

SUMMER FRIENDS

by

[Holly Chamberlin](#)

It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

PROLOGUE

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It was late August, the end of summer, at least, the end of summer for nine-year-old Delphine Crandall and almost nine-year-old Maggie Weldon. Both would be starting school in about a week, the fourth grade, Delphine at the local public grammar school five miles from her home in Ogunquit, Maine, and Maggie at Blair Academy, a private grammar school in Concord, Massachusetts, where her family lived. It was the end of the summer but it also felt like the end of the world. It was bad enough having to go back to school, but it was far worse to be parting from each other for what would be a whole ten months. In other words, forever.

The girls were hanging out in the backyard of the Lilac House, the expensive and recently renovated home Maggie's parents had rented for the summer. There was a giant swing set, metal monkey bars, and a slide. Two banana-seated girls' bikes lay on the grass; each had a plastic basket in front and streamers from the ends of the looped

handle bars. The new pink bike was Maggie's. The old red bike had once belonged to Delphine's ten-year-old sister, Jackie, but it belonged to her now.

Delphine, who was swinging ever higher, legs pumping furiously, wore a faded red t-shirt that, like her bike, had once belonged to Jackie. Across the front were the words – also now faded – Red Sox Rule. Her jean shorts had been cut down from full-length jeans that had badly frayed at the knees. Her sneakers, caked in mud from a morning's romp around the edges of the pond in the woods behind her house, had once been white, back when her mother had bought them at a resale shop in Wells. Her hair, which was thick and the brown of glossy chestnuts, hung in a messy braid down her back, fastened near the end by a rubber band that had once held together a bunch of scallions. Her eyes were as dark and luminous as her hair. Her skin was deeply tanned. Since school had let out she had grown an amazing three inches and was now as tall as Jackie, which meant no more hand-me-down pants. Secretly, Delphine hoped she would grow to be really tall someday. But given the fact that both of her parents were well under six feet, she doubted that she would.

Maggie was on the swing next to Delphine. She was too hot to move and was sitting as still as possible. The neck of her pale pink t-shirt was embroidered in darker pink thread. Her white shorts, which she hated but which her mother made her wear, came almost to the knee and, worse, had a crisp pleat right down the middle of each leg. Her sneakers were white, coated only that morning with that liquid paint like stuff that came in a bottle with a picture of a nurse on the front. The coating was her mother's idea, too. Her hair, which was the color of jonquils, was neatly drawn into a ponytail and held in place by a woolly purple ribbons. Her skin, almost white during the winter, was now a pale gold. Her large, almost navy blue eyes were currently distorted by the thick lenses of a pair of tortoiseshell-framed glasses she had gotten right after school had let out for the summer. She was

still embarrassed by them, though her parents and even Mr. and Mrs. Crandall had assured her that she still looked pretty.

Maggie was tall for her age, taller than Delphine who, even though she had sprouted was never going to be a towering Weldon. Her mother bragged about being ‘model tall’ at five-feet, ten inches and her dad was six feet, two inches. Peter, her thirteen-year-old brother, was already the tallest kid in his class, though he was terrible at basketball, something Maggie found very funny. She was bad at basketball, too, but it didn’t matter for girls to be bad at sports. Not at Maggie’s school, at least.

Around her left wrist, each girl wore a macramé bracelet. Earlier in the summer, Delphine’s sister had taught them how to make them and if the bracelets weren’t as perfect as the ones Jackie turned out, Maggie and Delphine thought they were beautiful. Delphine’s was already dirty and a bit frayed. Maggie’s looked as fresh as the day Delphine had given it to her. Still, when it got dirty, which it would, she would not let her mother coat it with that white paint stuff she used on her sneakers. That would be so embarrassing.

“Are you sure these glasses don’t make me look like a dork?” Maggie asked for what Delphine thought was the bazillionth time.

Delphine began to slow her swinging. “I’m sure,” she said. “Why would I want to be friends with a dork?”

“Ha, ha, very funny. I just hope the kids at school won’t laugh at me.”

“If anyone laughs at you – which they won’t – tell them your best friend in the world will come down from Maine and beat them up.” Her feet dragged in the sand below the swing and she came to a stop.

“No!” Maggie looked genuinely shocked. “You wouldn’t really beat someone up, would you?”

Delphine grinned. “Try me. I beat up Joey, once.”

“Liar. Your brother’s like, huge compared to you.”

“Well, I bet I could beat him up. He makes me mad enough.”

“Because he’s a boy and boys stink,” Maggie said emphatically. “And they’re stupid.”

“Mostly,” Delphine said with a shrug. “My dad’s okay, though. And your dad is pretty nice.”

“Yeah, but my brother is gross.”

“Maybe boys get nicer as they get older. Like, really old, like our dads.”

“Well, anyway, remember you’re leaving in like an hour. We have to do our swear about being best friends. We have to do a pinky swear.”

“What’s that?” Maggie asked.

Delphine laughed. “Come on! Everyone knows what a pinky swear is.”

“Well, I don’t. We don’t do pinky swears in my school.”

Delphine rolled her eyes dramatically. It made her feel slightly dizzy. Maybe it was all that swinging. And it was really hot. “Oh, all right,” she said. “Stick out your pinky. Now I link my pinky with yours and we swear whatever we’re swearing and then we pull our pinkies apart.”

The girls linked pinkies and Maggie said, “Me, first. I swear I will be your best friend forever and ever.”

“Me, too,” Delphine said.

“No, you have to say all the words.”

“Okay. I swear I will be your best friend forever and ever.”

“Pinky swear.”

The girls pulled their pinkies apart, and Maggie said, “Ow.”

Delphine leapt off her swing and stood with her hands on her hips. “So, write to me the minute you get home later, okay?”

“Okay. And you write to me the minute I leave, okay?”

“Okay.” Delphine considered. “But I won’t have much to say. Maybe I should wait til just before I go to bed tonight. Maybe Joey will do something stupid at dinner. The other night he laughed so hard

at something Jackie said milk came out of his nose and all over the table. It was gross. Also kind of funny, though.”

“I guess it’s okay if you wait.”

Delphine suddenly looked doubtful. “You’re sure your parents promised you could come back to Ogunquit next year?”

“Yeah. Mom said Dad already gave the guy who owns the house some money. So it’s all set.”

“Cool. I’m thirsty. Does your mom still have stuff in the fridge?”

“Refrigerator,” Maggie corrected. “I think so.”

Maggie got up from her swing and with their arms around each other’s waists, the girls trooped into the Lilac House for lemonade.

Chapter 1

Where the past exists, the future may flourish.

– Peter Ackroyd

2011

Maggie Weldon Wilkes steered her Lexus IS C 10 convertible around a slow moving station wagon decorated with three bikes and a canoe. The Lexus had been a present to herself for a very successful bonus season. Retractable hardtop, cruise control, even a backup camera – this particular car was more of an indulgence than a necessity.

She reached for her iPhone on the seat beside her. She knew it was dangerous to text while driving – everybody knew that, especially after Oprah had made a deservedly big deal out of it – but she did it

anyway, occasionally. It gave her a bit of a thrill to do something possibly illegal and definitely reckless, though she could barely admit that to herself. Besides, it wasn't like she reached for her phone on a busy New York City street. Like right now, there were only a few cars within sight and what was the harm in typing out a brief, abbreviated note to her husband. Nothing. Not much. Except that in spite of wearing bifocal contact lenses she couldn't quite see what she was doing.

"In ME," she managed, the intelligence of habit overcoming the limitations of vision. "How r u?" She put her phone back on the passenger seat and realized that she hadn't actually heard Gregory's voice in days. They had tweeted and texted and emailed but not actually spoken, not even on voice mail. This, however, was par for the course with the Wilkes and not to be taken as a sign of marital distress or discord. Maggie reassured herself on this point with some frequency. She and Gregory were a highly successful career couple whose jobs took them out of each other's sight, not out of each other's minds. Maybe they weren't as close as they once had been but . . . It was what it was.

So, she was on her way to spend a few weeks in Ogunquit, that 'beautiful place by the sea'. She had been so happy there, mostly, of course, because of Delphine Crandall, but also because of the sheer beauty of the area. She still remembered the slightly punky smell of the wild flowers that grew in profusion along the road to the Lilac House, the place her parents had rented for all those years. She could hear in her mind the absurdly loud chirping of the teeny peepers in the pond in the woods behind the Crandalls' house. She remembered the softness of the summer evening air. She remembered how she and Delphine and sometimes their siblings would go down to the beach at a super high tide, when the water would come all the way up to the parking lot. She remembered being both frightened and excited by the cold Atlantic rushing around her feet. She remembered the swing set

behind the Lilac House and the new kittens at Delphine's family's farm. She remembered the joy.

Now, after almost three hours on the road Maggie was finally getting close to her destination. So much had changed since she had last driven this far north. Traffic was definitely worse than it once had been, especially now along Route 1 in Wells. There were just way too many people, period. She didn't recognize half of the restaurants along the road, though she was pleased to see that the rickety old clam shack that Delphine's family had taken them to once a summer was still open. There was a whole new crop of summer cottage developments sprawled on either side of the road. Some of the cottages were unbelievably tiny; it was hard to imagine even a family of three being comfortable in them. Then again, kids could be comfortable anywhere, especially with the beach within sight. Still, Maggie could not imagine herself tolerating such tight quarters, not now, not as a forty-eight year old. She had become used to a degree of luxury. A high degree of luxury, in all honesty. Her hair color was professionally maintained at an award-winning salon on Newbury Street. She had a manicure and pedicure once every two weeks. Around her left wrist she wore a Rolex, another gift to herself after a particularly good year at the office. Around her neck, on a white gold chain, she wore a two-carat diamond set in platinum. That was from Gregory, an anniversary gift she thought, or maybe a birthday gift. She couldn't really remember. He had given her so many expensive presents. He was very good about that sort of thing. For their wedding, though he could barely afford them at the time, he had given her diamond stud earrings.

Thinking about those earrings, Maggie realized that the last time she'd seen Delphine had been at the wedding, and that was over twenty years ago. She had invited her with a guest but she had come alone, and had only accepted the invitation after ascertaining that Robert Evans, her former fiancé, wouldn't be there. He had been invited, also with a guest, but would be on an assignment in Thailand.

It would have been ridiculous to turn down a major journalistic gig for the sake of a friend's wedding. Besides, Robert and Maggie had really only been friends because of Delphine. Once Delphine had gone back home to Ogunquit after breaking up with Robert, Maggie's friendship with him had steadily waned. She hadn't heard from him in over fifteen years, though she could see his face, hear his name, and read his words all over the media. You'd have to be living in a cave not to be aware of Robert Evans.

Maggie adjusted the air conditioning a bit and thought of the pale blue velvet box carefully tucked between layers of clothing in her suitcase. Inside the box was an aquamarine pendant on a gold chain. Aquamarine was Delphine's birthstone; her birthday was March twenty-third. The necklace should have been hers. And it would have been if Maggie had asked Delphine to be her maid-of-honor. But she hadn't. The necklace had been in that pale blue velvet box, in the back of Maggie's lingerie drawer, for over twenty years.

She was crossing into Ogunquit now and traffic was still at a crawl. Every other minute it came to a complete stop for pedestrians crossing the road, many of who ignored the official crosswalks and dashed out at random. Maggie frowned. She did not care for traffic jams or for pedestrians who didn't follow the rules. Well, she supposed nobody did. As she waited for a family, which included a baby in a stroller and three small children to organize themselves across the road, she let her mind wander.

Delphine Crandall. There had been long periods of her life in which she hadn't thought about Delphine at all. Like when business school had overwhelmed her, and when she was starting her career, and then, when the children had come along. There had been other long periods when she thought of her occasionally, randomly, and without much emotion. Like when her daughters did or said something that reminded her of her own childhood self, or when Robert Evans' face popped up on the TV screen. Once in a very great while Delphine would make an appearance in a dream, and mostly those dreams were

somehow disturbing, though Maggie could never remember them clearly when she woke. Some details lingered - something about being forced to leave boxes of books behind, an eviction, someone crying, dirty floors. None of it made any sense.

But in the past two years or so, Maggie had found herself thinking more and more often of her old friend. Specific memories were coming back to her with a vividness that was startling. The time when they were about ten when they had stumbled on a teenage couple kissing behind a shack in Perkins Cove and had run away giggling and shrieking. The time when they were about sixteen and had snuck out one night to go to the only dance club in town, even though their parents had forbidden them. The time in college when Delphine had woken in the middle of the night with a raging fever and Maggie had bundled her into a cab and then to the emergency room. The time when Maggie had thought she was pregnant. She had been too frightened and ashamed to buy an at-home pregnancy kit so Delphine had bought it for her, and had sat holding her hand while they waited for the result.

And the feelings, too, they were coming back, rather, memories of how it had felt to be so comfortable with someone, so loved and appreciated. She had begun to think of Delphine Crandall with a longing that seemed more than mere nostalgia, and that finally became too real to ignore.

So back in April, Maggie had made a decision to find her. She had no idea if Delphine was online or if she had married and changed her name, so she sent an old-fashioned, hand written letter to Delphine in care of her parents. In it she mentioned her job, Gregory's job, her daughters being in college. She suggested that she come to Ogunquit to visit. August would be a good time for her. She had several weeks of vacation saved up. She would stay in a hotel so as not to burden anyone. She needed a low-key, quiet break from her busy life. She said nothing about the memories or the dreams.

She had waited a month, hoping for a reply, and when no reply came, she took the more direct measure of making a telephone call. There was a Delphine Crandall listed in Ogunquit. It was her Delphine Crandall.

She called one night, about eight o'clock, and was surprised to hear a voice groggy with sleep. She asked Delphine if she had gotten her letter. Yes, Delphine had. But she had been terribly busy and hadn't had time to reply. She said she was sorry. Maggie hadn't entirely believed her.

"So," Maggie had said, suddenly nervous, "what do you think about my coming to visit this summer?"

There had been a long beat of silence, one Maggie couldn't attribute to anything other than Delphine's reluctance. Just when Maggie, feeling both embarrassed and annoyed, was about to retract the suggestion of a visit, Delphine had blurted something like, "Yeah. Okay." The moment of retreat had been lost. A reunion was going to happen.

Traffic was crawling again, which was better than sitting still. Maggie felt a tiny flutter of anxiety, which seemed to be growing the closer she came to her destination. There was no doubt about it, Delphine had sounded less than thrilled about this visit. Maybe she had just caught her at a bad time. Maybe she'd been asleep. And then again, Delphine had never been a particularly effusive person. Or had she? Maggie frowned. Memory was a tricky thing, made up of truth, fiction, desire, and a whole lot of dubious detail. She wondered if the Delphine Crandall she would find today would have anything in common with the Delphine Crandall of her memory. The thought was troubling. And it was nonsense to think that someone's character and personality could change so drastically in twenty years that she would be unrecognizable. Nonsense.

There it was, coming up on the right. Maggie turned up into the driveway of Gorges Grant and brought the car to a stop outside the hotel's big front doors. She had chosen to stay here because it offered

not only a heated indoor pool and Jacuzzi (which she would definitely use), and an outdoor pool and sunning deck (she had brought plenty of high powered sun block), but also a fitness center. She never went anywhere without her workout gear. At forty-eight, closing in on forty-nine, she was in the best shape of her life, thanks to a healthy diet and a rigorous exercise regime. For someone who worked as hard as she did – long, tension filled hours in an office and frequent travel, always a nightmare what with security issues and unexplained delays – being in good physical shape was essential. Which didn't mean she didn't occasionally crave junk food and a nap, rather than an apple and a half hour on the treadmill. Not that her tight, fit body seemed to attract Gregory's attention these days. Then again, she hadn't exactly been seeking him out for anything other than resetting the digital clock on the oven after a blackout. It was what it was.

Maggie shook her head, turned off the ignition, and got out of the car. It was time to forget, at least for a while, all the troublesome stuff of daily life back in Massachusetts. Stuff like a diminished sex drive and a husband you communicated with mostly in cyberspace. Stuff like children who seemed to forget you existed until they needed money for iPhones and iPads and whatever electronic gadget was going to replace them. It was time to revive an old friendship. At least, it was time to try.

CHAPTER 2

Delphine Crandall was out of bed by five o'clock most mornings, which wasn't so hard to do when you were asleep by eight o'clock the night before. Farming was not a job for night owls or late risers. This particular Friday morning she had been awake since four, unable to keep thoughts of Maggie Weldon Wilkes's imminent, and largely unwelcome, arrival out of her head.

With a groan that was not strictly necessary, she got out of bed and made her way to the kitchen for that blessed first cup of coffee. She enjoyed mornings at home, a brief time of peace and quiet before the demands of the day started clamoring. Alone with Melchior, her three-year old cat, she could scratch and grumble and moan and not feel guilty about it. This morning, Melchior was waiting for her at his empty food bowl, eyes narrowed in annoyance.

"Is it breakfast time?" she asked him unnecessarily. He answered with a deep and affirmative, *Waaah*.

Delphine flipped on the coffee machine – she always set it up the night before – and went about getting Melchior's breakfast. Melchior's predecessor had also been a barn cat. Felix had died at the ripe old age of twenty-one. To say that Delphine missed Felix was an understatement. You couldn't share a home with another living being for twenty-one years and not feel bereft upon his death. For months after Felix had passed she was unable to bear the thought of taking in another cat, and then, suddenly, the thought of continuing to live without another cat was intolerable. So she had gone out to the barn, where one of the females, a small calico, had recently given birth to a motley litter, and watched. On her very first visit, one of the kittens in

particular had caught her eye. This one's father had clearly been a Maine coon cat, and an extra big one at that. Even at a few weeks old, this kitten was larger than his siblings, even a sister who seemed also to have a Maine coon, possibly the same one, as a father.

From the very first the male kitten had distained – that was Delphine's dramatic take on it – life in the barn with his numerous siblings and cousins and whenever she visited had followed her around more like a dog than a cat, pawing at her ankles and attempting to climb up her leg. Well, the climbing was very cat like, and very painful. So when Melchior – she had already given him this name, one fit for a king – was about two months old she had taken him home, hoping he would like his new, more sophisticated digs, and within hours he had settled in as lord of the house. He barely tolerated people other than Delphine, and hated dogs, two traits that probably had come from his mother or some other, more distant relative, not his Maine Coon father. When her sister, Jackie, stopped by with her mixed breed dog named Bandit, Melchior made a great show of hissing, which only made the good-natured Bandit wag his tail. Also unlike other Maine Coons, Melchior had little interest in play, preferring to spend his time eating, sleeping, and watching his surroundings with a careful, critical eye.

Delphine gave Melchior his wet food, and refilled his bowls of dry food and water. He dug in ferociously. He was a big boy, pushing twenty pounds. His coat was long, wild, and a riot of black, brown, and white. Long tufts of fur sprouted from the tips of his ears. His ruff alone made him look like a particularly imperious and important courtier or politician from the court of Elizabeth I. Delphine sometimes thought she should have named him Leicester, or Cecil, or Essex, instead. The fact that Melchior hated to be brushed was a bit of a problem. Delphine woke each morning with cat hair in her eyes and cat hair glued to her lips. Every piece of furniture was decorated with clumps of fur. She wouldn't be surprised if, in spite of her vigilant daily cleaning rituals, she herself coughed up a hairball one day.

Coffee mug in hand, Delphine went back upstairs to get washed and dressed. Twenty minutes later, she said goodbye to Melchior, who was now cleaning himself on the couch in the living room. In response, he ostentatiously closed his eyes on her. Delphine locked the front door behind her and skipped down the steps of the porch. Most people she knew, including her parents, didn't lock their doors but Delphine did. She wasn't really sure why. Maybe it was a habit left over from the years she had spent in Boston.

Delphine climbed into her big old red F-150 pickup truck, with "Crandall Farm" painted on the creaking driver's side door. Well, actually, what was visible on the door now read "Crandall Farm". The original outline of the missing letters was just barely visible and Delphine swore that someday she would get around to filling them in with matching black paint. But in Ogunquit and its surrounding towns, there really was no need for further identification. Everyone knew the Crandalls.

She steered the truck out on to Larsens Road and before she had gone a mile she passed two new construction sites. Another overblown McMansion, she thought, maybe two of them. There were already too many ostentatious new homes and unattractive house farms in and around Ogunquit. Too much of the area's charm had been suppressed and even erased. And the destruction was still going on. Roads were being cut into once pristine forest to ease the way to the obscenely large houses and beautiful marshland seemed always to be threatened by some big developer hungry for yet more profit. Change was inevitable, she knew that, but why, she wondered, did it so often have to be ugly? More jobs were always a good thing, but she didn't understand why they had to come at the expense of taste and tradition.

A little bit further along the road she passed the newest day spa to open. That would be of no use to her. She was the ultimate in low maintenance, partly by choice and partly by necessity. Once every six weeks or so she had her hair cut by a retired hairdresser who had worked for thirty years in Portland. Mrs. Snowman now worked out

of her kitchen and charged twenty dollars for her services. Delphine hadn't had a manicure since college, when she used to go, occasionally, with Maggie to a salon in Cambridge. She didn't have the money for facials or massages; she had never even been inside the spa on Maine Street, the first of the crop. Her daily boots had manure in their treads and were left at the front door. She had never set foot inside a gym, not even the Y in Wells. There was no need. Daily life had given her admirable muscles and stamina. Eating local had helped keep her forty-nine year old body more than serviceable. If she couldn't fit into the jeans she had worn at thirty-nine, she could still lift a bale of hay and toss it into the back of her truck. Today she was wearing a short-sleeved t-shirt, once bright orange and now a mellow melon color. Her hair, still thoroughly brown, was held in place by a navy bandana, tied at the back of her neck. She probably had close to fifteen bandanas, some at home, a few in the truck, more stashed in her office at the farm. You never knew when you'd need to keep your hair out of your face. She hadn't worn make-up in years.

Delphine turned off the busy main road. Traffic was almost non-existent on these back roads. Most tourists were strictly interested in the beach and in shopping, not in the farms and the woods out of which the farms had been carved. That was fine by her. On the right of the road was a mass of old lilac bushes. Lilac season was over, the purple and white blooms gone. Lilacs were one of Delphine's favorite flowers. Now, in August, the fields and gardens were teeming with orange and red day lilies, wild daisies, clover, Queen Anne's lace (her mother's favorite), and buttercups. Sturdy cattails crowded the edges of marshes and tall, exotic grasses grew in great clumps on the manicured lawns of the wealthier residents.

A few minutes later, Delphine turned onto Ryan Road and finally into the dusty drive that led up to Crandall Family Farm.

Her parents' house, the house in which she had grown up, was a traditional telescope style New England structure. It sat on a small rise, with the farm and front and back yard spread for several acres

around it. Thriving hydrangea bushes with vividly purple blooms lined the left side of the house, while a variety of hosta plants flourished out front. Behind the house, from June to October various breeds of roses grew in wild profusion. Her mother had a way with plants, a trait that was exceedingly helpful if you lived on a farm.

Delphine admitted that from afar, the house and its surrounds looked like something out of a storybook – peaceful, idyllic, the sun always shining, an apple pie always cooling on a windowsill - but the life of a working farm was anything but a fairytale. If a coyote or a fisher cat wasn't making off with a cat or a chicken, then a drought was killing the crops or Japanese beetles were infesting the beans or the blueberries or the tomato plants. Even the formidable Patrice Crandall, matron of the Crandall clan, couldn't entirely subdue Nature.

Delphine parked her truck alongside her father's ancient black Volvo in the front drive and went into the house for a second cup of coffee. No one was around; she assumed her parents had taken her mother's car to the family's diner earlier that morning. The house was beyond familiar. She had known it for almost fifty years. It was more like a living being than a structure of plaster and wood. Her bedroom was still pretty much as she had left it all those years ago, when she had moved into her own house, a house her parents had inherited from a long deceased relative. Jackie and her husband, Dave, Sr., had bought their own home, as had Joey and his wife, Cybel. Neither seemed to mind that Delphine wasn't burdened by a mortgage as they were. Sibling rivalry wasn't something that plagued the Crandalls. When Charlie and Patrice died, their house would belong to all three of their children. It would never be sold, not if the siblings could help it.

In the large kitchen Delphine set about making a pot of coffee. What she didn't drink would not go to waste. Her parents were big coffee drinkers but not particular about blends and quality. Day old coffee scalded in a saucepan was just fine by them. When the coffee

was brewed she poured some into an old mug decorated with a picture of lupines, and leaned against the sink to drink it.

Only hours remained until Maggie's arrival. She had given no other reason for her visit to Ogunquit other than the need for a quiet vacation, some time off. Imagine – a vacation! For Delphine, there was no such thing as a vacation. She had too many responsibilities; there was no such thing as 'time off'. She knew it was uncharitable to feel so accusatory and petty. Everyone deserved a break from the routine, even if not everyone could get it. Still, Maggie's out-of-the-blue visit was an intrusion, an interruption of her life and her work. Delphine suddenly felt overwhelmed by resentment. There were plenty of other places Maggie could have gone for peace and quiet, one of those big resorts in the Caribbean, for example, or a secluded lakeside village in Vermont.

No, Maggie had chosen Ogunquit not because of its lovely beach and fabulous restaurants and pretty little inns. She had chosen it because of Delphine. And that worried her. Maggie was bound to bring up the end of their senior year of college. She was bound to have questions. She had had questions all those years ago, questions Delphine had been unwilling and maybe unable to answer. Delphine didn't want to talk about the past, especially not about those final weeks before she had come back home for good. She didn't even want to think about the past, and mostly, she succeeded in keeping the memories at bay. Not having Maggie around as a reminder, helped. There were months on end when Maggie Weldon Wilkes ceased to exist. And when a stray memory did pop up in Delphine's head, she ruthlessly shoved it back down.

She poured a bit more coffee into her cup and sipped it appreciatively. She suddenly remembered that back in college Maggie had been strictly a tea drinker. She wondered if that had changed and figured she might find out that evening at dinner. But she didn't want to sit lingering over coffee and dessert. She planned to get in and get out as quickly as possible without being rude.

And she would not be rude because it was her own fault she was in this situation. She could simply have told Maggie that now, this summer – never? – was not a good time for a visit, that summer in general was always the most hectic and even exhausting time of the year for the Crandalls. But she hadn't said anything other than, "Oh. Well. It will be nice to catch up." Or something like that, some lame and largely insincere response.

Delphine took a final sip of her coffee, washed the cup, and turned off the pot. Time to get to work. It was almost seven o'clock. She needed to speak to Jackie, about one of the best laying hens that had been acting 'off', and then to Lori, Jackie's fifteen-year-old daughter who was being trained up in the farm business, about a change in Lori's work schedule due to an unexpected party invitation. Before the day was out she would also have spoken with and possibly seen her parents, her brother, her sister-in-law, and, possibly, her brother in law, though Dave, Sr. was not one for the phone and even when you were face to face with him, he rarely spoke unless addressed. The Crandalls were never far away and while at times Delphine felt that she was suffocating, most times she found their proximity essential and right. Sometimes she thought that Harry, her boyfriend, was mostly with her because of her family. His children were grown and busy with lives of their own, leaving Harry, who didn't have any close friends or siblings or living parents, alone except for the Crandall clan.

Delphine left the house and walked the short distance to the office, located in a small outbuilding off the smaller of the two barns *Another day*, she thought, though this one would not be entirely like the rest.

CHAPTER 3

Delphine hurried home from the farm that evening, fed Melchior, who seemed happy to see her and then annoyed that she was rushing around and not paying attention to him, changed into clean clothes, and drove out again to the restaurant. She'd had difficulty choosing the place where she would meet her old friend. Or was Maggie really a former friend? More like a virtual stranger now.

She wanted to keep this reunion of sorts away from the prying eyes of her small town; sometimes caring got mixed up with curiosity for its own sake. Of course, it wasn't as if Maggie was likely to be an embarrassment. Quite the opposite. Maggie had done very well for herself (Delphine had checked out her Facebook page and knew) and, to some eyes, was likely to make Delphine look fairly shabby. Anywhere they went there might be people who would remember Maggie and her parents. After all, the Weldon family had rented in Ogunquit for seven or eight years. True, Maggie hadn't been seen in town for a very long time, but someone with a good memory was bound to recognize her. Tall, blonde, beautiful - Maggie Weldon had always stood out.

In the end Delphine had decided on the Cape Neddick Lobster Pond on Shore Road. She got to the restaurant first and was seated at a table off by itself a bit, a deuce near one of the many large windows which afforded an unobstructed view of the marsh, now at mid-tide. She was wearing a t-shirt, chinos, and on her feet, serviceable sandals from L. L. Bean. The only jewelry she routinely wore was a watch – if that could be considered jewelry – an old, reliable Timex, and, on special

occasions, a pair of small gold hoop earrings Jackie had given her for her fortieth birthday. Tonight, it seemed, was a special occasion.

After a few minutes, Delphine noticed a tall, slim, blonde woman walk up to the hostess station. Maggie. Suddenly, she felt exposed and vulnerable. She had a mad desire to duck under the table. The hostess pointed in Delphine's direction. Maggie waved and with confident strides walked toward her.

Delphine felt herself begin to sweat. She couldn't remember when she had felt so awkward. Yes, she could. It was when she had first met Harry's children, both now in their early twenties. It was only a few months after she and Harry had started to date. There, the awkwardness had been all around and in an odd way, the obvious fact that everyone – Harry, Delphine, Bob, and Mary – felt uncomfortable had eased tensions pretty quickly. That had been a bit of a miracle.

Delphine half rose from her chair and at the same time Maggie half bent to give Delphine a hug. The hug became a bump and they separated awkwardly, quickly.

"It's so good to see you," Maggie said as she took the seat across from Delphine.

"Yes," Delphine said, her voice sounding odd in her ears. "You, too."

She was a bit disconcerted to see that Maggie was dressed so nicely, in a lime green linen dress and sling-back heels. That was nothing new for Maggie, she had always dressed well, but for the first time in the history of their relationship Delphine felt dowdy in comparison. A short-sleeved t-shirt tucked into belted chinos might be comfortable but in no way was it an 'outfit'. She suddenly remembered that she had first heard that term – 'outfit' – from Maggie's glamorous mother. It certainly wasn't a term her own mother, who owned one 'church dress' and one pair of 'good' shoes, had ever used.

“How was the drive?” she asked Maggie now. It was a requisite question to ask of a vacationer. And, it filled what was becoming a long silence.

“Okay,” Maggie said. “Not as bad as it could have been. Though I was surprised by how slowly the traffic moved through Wells. Route 1 was absolutely mobbed.”

“A lot has changed. The summer population now gets to about twenty-thousand, and that’s in Ogunquit alone.”

“Well,” Maggie said, smiling brightly, “all those people mean money to the local economy.”

Delphine was about to point out that all those people also meant littered sidewalks and noise pollution, but wisely didn’t. The last thing she wanted was an argument. Things were uncomfortable enough. At least, for her. Maggie seemed to be at ease. That was nothing new, either. She had always been the more socially adept, easing the way for Delphine with her creative introductions, her ability to start pleasant conversations, and her skill at getting out of unpleasant ones.

“We should look at the menu,” Delphine blurted.

“Okay.” Maggie picked up her menu and glanced around the large, simply decorated dining room. “This place is so – unpretentious,” she said finally. “Unassuming. I like the atmosphere.”

Delphine wondered if Maggie really did like the ‘atmosphere’ or if she was just being polite. Hadn’t Maggie always been polite? She thought that she had. So had her parents. Unfailingly polite, well-dressed, and socially skilled.

“Well, it’s quiet, generally,” she said in reply. “At this hour at least, once the families from the camp across the road have had their dinner. And the food is good. Nothing fancy but good. Actually, we supply some of their tomatoes. Crandall Farm, I mean. And some lettuces.” Delphine lifted the dime store reading glasses that hung on a cord around her neck and put them on her nose. “You’re not wearing glasses,” she noted.

“I’m wearing bifocal contacts these days,” Maggie explained. “When I’m not wearing bifocal glasses. Glasses are so outrageously expensive but I have such a weak spot for funky frames. Maybe it’s because of those early years of having to wear ugly glasses. And then the eighties! What a nightmare! Frames that practically hung down to your chin. Ugh.”

Delphine couldn’t help but smile. Robert Evans, she remembered, had had perfect vision back when she had known him. He used to tease Maggie, albeit good-naturedly, about her thick lenses and ponderous frames. Delphine had seen him on television not too long ago and he had been wearing a pair of unobtrusive metal frames. Other than the glasses she thought he had looked almost entirely unchanged. She wondered what he would think if he saw her now, a forty-nine year old woman who looked decidedly different from the way she had looked when she was twenty-one. She pushed the thought away.

Maggie looked up from her menu. “You know,” she said, “on the drive up here I realized we haven’t seen each other since my wedding.”

“Has it been that long?” Delphine said. She knew exactly how long it had been but she didn’t know what else to say. This was a startlingly new situation for her, sitting across the table from someone who had once meant so much to her. The only other person she had loved and lost – if ‘lost’ was the right word, given the fact that in each case she had been the one to walk away - was Robert. And there had never been a chance of their meeting again. She had seen to that.

“Twenty-four years exactly, this fall. It’s hard to believe.”

“Yes,” Delphine said. It was, actually, kind of hard to believe so much time had gone by since Maggie’s wedding. A wedding to which she almost hadn’t gone. She had waited to accept the invitation until Maggie assured her that Robert would be on an assignment somewhere in another part of the world. She forgot where. But she had always wondered why Maggie had invited him in the first place.

Had she thought, maybe, that Robert and Delphine would reunite, lulled into reconciliation by the sentimentality of a big, traditional wedding? She supposed that she could have asked Maggie – she could ask her right now – why Robert had been invited. But Robert Evans was no longer relevant. The only reason he kept popping into her head these past few days was because of his association with Maggie. That had to be the reason.

A waiter came by, a local boy Delphine knew by sight – she thought he was in her niece Lori’s class at the high school – and they ordered food, a lobster salad and a glass of wine for Maggie and fish and chips and a beer for Delphine.

“Tell me about your family,” Maggie said, when the waiter had gone off. “I hope everyone is well. How’s your brother?”

“Joey’s good,” Delphine said. “He’s got a small appliance repair shop in South Berwick.” Maggie had had a brief crush on Delphine’s brother one long ago summer. He had been a big, handsome boy, then a robust young man, and now, in his early fifties, Delphine thought that he was still attractive in a slightly worn, gray haired, burly kind of way. She wondered if Maggie would agree.

“Is he still married to – Cybel is it?”

“Oh, yes,” Delphine said. “Cybel works in a day care center in Wells. Their son, Norman, is twenty-three now. He’s married and lives in South Berwick. His wife is expecting a baby around Christmas. And I guess you wouldn’t know about Kitty, their daughter.”

Maggie shook her head. “No.”

Delphine smiled. “She was a ‘surprise child’. Kitty’s eight-years-old. And needless to say, she’s the apple of everyone’s eye, especially her father’s. And, well, of mine, too.”

“I would think so! And do you have children?”

“No.”

“Oh,” Maggie said. “So it must be extra nice for you having a little girl around.”

Delphine didn't reply and Maggie wondered if she had said something she shouldn't have. She was rarely rude or inappropriate but suddenly, she felt that she might have been both.

The young waiter brought their food just then. When he had gone, they ate in silence for a few minutes. Delphine was hungry and happy not to talk. Maggie picked at her salad and wondered when Delphine would look up from her plate.

"How's Jackie?" she asked finally, tired of waiting. "I remember her as being so popular when we were growing up."

"She still is popular," Delphine answered, wiping her mouth with her napkin. "Everyone likes Jackie, even her own teen aged children. And Jackie pretty much likes everyone, too. Even tourists." It was true. Most locals tolerated – and sometimes welcomed – tourists for the business they brought. Jackie seemed to like most visitors as actual people. "She works the farm with me, though she's much more of the hands on, in the fields person. And she's directly in charge of our summer workers."

"Wow," Maggie said, eyebrows rising. "But she went to college, didn't she? Somewhere in South Portland?"

Delphine bristled. What did Jackie's education have to do with her involvement with the family farm? Of course. No one with a formal education, even one from a two year community college, was supposed to get her hands dirty with manual labor. It amazed her that so many people really didn't understand how much intelligence and learning it took to farm successfully. And then there was intuition, a feel for the work. That, too, was important. "Yes," she said after a moment. "She went to college." That would be the end of it.

"Is she still married?" Maggie asked.

"The Crandalls don't do divorce. Not that there's any reason for Jackie and Dave, Sr. to be divorced. He owns a small contracting business. Norman works for him, actually. And Dave Jr., he's seventeen, he'll probably join the business when he gets out of high school. Lori, she's fifteen, she works at the farm with me after school,

on weekends, and during the summers. I'm training her to take over some day, but that will be a long time coming."

"Wow," Maggie said again. "The Crandalls are quite the – enterprise."

"There's nothing new about that," Delphine said, unable to tell if Maggie had meant something critical by her remark.

"I guess I just never realized how . . ."

"Realized how what?"

Maggie shrugged, smiled. "Nothing. So, tell me about your parents? I hope they're well."

"My mother is good," Delphine said. "She's still doing the baking for the diner, taking care of the house, helping out with her grandchildren. And my father is good, too. The diner is almost always packed so he keeps pretty busy with that. Neither has much to do with the farm anymore since Jackie and I pretty much run everything. But they chime in on any major decisions. We all do, Joey, Cybel, Dave, Sr. Like you said, we're an enterprise, a team."

"I have some fond memories of that diner," Maggie said. "There was that one really nice waitress, I can't remember her name. She had an old-fashioned beehive hair-do. It was almost day-glo orange. I had a yo-yo that same color. She used to sneak us cookies."

"Veronique," Delphine said. "She's actually a distant cousin of my mother's. Well, she was a distant cousin. She died a while ago."

"Oh, that's too bad. You know, I'd love to visit the diner while I'm in town. Maybe we could have lunch there one day."

Delphine hesitated. She never ate at the diner as a customer. To do so now, after so many years of working behind the counter, would feel somehow inappropriate. She couldn't allow her father's employees to serve her, a sometime colleague. "We're very busy in the summer," she said.

"But that's good, isn't it? I mean, busy means money coming in."

"Yes. Well, what about your parents?" Delphine remembered Mr. and Mrs. Weldon as a glamorous couple, especially compared to her

own parents. Mrs. Weldon always wore a skirt or a dress, never pants, and often wore heels, even when sneakers would have been more practical. Her husband always wore a jacket when they went out in the evenings, no matter the heat. They had been good to her, generous and supportive, especially when it had come time to apply for college. Walter and . . . It took Delphine a moment to remember. Dorothy.

“My father’s dead,” Maggie said. “My mother lives in Florida.”

“Oh.” Delphine felt a prick of conscience. She would have sent a note of condolence if she had known. And she would have known if she hadn’t walked away all those years ago. “I’m sorry about your father,” she said. “He was a nice man. How long ago did he die?”

“Almost six years now,” Maggie said. “He had a massive heart attack. By the time the ambulance got to the house he was gone. My mother moved to a condo down south a few months after he died. She’s doing pretty well. Luckily, she doesn’t have any major health problems.”

“That’s good. How’s your brother?”

“Peter is fine. He’s a successful corporate lawyer and his wife is a judge. They live in Marblehead. We don’t see each other much.” Maggie smiled a bit. “I don’t know if you remember, but we were never really that close growing up and it seems that every year we drift further apart. It’s okay, though. It is what it is.”

Delphine said, “Oh.” Her own sibling situation could not be more different. She saw Jackie and Joey several times a week, sometimes every day, and she liked it that way, even when Joey was in one of his grumpy moods or Jackie was being a know-it-all. And they seemed to like seeing her just about all the time, even when she was being whatever it was that annoyed them. A killjoy Joey had once called her. Just last week Jackie had accused her of being uptight.

“So, tell me,” Maggie said now, “are you seeing anyone?”

Delphine took a sip of her beer. There was no point in trying to deny her relationship with Harry. It was a small town. Maggie would meet him before long in some way or another. Besides, she thought, it

wasn't like Harry was some sort of freak. She had nothing to be embarrassed about. "I've been with someone for about ten years now," she said. "His name is Harry Stringfellow. He owns a house on Agamenticus Road."

"So you don't live together?" Maggie asked.

"No."

"Oh." Maggie smiled and sipped her wine.

"Your children. How are they?" Delphine hesitated, caught short by another sudden and embarrassing lack of memory. "I'm sorry," she said, "I'm blanking on their names."

"Kim and Caitlin," Maggie said easily, seemingly undisturbed by what might be taken as an insult. "They're both at a small college in San Diego. In fact, they're staying through the summer this year. They got decent jobs and an off-campus apartment with some friends so . . . Unless I go out there in the fall I probably won't see them until Thanksgiving. That is, if they decide to come home."

"That must be tough. Being so far away from your children."

Maggie shrugged. "Not really," she said, aware she was lying to an extent. "I'm so busy with work I don't have time to miss them much. And the girls seem happy. I guess they got tired of life in the northeast. And I guess they were through with living so close to Mom and Dad. I can't say that I blame them. At least, about the Mom and Dad part. It's perfectly normal for a child to want to get away from her family, experience life on her own. I mean, you raise children to be independent. It's natural that they leave you."

"Of course," Delphine said. "So, you said you wanted to come to Ogunquit for a quiet vacation." What Delphine really wanted to ask – but wouldn't – was: "So, what made you want to see me after all these years, the unnatural child who didn't, couldn't, wouldn't get away from her family?"

"Yes," Maggie said. "It's been an incredibly busy year and I had some vacation time saved and I thought, why not Ogunquit? It's peaceful and lovely and I could see Delphine while I'm there." What

Maggie really wanted to say – but wouldn't – was: "And I want you to finally explain to me why you abandoned our friendship."

"You might not find it as peaceful as it used to be," Delphine said.

"But like you said, more people means more money."

"Yes. So, tell me about yourself."

"Oh, there's not much to tell."

"No, really, what's going on in your life?"

Delphine shifted uncomfortably. "Well, work, mostly," she said.

"You know, the farm, and the diner. I help out there when I'm needed, if a waitress has to take a sick day, that sort of thing. I've got the nieces and nephews and one or another of them always needs something." Then, and she had no idea why because it was a lie, she added, "It's all pretty unexciting."

Maggie shook her head. "Oh, I doubt that," she said. "For example, the farm. Tell me about what do you do exactly."

"Well, we're certified organic now. And you've heard of CSA, community supported agriculture?"

Maggie nodded.

"We raise chickens for the eggs. Free range. We grow vegetables, tomatoes, lettuces, other salad greens, various kinds of beans. It can vary from year to year. Jackie and Dave, Sr. maintain an herbal garden, but that's just for family use. We've just started selling cut flowers for bouquets. And Jackie and her daughter are learning how to make wreaths out of dried and preserved flowers and vines. We sell locally and at the summer and winter markets up in Portland. Sometimes we barter with other farmers or fishermen for their products." Delphine shrugged. "I guess that's about it."

"I think that all sounds very interesting," Maggie said.

Delphine shrugged. She assumed Maggie was just being polite, again. It didn't matter. "How about you?" she asked.

"Well, the same as with you, mostly work, though my job is a lot less – varied - than yours. I'm at the second largest investment firm in

Boston. And, let's see, I play tennis about once a week and I work out five days a week. I guess that's pretty much the sum of my life."

"And what about Gregory?" *At least*, Delphine thought, *I remembered her husband's name*.

"He's fine," Maggie said. "He's doing really well at work. He's a senior partner in his firm, which means he has to travel a lot. And, well, to be honest, things aren't what they used to be between us. Nothing major is wrong, though," she added hurriedly, with a flick of her wrist, at the same time wondering if that was really true. Not the trouble part but the 'nothing major' part. "It's probably just the twenty-four year apathy setting in," she went on. "The arduous middle years. It was probably bound to happen. This too shall pass. It is what it is."

If Delphine was remembering correctly, it was unlike Maggie to resort to a string of clichés. But maybe she wasn't remembering correctly. And people changed. She really knew very little, if anything, about the woman sitting across the table from her. Maybe Maggie was a bit nervous, after all. Why else would she have revealed that there was trouble in her marriage to someone she hadn't seen in over two decades?

"I'm sorry," she said. "You're probably right. Everything will be fine."

"Oh, sure," Maggie said, with that same dismissive flick of the wrist. "I know. Hey, the other day I was thinking about the time my parents took the two of us to see that musical at the Ogunquit Playhouse. For the life of me I can't remember what it was but I do remember that when we came out of the theatre we were both totally convinced we were going to become actresses. Do you remember that?"

"No," Delphine said.

"Oh. Really? My mother made us get dressed up and we were both sure we were going to have an awful, boring time and then we wound up having a blast."

“I’m sorry. I really don’t remember any of that.” Delphine looked down at her watch. “I should probably get home. I go to bed pretty early. And I get up pretty early, too.”

“Sure, okay,” Maggie said, reaching for her bag. “Let me get the check. This is my treat.”

“No, no. We’ll split the bill. Please.”

“Well, okay,” Maggie said. “But next time it’s on me.”

No, Delphine thought, it won’t be on you. I can pay for my own meals.

There was little conversation as the bill was asked for and then paid. Together, they walked out into the gravel parking lot. The evening sky was streaked with purplish clouds. The tide had come in a bit more since they had arrived and now the water of the Cape Neddick River lapped up against the shore. A small, overturned rowboat rested close to a shed decorated with colorful buoys. The air was filled with the excited, happy shouts of kids from the camp across the road, some playing in the calm waters of the Cape Neddick Harbor.

“It’s a beautiful evening,” Maggie said. “I forgot just how lovely it is here.”

“Yes,” Delphine said. She lifted her hand in a sort of wave. She really didn’t want to attempt another hug and hoped that Maggie felt the same. “Well,” she said, “it was good seeing you again, Maggie.”

Maggie smiled. “Thanks. It was good seeing you, too. But we’ll see each other again, soon. I’m booked at the hotel for several weeks.”

“Of course.”

“I was hoping we could spend some quality time together, really catch up, you know. I’ve missed you, Delphine.”

Delphine hesitated. She looked away, a bit over Maggie’s left shoulder. She had not missed her old friend, not in a very long time. She couldn’t afford to be missing people. There were too many people right in front of her, in the present, who needed her. “Yes,” she said, knowing her reply was inadequate but feeling helpless to respond

otherwise. “But I do have to work. Every day, sometimes all day. I don’t have much free time.”

But Maggie was not going to put off. She wouldn’t allow herself to be so easily dismissed. Not again. “Oh, I know that,” she said. “And I wouldn’t want to interfere with your job. But I’m sure I could squeeze myself in some times. I mean, you must have an odd hour here and there, maybe in the evenings?”

Delphine forced herself to look directly at this person from her past, this person who seemed to badly need or want a connection. She managed a smile. “Of course,” she said. “We’ll . . . I’ll make some time. Sure.”

“Good. Well,” Maggie said, indicating a sleek, hardtop convertible, “this is my car. Goodnight, Delphine.”

Delphine watched as Maggie got behind the wheel. She wondered how much a car like that cost – a Lexus of some sort she saw - and if it was worth it. But ‘worth’ might mean something very different now to Maggie than it meant to Delphine. Value was a subjective notion. Maggie waved as she drove off, back in the direction of her hotel.

Well, Delphine thought as she climbed up into her truck, *that was a disaster or pretty near to one*. But Maggie seemed determined to repeat the disaster. Vaguely, Delphine remembered this about Maggie – her persistence, her refusal to walk away from a friend even when she was being ignored or pushed along. She shook off the memory and pulled out of the parking lot onto Shore Road.

Before going home she would stop at the farm and check on that worrisome hen. Jackie, of course, would already have done so, but it was better to be safe than sorry, as her father always said. And then, before going to bed, she would read a few pages in the novel that was currently absorbing her – a mystery by C. J. Sansom, set in the time of Henry VIII - and work for a bit on her current knitting project, a fairly mindless one, a simple, light-weight scarf for her sister. It would be good to be home with Melchior where she could attempt to put

thoughts of her dinner with Maggie – and of what might come in the weeks ahead – out of her mind.

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