked for.

True to her word, a man had never been among those things. But damned if she didn't get goose bumps when she heard Oliver Owens whistle. When the back kitchen door opened, there he stood in his tall green Wellies, a goofy grin plastered across his tanned face as he held out his latest offering.

"For you!" he said, tromping up to the island and thrusting a basket of greens beneath her nose. Already she could smell sun

and soil, the scents of the garden, rising from within. Avoiding his big brown eyes, Greta forced her blue ones down to the contents of the basket. To the bright batch of butter beans, the thicket of pea pods, the soil-sprinkled leaves of the most beautiful purple radicchio she'd ever seen. "This may be the best batch of peas I've ever grown. Try one." When Oliver handed her a pod, their fingers brushed, and it fell to the floor.

"Gosh, sorry!" he said.

"I've got it," she said, bending to retrieve it. When she stood, Oliver was holding out a new one, inches from her mouth.

"Taste?"

Greta blinked. Her lips parted, and Oliver deposited the pea pod gently on her tongue.

His eyes narrowed as she crunched.

Oliver Owens gardened with the fervor of a doting new parent. He'd once told her he hated to wear gloves because he needed to feel the earth, the tender shoots between his fingers, the shape of a warm tomato in his palm. No one had spoken to her like this before, this language of love for the food he grew. Greta knew this language. She also knew this love.

Now, the sweet bright taste only a June pea could proffer flooded her senses. Unconsciously Greta closed her eyes and smiled.

Oliver laughed, delighted. "My thoughts exactly."

When she opened her eyes, he was already halfway out the door, whistling once more. The screen door slapped shut, and Oliver disappeared around the corner.

In the silence that followed, Greta stared at the basket of vegetables he'd left on the butcher block counter. She was in trouble.

That night's dinner menu was printed. Her coworker Linus would come huffing in any second to run through reservations and complain about one dish or other. Guests would arrive laden with luggage and looking for a cocktail. The dining room and porch would hum with hungry diners clamoring for chowder. After all she'd been through in her young life, none of that spelled trouble for Greta Nyqvist. The real trouble had just walked out the door.

# Ezra

The summer was already promising to be a hot and humid one, not that it really mattered. Unless you counted the extra time it took his art canvases to dry. Ezra sighed and removed his latest work gently from the easel before taking it indoors to the air-conditioning so the acrylic could set. The heat was not for him. He wasn't sure the Cape was anymore, either.

His daughter, Amy, loved a hot summer day. Freed from the sticky confines of the city, here she could climb dunes and skip rocks and race up and down the beach with the other summer kids, her long limbs unfurling like a leggy foal. Ezra shook his head at the memories, recalling the trouble he had dragging her off Ridgevale Beach each afternoon. His wife, Rachel, too, for that matter. Unlike Ezra, with his thin fair hair and pale skin, Rachel's and Amy's skin turned tawny then gold as June spilled into July, their long dark curls tinged with copper. All while Ezra parked himself beneath the umbrella, moving his beach chair irritably every hour as the sun played games, shifting the shade away from him. No, he did not love the Cape like the women

in his family. But how he loved them. And that was why they'd ended up with the house on Pleasant Bay. But that was a long time ago. Now it was just Ezra and the house and the fresh disappointment he'd been delivered a few hours earlier.

Amy had tried to break the news gently when she called. "I'm sorry, Dad. I really wanted it to work out, but I just don't see how we can manage it this year."

It had broken what little was left of Ezra's heart. "You mean you're not coming? At all?"

He heard her sigh on the other end of the line, and instantly felt bad. "Though I understand," he rushed to add. "I do. You and Ethan have your hands full with the kids, and now he's got that new job."

"They won't give him the time off, Dad," she tried to explain. "And bringing all three kids out there alone . . . well, it's just too much."

"You won't be alone," he said before he thought.

"Of course not." She paused. "What I meant was the travel, the plane and such."

Ezra knew she meant him, too. His grandchildren were all under the age of five, and Ezra was seventy-six, with a heart that wasn't working like it used to. He could not be the kind of physical help Amy would need with all three little ones. Plus, there was the house. Perched atop a rocky bluff with steep wooden steps running down the craggy hillside all the way to the water, it was the worst kind of setup for toddlers. It may as well have been made of glass and filled with alligators. Just imagining the kids toddling about the perilous edges of his patio made his heart tick too fast.

But so did the thought of not seeing them. They'd missed Christmas, when Amy and little George came down with the

flu. Ezra tried to cover his own sigh, but Amy heard it three thousand miles away.

“I’m really sorry. We miss you a lot, Dad. But we’re going to try for Thanksgiving, alright?”

*Thanksgiving?* That was six months from now.

“Alright then,” he’d said, sadly. Neither of them mentioned the idea of him flying to Seattle. His health was not up for that these days.

When the call ended, Ezra wandered to the patio and sat staring out at the water. From his viewpoint, through the part in the stand of cedar trees that lined the hillside, Pleasant Bay shimmered softly. “They’re not coming,” he whispered. Rachel did not answer him, but that never deterred him from talking to her. These days she was the only person Ezra regularly spoke to.

He watched a man on a boat sail away from its neighboring mooring, though he didn’t know any of the neighbors anymore. That was Rachel’s thing; the many years they summered here with Amy, Rachel knew all the neighbors by name, and their kids as well. Hell, she even knew their pets. Rachel was like that. She liked people, and people sure liked her back.

“Oh, come on,” she used to tease when he dragged his heels about going to a dinner party or barbecue. “You know the Rogers, and you like the husband.”

“I don’t know the Rogers, not really,” he’d remind her. “And I don’t even remember his name.” Ezra, who worked long shifts in the Mass General neurosurgery department during the week, joined his family on the Cape only for the weekends. By then he was exhausted, having made the traffic-jammed trip down the mid-Cape highway, often still in his suit, having left straight from hospital rounds. By then Rachel, who’d spent the week

alone with Amy, would be practically vibrating on the front porch waiting for him. Their love was fierce, and they did not like to be apart. But it was also the aspect of adult company Rachel would be craving. Back then, all Ezra wanted was to shed his loafers and throw on his swim trunks, race Amy down the steep wooden steps and dive off the dock. Perhaps a cold beer and some fresh fish on the grill. And most definitely, after Amy was tucked in, to slip between the cool sheets while the salt air stirred their bedroom curtains and press himself up against his lovely wife. *That* was a summer weekend.

Sometimes Ezra got that. But sometimes, and he always knew by what she was wearing when she greeted him, Rachel had plans. Plans of her dreaded sociable nature, that took them out of the little haven of their house perched on the rocks over the bay and into someone else's house. Where small talk and introductions needed to be made, and Ezra would be forced to engage with people he would be perfectly happy never to see again. But he made the small talk with those people, and he often saw them again, because of Rachel. Rachel was a butterfly, so unlike him and so perplexing to his scientific mind with her social proclivity, and yet he loved to watch her flutter through a crowd. The way she slipped effortlessly into conversations with perfect strangers. The lilt of her voice when she laughed at something someone said; the flush of her cheeks from a glass of wine; the way her eyes sparkled on the walk home, arm in arm with him, as she recounted the evening, the hem of her gauzy sundress rustling against his shins. Ezra understood Rachel needed these outings like one needs oxygen. Just as she understood he needed his peace. The next morning there would be a warm frittata on the kitchen counter beside the *Boston Globe*, and the two would sink into the patio lounge chairs with

steaming cups of coffee, the toes of their feet brushing against each other on the little teak table. Wordlessly they'd read and sip and pass sections of the paper back and forth. Then, finally, Ezra's weekend would begin. It was the pace of their Cape summers that became the pace of their marriage, the constant ebb and flow, not unlike the tide that tickled the base of their hillside and the shore of their little beach. Rachel and Ezra, two peas from opposite pods, who loved different things but one another even more. It was how their marriage had sustained them, through his entire career at Mass General, and later, his private practice in Newton. All the years until he retired, something they'd desperately looked forward to, when he would not drive up to the Cape house alone on a given Friday night but rather with his wife in early June. To stay not for the escaped breath of a weekend, but for the whole summer. Where Amy, now an adult, would join them for a week or two or three with kids of her own. Retiring to the Cape to enjoy the fruits of his career was Ezra's greatest wish—the only one he ever made each year he blew the candles out on his birthday cake. Double chocolate, made from scratch, by Rachel.

Ezra finally got that wish, but only for two years. Two nearly perfect years before Rachel got sick. As a doctor, a surgeon no less, Ezra understood the diagnosis. He understood the prognosis, too. Medically, these things clicked with him. But still, he could not wrap his mind around the changes to come. The diagnosis altered both his life and his heart like a spring storm rearranges a whole beach, washing away swaths of land before it is finished. When it ended and they laid Rachel to rest last August, Ezra found he did not recognize any part of his life here on the Cape anymore. He could not make sense of the emptiness of the house. He did not know his neighbors, and if he

were honest, he barely knew his own grandchildren far away in Seattle. Since Rachel left this world last year, Ezra was not even sure he wanted to be a part of it anymore. The news from Amy that morning made his old heart feel even heavier. He rested a hand on it now and looked down.

Whose hand was this, the skin thin and mottled with sun spots, the knuckles so knobby? How was this the hand that once cradled the skulls of his young patients and performed delicate surgeries on their brains? The hands that once held a scalpel now had trouble holding a paintbrush. Ezra lifted his gaze once more to Pleasant Bay. Even the name of it was an affront these days.

When the shaggy dog emerged from the bushes like a bungled missile fired from the neighbor's property, Ezra did not see him. Not at first. Which was a good thing, because the dog slowed only long enough to lift a leg on Rachel's hydrangeas before continuing his course. Despite not knowing where he was going, the dog was committed. He rounded the corner of the house, tongue lolling, legs akimbo, as he made his haphazard approach. Spying Ezra, the dog accelerated.

Ezra heard the scuttle before he understood. A brown woolly beast, most certainly a bear, hurled itself at him from the shadows of the patio. There was no time to get a good look. Nor was there time to flee. Ezra barely had time to tuck reflexively before the beast thrust its bulk upon him, a magnitude of paws and snout and something else . . . a tongue that swept up Ezra's nose.

Ezra cried out. The beast recoiled, rolling off his lap like a furred sack of potatoes. Only then did he realize it was a dog.

"Bruce!" someone shouted. There was the stamping of footfalls and crackling of branches, as someone hurried through the brush at the edge of the yard.