

SUMMER
ON
LILAC ISLAND

A Novel



Lindsay MacMillan



HARPER MUSE

Summer on Lilac Island

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For Alyssa and Addison—
Your mother-daughter love shines so brightly.
May you always hold the magic of “Macaroni”
Island close to your hearts.



Mackinac

If there was one thing locals agreed on, it was that Mackinac Island had a split personality.

Winter months found the island a barren tundra. Snow spitting across empty streets, winds careening in from Canada, tangling on the knob of land between Michigan's lower and upper peninsulas. "Closed for the Season" signs dangling from boarded-up windows of Main Street shops. The Grand Hotel dormant, encrusted with icicles.

Along the perimeter, the eight-mile lakeshore path buried by the latest blizzard. The island's iconic horses (no automobiles allowed) wintering on farms downstate, only a handful of mares left to deliver mail and transport workers. Scarcely five hundred residents in total, sequestering behind curtains, quilts, and coffee mugs. Venturing outside only to shovel driveways, haul groceries home on snowmobiles, or traipse to the Mustang Lounge, the island's only year-round bar, for oatmeal stouts and human contact.

But summer was a different story, had a different narrator altogether.

Unadulterated views of the Great Lakes, thawed and tamed and Caribbean blue. Sailboats bobbing happily on the harbor to the beat of an old acoustic hit, the kind of tune that finds revival each generation. Fresh paint gleaming from gingerbread trims of cozy Victorian abodes. Horses clogging the streets with boisterous traffic jams.

Ferry boats depositing up to fifteen thousand visitors each day.

Long queues for freshly made fudge, carriage tours, and bicycle rentals. Tourists mispronouncing the island's name. Other tourists loudly correcting them. "The *c* is silent, didn't you know? Mackinac Island is pronounced like Mackinaw City across the bay—the French and English versions of the Native American name Mitchimakinak, meaning 'Great Turtle,' for the island's shape."

More history (or some loose descendant of it) atop the hill at Fort Holmes, peppered with reenactment actors. The Grand Hotel's preppy guests slurping down the sunset from the nation's longest front porch. Children walloping croquet mallets on the hotel's flawless lawns. Seasonal workers passing joints around an illegal beach bonfire, enraging locals once more, twice more. Off the coast, the Mackinac Bridge connecting Michigan's lower and upper peninsulas, draping over the horizon like an heirloom necklace.

The high season was when Mackinac Island came alive. Shimmering and showing off, shrugging off its loner status like an unruly illusionist, exhausting herself with her own excess. The island reeled people in, hooking them with her old-world charm, only to release all but the heartiest hearts in November, when Mackinac again retreated into her shell, hunkering down for the off-season.

Yes, in a place like this, summer and winter were as different as night and day, as oil and water. Or in the case of the Jenkins family, as far apart as mother and daughter.

Chapter 1

Gigi

Georgiana Jenkins, or Gigi as everyone but her mother and grandmother called her, had managed to avoid Mackinac Island for ten consecutive summers.

She was not so fortunate for the eleventh. Here she was, seated atop the upper deck of Shepler's ferry, skirting back across the Straits.

Fresh water spritzed her face and cast a film over her eyes. Gigi found herself missing the harrowing snowmobile rides across the ice bridge during her winter trips when the lake froze over. The five-mile path was marked by a line of Christmas trees dug into the ice to guide travelers and keep them from plummeting to their death. Then at least there was some danger to distract from the dullness.

She hadn't yet managed to cleanse herself of enough daughterly guilt to boycott coming back for Christmas. That level of liberation was something she aspired to. Perhaps after this summer was over she would have overdosed on the island enough to strengthen her resolve to decline all future visits. Not that she had exactly been invited this time—it was a bit of the reverse, technically speaking—but the principle held.

On her lap, her journal was open. The pages were largely blank, with a two-year gap from when she'd last flung words down, at that time venting about how everyone in LA spent more on skincare than she could afford on rent. This was before she had tried her first microcurrent sculpt facial and promptly become addicted herself, thus

blowing through her meager paychecks and winding up destitute, with no choice but to move back in with her mother.

There may have been some contributing factors that led to her current predicament beyond the facials. The inconsistency of the gig economy, the egregious cost of rent, the criminally high tax rate. Summer back on Mackinac Island would be a time to reset, to take a breather and figure out where to go from here. In no way was it a permanent return. Gigi would never settle for such a dull, insular life. Not like her mother had.

She was writing in the journal again at the recommendation of her therapist, Renata. Renata wasn't technically a therapist (Gigi couldn't afford anyone with real qualifications), but she'd completed a course on energy healing so Gigi figured she was close enough.

She usually preferred to treat her emotions like she treated her socks—stashing them messily into a drawer and telling herself she would fold them later.

But she had seen Renata several times in LA, not because of her tense relationship with her mother and sister, nor any unresolved trauma caused by her absentee father. No, far more pressing was the problem of Gigi's crash-and-burn romances that had been trailing her like a cloud of bad karma. She'd hoped therapy might be a quick fix, a way to have someone else validate that her exes were the problem, not her. It hadn't turned out to be quite so affirming.

Gigi was now making a list of her exes, part of the homework. Upon completion, she counted the names by twos, then threes. The total came to thirty-four. Gigi had thirty-four ex-boyfriends. Thirty-five, if she included Benjamin Hall, the rascally towhead who'd been Gigi's first high school boyfriend before he swiftly exchanged her for Lillian Tong. Gigi did not, in fact, include Benjamin. It seemed like a suitable, if petty, form of vengeance for a teenage snub, and the list was already too long.

Eyeing the roster, she looked for other exes to cross out.

Her handwriting was sloshy, thanks to the jostling ferry return-

ing her to her horse-and-buggy hometown. Everyone said Mackinac Island was a step back in time. Gigi preferred moving forward, not backward, and tensed up as the shoreline sharpened into view.

She'd hoped the gusty air might settle her stomach, which was coiling terribly, whether due to the rocking waves or the prospect of spending an entire summer in a place she'd thought she'd escaped, she couldn't be sure.

Even the late-middle-aged man seated next to her seemed to notice her discomfort. "You all right there?" he asked Gigi in a thick Scottish accent, offering up a crinkled paper bag. It reeked of bananas and peanut butter.

Gigi declined but changed her mind moments later when necessity struck. Snatching the bag, she ejected the iceberg lettuce salad she'd purchased at the dinky airport in Alpena. She managed to avoid splattering her boho outfit. Her journal was not so kindly spared.

This, too, the Scotsman seemed to notice. Gigi got the sense he was trying to read what she'd written. She clamped the journal shut.

"Sorry," the man said. "Didn't mean to snoop." There was a youthful bounce about him despite the fact that he was about Gigi's mother's age. "What were you working on, if you don't mind my asking?"

Gigi stared him down. His cornflower-blue eyes were bright, the whites remarkably clear. "Nothing."

"'Nothing' is always the best content," the man said confidently. "Most of my books have started from scribbling about 'nothing.'"

"You're a writer?" Gigi asked. It checked out. The argyle sweater vest, the chaotic tufts of white hair jutting out from under a lopsided bowler hat, the loafers tapping on the ferry floorboards, as if to some bagpipe beat. Gigi had pegged him as a professor type, but author fit the bill.

"We're all writers, aren't we?" A cheeky smile revealed tilted, tea-stained teeth. "But that's right, I've managed to make a living from inventing stories." He gave a booming laugh.

In spite of herself, Gigi was liking the man and the way he seemed

to be gaming the system of life.

No one had ever mistaken her for an author before. It was quite flattering. She had the creativity for it, no doubt, but the discipline was another beast. As evidenced by her inventory of failed relationships, she was as good at starting things as she was bad at finishing them.

“I’ve done an audit of all my ex-boyfriends,” Gigi said. She tended to be a fairly honest person, not motivated by morality so much as the fact that the truth was the surest way to shock people. “I’m going back through past relationships to look for patterns.”

This part of the assignment had taken so long that Gigi was not inclined to dive into the second and more intensive portion: analyzing them.

Pattern = duds, she’d scrawled on the bottom of the page, circling the phrase a few times, as if after deep cogitation she’d produced a most profound insight.

The Scotsman seemed to find this all highly amusing, a reaction Gigi enjoyed. She couldn’t stand people who took life too seriously.

“Quite prolific you’ve been,” he chuckled.

“It’s not as scandalous as it sounds,” Gigi said. “I had my first real boyfriend at eighteen. Right when I fled the island.”

The Scotsman’s bushy eyebrows raised quizzically, but Gigi swept past the inquiry. “I’m twenty-nine now,” she carried on. “So over eleven years, I’ve had an average of three point four boyfriends per year. Hardly an outlandish figure.”

“Three point four boyfriends per year,” the Scotsman repeated, as if tucking away the nugget of dialogue for a future book. Gigi didn’t mind that he might plagiarize her. The prospect of seeing her cleverness in print was exhilarating.

“Want to know what I’ve learned about love?” Gigi asked, hoping he might be inspired twice over. She told him about how since leaving Mackinac, she’d lived in New York, Miami, Austin, Phoenix, New Orleans, Seattle, and most recently, Los Angeles. “But men are the

same everywhere,” she fumed with a blubbery sigh. “They all make you feel like a crazy person for expecting them to put in an ounce of effort.”

The Scotsman clucked sympathetically, though he didn’t appear to find her analysis as impressive as Gigi had hoped.

“There’s nothing wrong with having high standards,” the Scotsman said. “But if I could offer a bit of fatherly advice . . .”

Gigi flinched involuntarily at the word *fatherly*.

“Don’t hold someone else to a standard you wouldn’t hold yourself to,” he continued. “Or you just might end up alone, with no one to miss you when you vanish across the ocean. Like this old gadgie here.” He was smiling, but there was an undertone of sadness. Regret, even.

Gigi checked his left hand. There were sunspots, moles, and wispy white hairs, but no wedding ring. She wondered about his own roster of relationships and where things may have gone wrong. Ordinarily she wouldn’t hold back from prying, but she’d become too fond of him to put him on the spot, so she led in with a softer opener. “What’re you doing on the island?”

Her informed her that he was here to gain inspiration for his next book, which he hadn’t started writing yet, thanks to an extended episode of writer’s block. When Gigi inquired why he didn’t post up on a Scottish island instead, he told her he preferred the novelty of places he’d never been and people he’d never met. Gigi empathized greatly.

“And when I heard there was an island in America with no cars allowed—only horses, buggies, and bicycles—I knew that was my spot,” the Scotsman went on. “What a romantic quirk for a story!”

“It’s less romantic in real life,” Gigi cautioned. “Trust me.”

“Have you been before?” he asked.

“I grew up here,” Gigi said. “Now I’m back spending the summer with my mom.” She tried to make it sound like she was being a solicitous daughter rather than using her mother for free housing and laundry.

Gigi had nearly as many ex-jobs as ex-boyfriends. Most recently she'd quit her gig as a cycling instructor out in LA. She delighted in yelling at people to work harder but despised having to wake up early to do it. Upon assigning her all the 6:00 a.m. classes, her manager told Gigi it was an opportunity to demonstrate her commitment. As if Gigi had any of that to a company that didn't even provide health insurance.

Returning to Mackinac Island had been a last resort, but when her mother offered up free rent for the summer—with the flight and ferry included—she hadn't exactly been in a position to refuse. Gigi's credit card was declined when she'd made a late-night pizza order last week, and she was living off the last of the cash her sister had sent for her birthday (a nice wad, Gigi must admit, though that was only fair, given the whole incident of Rebecca choosing her college roommate as her maid of honor over her own sister).

"Any guidance for scrounging up stories on the island?" the Scotsman asked as the ferry turned into the dock. "I write fiction, but it's often inspired by real people. They're the oddest characters of all, aren't they?"

Gigi suspected that she herself starred in the island's most interesting tales but didn't volunteer that information. There were some things she'd prefer not to dig up, no matter how assuredly they would shock.

"You'll want to look into the witch trials of the 1800s," she told him. "Women were drowned in a lagoon." She grimaced. "It's still there, between Mission Point and downtown."

"Is it haunted?" he asked excitedly.

"Allegedly, but it's a tourist trap. The real stories are with Deirdre Moore, president of the euchre club and rumor mill," Gigi said. "You can find her and the other ladies at the Lucky Bean most mornings. And the tennis courts have been taken over by the pickleballers; they're worth checking out. My grandmother plays in a league; it's all nice and petty."

Gigi's smile twitched at the thought of seventy-seven-year-old Nonni slamming the yellow pickleball at her opponents' faces, letting out a primal roar when she won, refusing to make eye contact with her opponents when she lost.

"Loiter at Doud's too, right on Main Street," Gigi went on. "America's oldest family-owned grocery store. Everyone circles through. You'll get the scoop on the latest tension between the islanders and fudgies."

"Fudgies?" The Scotsman was eagerly scribbling notes on the parchment-like pages of a thick leatherbound notebook.

"It's what locals call the tourists and seasonal residents," Gigi explained. "Because they buy so much of Mackinac's famous fudge. There's plenty of summer drama with fudgies partying and disrupting the peace. But the real villain is the mayor, Camille Welsh. Stuck in the dark ages with an ego that stretches longer than the Mackinac Bridge."

"Excellent." Clyde appeared elated to have such promising leads. "If there's ever anything I can do for you, do give a ring to the Grand Hotel and ask for Clyde MacDougal."

"You're staying at the Grand Hotel?" The luxurious hotel was the island's most renowned landmark and very expensive. Her new acquaintance must be an unusually successful author. Gigi found herself filled with more admiration than envy, which was not particularly like her.

"Just for the summer," Clyde said. "As I conduct my research." He let out another titter, seemingly pleased that "research" entailed vacationing at a posh island resort and ingratiating himself in small-town gossip.

"One more question," he said. "You wouldn't happen to know of any eligible women around my age, would you? Someone I might take out to dinner . . . purely for literary purposes, of course." His mouth folded bashfully and his cheeks took on a ruddy hue.

Gigi thought about volunteering her mother, but that would be

pointless. Eloise Jenkins didn't date. "Everyone is pretty much coupled up," Gigi said. "The locals, at least. You could find a fudgie, but I can't recommend them in good conscience."

"I see." Clyde's expression sank but sprang back quickly. His broad nose sniffed. "What's that smell?"

Gigi, too, caught a whiff of Mackinac Island's signature scent. "The horses," she said. "Twenty-first-century transportation at its finest."

She expected Clyde to plug his nose as the other tourists on the ferry were doing. Instead, he broke into a boyish grin. "How charming." He inhaled deeply as if to commit the aroma to memory so he might accurately reproduce it on the page.

Gigi grimaced. "Charming indeed," she deadpanned as the familiar manure scent welcomed her home. Or at least to the place that had once been home and now felt the furthest thing from it.



Chapter 2

Eloise

Do you think I'm setting myself up for failure?" Eloise said earlier that day as she and Deirdre took their usual 7:00 a.m. walk along M-185, the lakeshore road circling the island.

It was the nation's only highway prohibiting automobiles—a ban that began in 1898 when townspeople complained that the sounds from the engines were disturbing their horses. Only in a place like Mackinac would that kind of law stick all these years.

The sun was already up, soft morning rays kneading knots out of the water like a set of supple hands.

"Having Georgiana and me in the same house all summer, I mean," Eloise clarified.

It had sounded fine in the abstract. Very nice even, the idea of her drifter daughter home again. How many times over the past decade had Eloise wished that Georgiana might return to the island for more than a fleeting visit? But as the arrival approached, Eloise had become increasingly tense. Sweat formed now on the rim of her visor.

"It'll be terrific," Deirdre assured. "Nothing like some quality mother-daughter bonding time."

"Says the woman with two sons," Eloise muttered, making Deirdre scowl. "Georgiana and I could still bond from separate houses. Lord knows that's been the secret to keeping the peace with my own mother."

Since the passing of Eloise's father seven years ago, Eloise had of-

ferred for her mother, Alice, to move in with her. She lived just down the road, after all. But her mother refused, which was a blessing for them both. Alice insisted on remaining in the cabin Eloise's father had built with his own two hands, or so the legend went. Alice continued brewing coffee the way he liked it every morning—very black, very strong—pouring it in his favorite Detroit Lions mug, the colors long faded, then drinking it herself, though she preferred tea.

"It'll be an adventure," Deirdre said, pumping her arms vigorously, clutching two-pound dumbbells as weapons to defend against osteoporosis, the latest menopausal calamity coming their way. "Adventures keep the mind young, ward off dementia. Fred says so."

Fred was Deirdre's husband and the island's general practitioner, meaning Deirdre was too versed on medical ailments. Eloise usually took her friend's warnings with a grain of salt, but the bone density lecture had scared her enough that she had started to increase her milk intake and switch to decaf a few days a week. No dumbbells, though. Eloise got enough weight-bearing exercise from the tasks associated with keeping up a house. Lugging salt bags to the water softener. Hauling groceries, rearranging furniture, changing lightbulbs, then doing those tasks again for her mother. Deirdre was always offering up Fred, as if he were a carton of eggs or a library book—something useful to borrow—but Eloise's pride was a hard wall to fell. She managed on her own, and until recently she'd had Rebecca helping her.

"It's perfect timing that Georgiana is coming home," Deirdre went on. "You've been in a slump since Rebecca's betrayal. Understandably, of course."

Eloise jutted out her pointy chin, becoming one with the cliffside. "I'm not in a slump, and it wasn't a betrayal," she said, though it did feel that way. "Rebecca got married and moved a couple hours away. It's the circle of life."

They passed beneath Arch Rock, the island's most famous sandstone formation, perched up on the bluffs. The story went that when the Ottawa tribe lived here, their Master of Life was angered by the

actions of one of the chiefs and in retaliation sent a blazing red sun toward the island. It burned a hole in the rock, forming an arch. Eloise didn't believe in those sorts of myths, but she liked their familiarity nonetheless, their timeworn texture.

Lake Huron stretched before them. No land in sight on the horizon, just the endless lull of the lake. Even after living here her whole life, Eloise sometimes still forgot it wasn't an ocean.

"Rebecca promised she'd always stay on the island, though," Deirdre reminded, as if Eloise might have forgotten. As if she hadn't cradled Rebecca's words, rocked them against her chest as proof that her family hadn't shattered just because her husband had left and her father had died and Georgiana had gone flitting about the country.

"That was before she met Tom," Eloise said. "He's doing well at his financial firm in Traverse City. It makes more sense for them to live there. It's nothing personal." Though it did feel personal, the abrupt uprooting of the daughter she'd thought would always stay close.

"Nothing personal," Deirdre repeated, huffing. "That's what Kimberly said when she told me I had to start calling before coming over to see my own grandsons." She put on a voice, something high and shrill, to imitate her daughter-in-law. "It's nothing personal—we just like to be able to plan our family time around your visits," Deirdre quoted. "As if *I'm* not family. As if *I'm* somehow an intruder. It's an abomination, that's what." She punched her weights, punctuating the rant.

Deirdre was petite, not much above five feet tall, her edges soft and fleshy. But what she lacked in physical stature she made up for in presence. No one walked away from an encounter with Deirdre Moore thinking her a small woman.

"At least you *have* grandchildren," Eloise said. "Rebecca and Tom just got a dog, did I tell you? This ugly little thing, looks like a giant rat. Rebecca tried to tell me it was my 'grand-dog-ter.' Can you believe it?"

“After all we’ve done for our children,” Deirdre fumed. “I knew Mikey was a lost cause, down in Grand Rapids caught up in that crowd of *bachelors*.” She said it as if she were talking about drug dealers. “But I didn’t expect this from Joshua. Kimberly corrupted him, getting them to move to the north side of the island, three whole miles from me.”

“Very unfair,” Eloise said, thinking how she would kill to have Rebecca so close.

The two lanes of M-185 became Main Street near Mission Point Resort. Formerly Mackinac College, it was now a smaller, more affordable alternative to the Grand Hotel. White Adirondack chairs dotted the lakeside lawn. Guests were breakfasting at the farm-to-ferry restaurant. Eloise rarely went out to eat—it was a waste of money—but something about seeing the diners this morning made her crave a change of pace. She was growing tired of her practiced routine, growing lonely at her kitchen table set for one.

Georgiana’s presence this summer would certainly shake things up, and Eloise was looking forward to it on the whole.

Bicycles whizzed by. It was Mayor Welsh and her overly competitive posse. “Morning, girls!” Camille called out. “I would stop and talk but we’re training for our charity ride. One hundred miles!”

“I had no idea she was training for something,” Deirdre said to Eloise once the group had passed, Pastor Kevin bringing up the rear. It was all the mayor had been talking about for months.

“First I’ve heard of it,” Eloise replied dryly. “Five miles, did she say?”

Farther down, the heart of town unfurled slowly with quaint bed-and-breakfasts, lakeside condos, and the public marina at Haldimand Bay. Across the street, Marquette Park sprawled at the base of Fort Mackinac, with Doud’s Market on the corner, the unofficial gateway into the Main Street hubbub. Old Mr. Doud was directing delivery boys on how to stack milk crates.

“Hi there, Mr. Doud,” Eloise called out. He waved back.

“Hilarious, isn’t it?” Deirdre commented after they passed. “How we qualify for the senior discount at his store and we’re still calling him Mr. Doud.”

“I prefer it,” Eloise said. “Makes me feel like adults are in control.” They snickered.

The first ferry of the day was dumping tourists into scraps of early-morning scenes. Dockhands setting up for the day. Fudge shop workers stirring silky batches, treacly scents seeping into the streets. Horses getting hitched to buggies, hooves scraping the pavement.

Early morning was the only time of day that Eloise tolerated coming downtown in the summer months.

“There’s Georgiana’s competition,” Deirdre hissed. She pointed across the street to the Chippewa Hotel. The popular Pink Pony restaurant, owned by the Tongs, was located inside, with the gift shop next door. “You would think Lillian might take some time before diving back into dating, but her sights seem set on Dr. Kentwood.”

Lillian was the Tongs’ only child, Georgiana’s age. She was beautiful and brilliant, universally liked. “Lillian isn’t competition,” Eloise said. “This isn’t middle school.”

“Exactly. The stakes are higher now,” Deirdre said. “They’re not just vying for dates to school dances anymore. They’re contending for a husband. Hold these, will you?” Deirdre passed her dumbbells to Eloise. “My arms are giving out on me. My whole body is, really. If it weren’t for the marriage plot we’re hatching, I’d need Fred to prescribe some antidepressants.”

Eloise’s conscience prickled. “Can we not call it that?” she asked. “It’s not really a plot.”

Deirdre’s honeycomb eyes were bright beneath a thick coat of mascara. Deirdre always applied a full face of makeup before leaving the house, no exceptions. It had long been a marvel to Eloise, a habit she’d aspired to imitate since they were teenagers. Upon turning fifty, she’d finally relinquished the goal, sticking to her trusty sunscreen and Chapstick routine, making peace with the fact that she’d never

be a beauty icon. There was a great relief to it, surrendering the idea of what might be, what could be. And a sadness too, collecting like sediment.

“You’re right, *plot* is too boring a word, isn’t it?” Deirdre said. “This isn’t a book club. A ploy, shall we call it? A ruse? A machination?”

Eloise didn’t like where this was going. The horror, the disgust that would be on Georgiana’s face if she heard them now. She’d cancel her plans to stay for the summer and go join her father on his latest motorcycle trip instead. “None of that,” Eloise said. “It’s an introduction, that’s all.”

“Scheme!” Deirdre exclaimed. “A suitor scheme, yes, that’s it. The alliteration rolls off the tongue. I have to say, if Dr. Kentwood were a few years older, I’d keep him for myself. I have Fred, of course,” she added dutifully. “You know men like older women now. I read about it in one of the magazines in the checkout aisle. I wasn’t trying to read that tabloid trash; it’s just that the fudgies were clogging up Doud’s so I had to keep myself occupied in line. Dr. Kentwood has the most divine shoulders, by the way. So broad, so brown. I get glimpses of him through the guesthouse window. Only from the waist up, nothing scandalous.” She sounded disappointed. “I’m not spying—he just doesn’t close the blinds.”

Deirdre and Fred were housing Dr. Kentwood at their guesthouse, given its proximity to the medical clinic.

“You act like I don’t know your ways,” Eloise said. “We’ve been best friends for half a century.” Eloise and Deirdre were both born and raised on the island. Their fathers were drinking buddies, their mothers euchre partners (euchre was a wilder, simpler version of bridge and very popular on Mackinac). “You intentionally broke the blinds before he moved in.”

Deirdre colored. “I didn’t break them. I just didn’t have Fred fix them. There’s a difference. So when does Georgiana get in? I’ll assemble the troops to greet her at the ferry.”

“Sometime tomorrow,” Eloise said. “I asked for her flight itinerary but she hasn’t sent it yet. She knows how nervous I get when she’s flying. And all the way from California.”

The only time she herself had stepped onto a plane was for her honeymoon in the Florida Keys. It was all the turbulence she’d needed for a lifetime. Never had she prayed so fiercely, just about crushing the bones in Gus’s hands with her grip.

“Planes are safer than cars, though,” Deirdre said. “I’m a wreck when Joshua and Kimberly drive down to see her parents in Grosse Point. Especially with the twins now. It’s a relief not to have to deal with lunatic drivers here. Though we do have that infestation of motorized scooters, thanks to the fudgies. The mayor’s not enforcing the law; it’s an accident waiting to happen. Someone’s going to die one of these days.” She sounded as eager as she did irate.

“I have a bad feeling Georgiana will get her hands on one of those scooters,” Eloise said. “Given how she inherited Gus’s adrenaline junkie genes.”

“You’ve got some rebel in you too,” Deirdre said. “Remember when you played hooky senior year to go jet-skiing with Gus?”

“Yes, and I turned myself in the next day and begged for detention.” Eloise recalled the perplexed look on Principal Anderson’s face when she’d told him why she deserved to be punished. “I’ve never been good at breaking the rules.”

They slipped off Main and headed up to Market Street. City Hall, the police department, and the courthouse were all within a stone’s throw. The island had one police car, two fire trucks, and an ambulance as the only exceptions to the “no motor vehicles” law. The medical center and Deirdre’s house were on Market Street too, along with the Lucky Bean, where Eloise and Deirdre always ended their walks. Their salted caramel lattes were Eloise’s one vice—not including Gus, that is.

“Well, you’re breaking the rules now,” Deirdre said. “It’s heresy to set up your child on a blind date. Remember how angry you were

when Alice tried to fix you up with that visiting pastor? The conniver doesn't fall far from the tree."

"That was different," Eloise said. "I'm not interested in dating. My mother knows that. Georgiana is interested; she just has abysmal taste. This intervention is for her own good."

"Of course it is," Deirdre agreed. "We don't want her running off to Australia with

some vegan yogi astrologist, do we?"

Eloise winced. Deirdre's scenario didn't seem too far-fetched. "This plan might push Georgiana further away from me," Eloise said. "But I can't sit by and watch the train wreck that has become her life."

Eloise felt very firmly that it was her motherly duty to help Georgiana get her life back on track. Georgiana was clearly burned out from the string of shoddy jobs. For all her flaws, her work ethic was deceptively strong. She'd been supporting herself since she was eighteen. Gus told Eloise he chipped in here or there, but Eloise believed her daughter's reports that the help had been minimal.

What Georgiana needed was to rest and reset. That was why Eloise had offered to let her stay rent-free for the summer. Give her a break from work, a breather from the toxic influences of urban life. Remind her that there were other ways to live than scrounging by in dangerous, overpopulated cities.

Eloise had been surprised when Georgiana agreed to the offer. That, more than anything, was how Eloise knew how bad things must have been for her daughter. Georgiana had no tolerance for Mackinac Island. The feeling had been so strong that Georgiana had run away at eighteen and never looked back. The Great Scandal of Mackinac Island. Though Eloise wondered if Georgiana had been running away from Eloise or the island . . . Probably some combination of the two.

Either way, coming home for summer felt like a cry for help and therefore Eloise felt justified to intervene. Part of that intervention was showing Georgiana that other types of men existed beyond the slick-talking, moral-bereft, commitment-phobic boys whom big cities

wrongly labeled men. Not that Eloise really knew much about Georgiana's past relationships, if they could even be called that. Georgiana offered only scraps when Eloise asked.

Their less-than-close relationship wasn't for lack of effort on Eloise's part. She called every Sunday, but it nearly always went to voicemail—except that Georgiana didn't believe in voicemails (“Why wouldn't people just text?”), so the line promptly disconnected and Eloise had to make do with a lone thumbs-up or smiley face emoji when she texted to check in. Eloise detested emojis and was looking forward to a summer free of them. A summer when, for the first time in a decade, she would get to spend quality time with her daughter.

Assuming Georgiana didn't bolt off the island the moment she found out about the matchmaking.

“The suitor scheme will be good for us too,” Deirdre said, plucking Eloise from her inner world. “Splash a bit of vicarious romance into our lives.”

It was true enough but made Eloise feel old and shriveled. Gus hadn't visited in two years, though he said he was planning to come for a while this summer. Eloise knew she shouldn't still want the man who left her, but she did. They had history together; they had children together. And besides, it wasn't like she was going to meet anyone else on the island. Mackinac kept her safe that way. Though there were some days that the safety felt a little stifling. Eloise had to concede that Georgiana had a point with that critique, not that she would admit it to her daughter.

“Now believe me when I say I'm not rooting for Georgiana to murder you for what you're about to do,” Deirdre went on. “But if she does, we just might get one of those true crime shows to come here. The island is such an idyllic setting for the cameras.”

Eloise opened the coffee shop door, mocha aromas wafting out. She tried to keep some humor as her nerves churned. “Try to get my corpse a cameo, won't you?”

Chapter 3

Gigi

Though it was mostly desperation that had brought Gigi back, it wasn't *all* desperation.

There were a few ounces of nostalgia sprinkled in there too. On some deep, dusty level, Gigi had missed the island. The slower pace of life, the lack of responsibility, the powdery lakeside beaches. She hadn't had a full Mackinac Island summer since high school. Three months here during the prime high season wouldn't be so bad. She could press pause on real life, catch her breath, and then figure out where to go from here.

It might be tolerable enough if she didn't have to share a roof with her mother. She had no idea how she was going to survive cohabitating after so many years of independence.

Still, she was glad to be off the ferry and found herself imbibing the island with fresh eyes, sipping it like a summer shandy.

Nudging up against the fishing-boat-filled docks, Main Street was in top form. A flurry of horses and cyclists and shoppers who rifled through artsy tote bags, pine-scented candles, and pastel crewnecks at quirky boutiques. The fudge shops had lines out the door, as did Sadie's Ice Cream Parlor and Great Turtle Brewery. Gigi felt a prick of respect for how the island spruced itself up to rake in enough money to keep the economy running, or at least shuffling, in the long off-season. And the crowds made it easy to blend in. The last thing she wanted was to be ambushed by Deirdre or one of her old teachers.

Hopefully her new hairstyle—bleached, in a shag—would serve as an adequate disguise.

Lugging her oversized suitcase behind her on the paved but heavily potholed roads, she ascended the steep hill toward Fort Holmes, a former military outpost dating back to the Revolutionary War. Panting before she reached the top, Gigi continued inland, oak and sassafras trees thickening. She welcomed the peace and quiet after a full day of travel, though the *clop, clop, clop* of hooves disturbed her tranquility. Horse-drawn carriage tours squeezed Gigi off the narrow path until she was forced to haul her suitcase through scraggly weeds and wildflowers.

Gigi felt like a bad cliché from one of those cheesy rom-com movies she couldn't stand. The wayward daughter returning home with no money, no partner, no prospects. This would be the opening scene where the ruggedly handsome carriage driver lost control of his horses and hit her, then professed his undying love within the week—perhaps even the day, depending on how quickly he was overcome by her urban allure.

But, thankfully, no flannel-shirted lumberjack appeared. She was alone, and things became even more secluded as she approached Harrisonville, the tiny village where the island's year-round residents lived. Life up here was less performance, more practicality. A uniform row of two-story homes with pitched roofs and economical siding. Their plain appearance insulated them from tourists.

The sight triggered that old, awful sensation of being ordinary. It was Gigi's greatest fear, really. Everyone assumed her greatest fear was probably being abandoned, given her dad left when she was young. But Gigi understood why he had to go. He was terrified of the same thing she was: to live a mediocre, predictable, forgettable life.

And so her dad had gotten off the island before it caged him forever. He hadn't abandoned them, not really. He'd wanted Eloise and the girls to come with him, but Eloise had refused in her typical risk-averse, self-sabotaging way. So Gigi had grown up with both a mother

and a hometown she could hardly look at without seeing the reasons she didn't have a dad to ride bikes with or take to the father-daughter dance down in the schoolhouse gym.

Gigi had ultimately made her own escape and tried very hard to live a big life, an interesting life. She'd avoided getting stuck on the island and avoided going to college, where she would be told what to think. She'd also avoided working a corporate job that would force her to conform.

She'd lived in many different places and held many different jobs and gotten in with many types of friends. She'd successfully carved an uncommon path for herself. Yet that life, too, proved unfulfilling. Like she was just another face trying too hard to be seen in the city crowd.

Gigi had a nagging fear that the problem might not be where she lived or what she did for work. It might not have to do so much with her boyfriends or her bosses or her friends. The problem might be herself, that she was an inherently unimportant person, the kind of person who makes a splash wherever they are but never leaves a lasting impact.

Gigi pushed the thought aside, already hating how Mackinac brought up so much from her past. How the quiet of the island magnified the voices in her head.

Eloise's half acre came into view. Aloud, Gigi referred to her as "Mother." There was a certain defiance in the formality. It was a reminder that they were both adults and that Eloise did not have the power to micromanage her anymore.

Gigi's trust fund friends back in New York would refer to Eloise's abode as a cottage, but when it was a year-round residence, it was simply called a house. Thistle Dew was its name. Thistle Castle was what Gigi had called it growing up, trying to give it some glitz in name, if not appearance.

Perched up on a rise with a view out over the lake, the house was buttermilk yellow with a peach-colored door. It had a double gable roof, a deep front porch, and carefully pruned landscaping—hedges

hearty enough to survive the thrashing winters, plus seasonal flowers. The island's iconic lilacs were nearing their early-summer bloom.

An American flag fluttered in the afternoon breeze. Gigi nearly expected to see it at half-mast, so in mourning was Eloise about Rebecca's move. But the flag was raised to its full height, as was Eloise as she watered hanging baskets of geraniums that brought pops of pink to the porch.

Eloise had a tall, elegant frame that she tended to hide in shapeless empire-waisted dresses, always with a cardigan over. A proud resister of youth-glorification trends, she was aging naturally. Her strawberry-blond hair was streaked with silver, and crow's-feet continued to deepen around her upturned seafoam-green eyes.

Growing up, Gigi had often been told she was the spitting image of her mother. She'd hated the comparisons at the time but found herself missing them over the years now that they rarely came. Eloise might be puritanical, but she was a great beauty by any standard.

It was good to see how well Eloise looked. Gigi took it as validation that she had been right not to spend much time worrying about her or replying to all those missed calls. She didn't want to be one of those overly solicitous daughters who prioritized her mother above herself. That was Rebecca's place. Rebecca, the younger sister who had always assumed the role of the older sister because she just couldn't help herself. Not that Gigi minded—it let her off the hook. Though now that Rebecca had moved off the island, Gigi felt the sensation of a tilted seesaw, as if the balance had shifted and Gigi was going to be holding more than she wanted.

"Hello, Mother." Gigi announced herself, trekking up the gravel driveway.

Eloise whipped her head around, tossing aside the watering can. "Georgiana!" she shrieked. "What have you done to your hair?"

"Lovely to see you too." It was going to be a long summer, Gigi thought as she lugged her suitcase up the creaky porch stairs. She gave Eloise a quick hug.

Eloise was all out of sorts just as Gigi had anticipated. “You told me you weren’t arriving until tomorrow.”

“You know I’m no good at communication.” It was one of the narratives Eloise liked to reinforce about Gigi. Though the real reason she hadn’t told Eloise the correct day was to ensure Eloise wouldn’t assemble a welcome committee. Gigi detested welcome committees.

“I haven’t gotten anything ready for you yet,” Eloise said. Scurrying inside through the side door (the front door was reserved strictly for guests), Eloise set to work.

But it seemed like everything was already prepared. Up in the second-story loft, which Gigi used to share with Rebecca, her twin bed was freshly made up, daisy bedspread pulled taut. Tammy the Turtle, her oldest Beanie Baby, more gray than green these days, sat atop the plumped pillows. Fresh towels and toiletries filled the bathroom. Downstairs in the kitchen, Eloise’s renowned homemade peanut brittle cooled on the stove.

“It hasn’t set long enough,” Eloise chided as Gigi cut herself a large chunk of the brittle.

“Tastes amazing.” Mouth full, Gigi handed a piece to Eloise, who nibbled cautiously.

Gigi felt a tender twinge as she pictured Eloise running around the house to make things special for her return. Perhaps they’d get along better than expected.

“I suppose it’s not the worst thing that you’ve come today,” Eloise said with similar optimism. “You’ll have more time to get ready for Thursday.”

“What’s Thursday?” Gigi broke off another piece of brittle and took a seat at the circular kitchen table. It was adorned with a crocheted tablecloth and matching doilies, handmade by Eloise, the expert crafter. Arched bay windows gave a view down to the lake. Eloise’s Ragdoll cat, named Pluto for how he always seemed worlds away, slinked into the kitchen and straight out again, maintaining his typical aloofness.

“I’ve secured you a date with the island’s new doctor,” Eloise said.

Gigi didn’t react right away. Perhaps it was the jet lag making her head fuzzy, but she’d thought Eloise had said the phrase *secured you a date*. Surely she’d misheard.

“What’s that?” Gigi said, trying to keep her voice even, trying to give Eloise the benefit of the doubt that the situation was not, in fact, what it appeared.

“Dr. Kentwood is supporting Dr. Moore at the clinic this summer, what with the influx of fudgies and all their antics.” Eloise paused to frown but resumed her prior perkiness as she dove into Dr. Kentwood’s descriptors. “Early thirties, devilishly handsome, and single as a slice of Kraft cheese. Now, he’s not an islander,” she went on, like this was one strike against him, “but he’s of wholesome Midwestern stock, rest assured.”

Gigi immediately rescinded any hopes of a harmonious summer. She felt even more infuriated with herself than with Eloise. She should have known there was no such thing as free rent.

“What a relief,” Gigi deadpanned. “And why is he here?” It didn’t check out that any young, single doctor would choose to be isolated out on Mackinac Island.

“Because he values the close-knit community and plethora of opportunities that the island offers,” Eloise said as if reciting from a tourist pamphlet. “He’s only been here two weeks and the islanders are swooping in to set him up. It’s something of a wife hunt, all very exciting. We’re hoping meeting a good woman will persuade him to put down roots here.”

Gigi found the term *wife hunt* as gruesome as *witch hunt*. “Is he *looking* for a wife?” she asked.

“Seems that way,” Eloise said. “Not everyone enjoys frolicking from fling to fling, you know.”

This was something, Gigi thought, given Eloise knew almost nothing about her dating life and how the breakups were never—or at least very rarely—Gigi’s fault. Any decent mother would be com-

mending her daughter for knowing her worth, for refusing to settle, but here Gigi was getting attacked the moment she arrived.

“I don’t frolic,” Gigi said, thinking about her long list of exes. “I’m just not going to marry the first person I date and wind up divorced.” She almost added *like you did* but caught herself just in time.

“Well, I don’t think even you will have much to critique in Dr. Kentwood,” Eloise said. “He’s a veritable catch and he’s picking you up on Thursday at half past six. I know it’s a bit soon after your arrival, but it was the only night he was free. He’s very popular, like I said, and such a devoted doctor.”

“Unbelievable.” Gigi was torn between competing desires to laugh and scream. The result was a strained cackle. “I’ve been here five minutes and you’re already meddling.”

“I’m not meddling. I’m looking out for you.”

“You’re auctioning me off to the highest bidder.”

“Dr. Kentwood isn’t bidding for you, Georgiana. I had to lobby him, if you must know.”

Gigi couldn’t help but choke on the missed humor of it all.

“Lillian Tong’s been spotted with him twice this past week,” Eloise added. “*Twice.*”

This piqued Gigi’s interest. “I thought Lillian was married.” She clearly remembered Eloise telling Gigi about the engagement, with the implication that Gigi was falling behind.

“Jilted, two weeks before the wedding. He was from Boston,” Eloise added, as if this explained it. East coasters—and west coasters—were all depraved in her eyes. “She came back to the island a few weeks ago to recover from the distress of it all and help her parents with the Pink Pony. There’s such a labor crunch, no surprise given how the president has been ballooning the deficit, doling out handouts like there’s no tomorrow. But maybe you and Lillian can reconnect. I’m sure she could use a friend right now.”

“So you’re telling me who I should date *and* be friends with?” Gigi said. “This just gets better and better.”

“You and Lillian used to be so close,” Eloise noted, in that sad way mothers did when they recalled how their cargo-pants-wearing daughters used to love frilly pink dresses. “I’m just saying maybe this summer could be a fresh start.”

“I don’t want a fresh start.” Gigi rarely thought about Lillian anymore. They hadn’t been close since middle school. Lillian hogged the spotlight as they got older, with all her talents in clarinet and tennis and academics, and then the boyfriend-stealing incident senior year had added insult to injury.

“And no offense, Mother,” Gigi replied now, “but I don’t exactly think you’re qualified to be my matchmaker. Given you have the dating life of a nun.”

Gigi watched the words sting Eloise and tried to tell herself she was glad for it.

Eloise recovered swiftly. “My judgment can’t possibly be worse than those dating app things,” she said.

Privately, Gigi conceded that Eloise might have a point. Given the impossibility of dating on Mackinac, Gigi had deleted her apps on the flight from LA and felt a weight lift.

“You’re living under my roof now, rent-free, I might remind you,” Eloise went on. “Dinner with the doctor seems like the very least you can do to express your thanks.”

Gigi groaned, anticipating all the ways Eloise would continue to use this as leverage. “I’ll move in with Nonni,” Gigi said. Enduring flavorless porridge and conservative radio talk shows (Gigi’s grandmother made Eloise look like a moderate) would be nothing compared to this.

“Nonni helped arrange the date,” Eloise said. “She played pickleball with the doctor, primed him with compliments about you.”

Gigi groaned. The whole plot felt like satirical fiction—marrying off the prodigal daughter to the town doctor. Gigi would have to tip off Clyde on the story lead.

As she thought of Clyde, an idea dropped into her mind. It prom-

ised trouble, so she held on to it.

“All right,” Gigi said. “I’ll go.”

“You will?” Eloise had clearly anticipated more of a fight.

“Under one condition.” Gigi’s lips curled. She was beginning to enjoy herself, knowing Eloise would never agree to it. She’d get so flustered that she’d call off the whole thing and never dare to interfere again. It would teach her a much-needed lesson. “You agree to go on a date with someone I set you up with.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Georgiana.”

“*I’m* ridiculous? You’re the one orchestrating an arranged marriage. And besides,” Gigi said, voice softening, “it’s about time you come out of hibernation. Have you even been on one date in the *twenty years* since Dad left?”

Eloise blanched. “I enjoy the company of many friends.”

It was playing out just as Gigi had thought it would.

“All right, I guess the deal is off then.” Gigi feigned disappointment. “And to think I was going to brush my hair out of my eyes and wear my most modest turtleneck for the occasion . . .”

Vexation flashed across Eloise’s face. She busied herself at the sink, though there were no dishes to wash. “Who?” she finally asked over the running water. “Who would the date be with?”

Gigi was surprised Eloise even asked. Unless it was Gus, Eloise had no interest in men. She clearly just couldn’t keep from prying.

“A Mr. Clyde MacDougal.” Gigi presented his name slowly, for effect. “Hailing from across the Atlantic.”

Eloise stole a glance back at Gigi. “The Scottish author?”

“You’ve read his books?” Gigi hadn’t yet gotten around to googling to see how famous Clyde was, and she felt a lurch of excitement that he might be a household name.

“No, but Deirdre called about him before you arrived. Told me she’d just met the most amiable fellow who was staying at the Grand Hotel for the summer, working on his next novel. She was in quite a tizzy, frankly.”

Gigi decided now was not the opportune time to point out that being in a tizzy was Deirdre's natural state. She was too eager to trap Eloise in her own snare.

"That's correct," Gigi said. "So, what do you say? You go on a date with Clyde and I'll go on a date with the doctor."

Gigi waited for Eloise to decline and lecture her on how daughters should stay out of their mothers' personal matters. But Eloise just fiddled with the lavender in the kitchen table vase, turning the sprigs this way and that until they were back in their original position.

A rap came at the side door. It swung open and Nonni bustled in, bringing with her a bundle of warmth. As someone who declared it treason to pass up a piece of pie, her figure was more filled out than Eloise's but she still moved athletically, a walking advertisement for hip replacement surgery. No matter the temperature, she always wore high-waisted trousers and a tucked-in sweater. That, or a bright floral pickleball dress, one of which she was donning now. Lines crisscrossed her velvety skin, telling of both good times and grief. Her eyes were starting to deteriorate, and she was constantly snacking on carrots. She was holding a Ziploc bag of them now.

"I'm terribly sorry," Nonni said to Gigi. "My memory is going. I had your arrival on the calendar for tomorrow. Liam Townsend just called to say he thought he saw you walking by but you had green hair so he wasn't sure."

"Georgiana told me the wrong date," Eloise said.

Gigi gave her grandmother a hug, letting herself sink into her shoulders the way she didn't with Eloise. "My hair is blonde," she said. "Not green."

"It does look lime-ish in the light," Nonni said, stepping back to appraise. "Though you could shave your head and still be the prettiest thing on this island."

"Don't give her any ideas," Eloise said.

Nonni dropped a kiss on Gigi's cheek. Her lipstick stuck, the texture of something several years expired.

“Nonni, you’ll be on my side here,” Gigi said, slipping her hand into Nonni’s. Her skin wasn’t as cold as she remembered. Maybe because she’d only held her grandmother’s hand in winter for many years. “I’m proposing an amendment to my mother’s matchmaking scheme that she’s recruited you into.”

“Don’t you gang up on me,” Eloise said. But Gigi could tell Eloise was happy about the fact that her family might be large enough, united enough, to hold a line.

Gigi explained the deal to Nonni, including how she’d confirmed Clyde was unmarried and looking to date. The only thing Nonni hated more than liberals were homewreckers.

“I like it but your mother won’t agree to it,” Nonni said. “Not a chance.”

They looked at Eloise, who was now sorting the already sorted mail. “Okay,” she said. “I’m in.”

Gigi frowned, then glanced at Nonni, who was wearing a similar look of confusion.

“Okay?” Gigi repeated. The Eloise she knew would never agree to this. Could it be Eloise had been wanting to reenter the dating scene but needed a nudge? Was she trying to prove Nonni wrong? Or was she just so overinvested in Gigi’s love life that she was willing to do anything in order to get Gigi to go out with someone she approved of?

The fact that Gigi didn’t know the answer to this spoke to how close she and Eloise were these days.

“You’re quite the negotiator, Georgiana,” Nonni said. “I should have you call my home insurance agency. Premiums went up twenty-one dollars a month. David used to handle all of that . . .”

“You don’t have to go through with this, Mother,” Gigi said, appalled by the prospect of having to suffer through a date with such a schmoozing, pompous bore as this Dr. Kentwood figure would no doubt be. “Let’s just forget about the whole thing.”

“You want to back out, do you?” Eloise said. The delivery made

Gigi feel like she was a little kid again, begging to quit clarinet lessons.

“No,” Gigi said, refusing to be the one to fold. “I’m just giving you an out.”

“I don’t want an out,” Eloise said, her expression inscrutable. “I told you, I’m in.”

Something about the way she said it made Gigi think about how Rebecca had mentioned several times that she thought their mother was lonely. Gigi had pushed the comments away as nothing more than the flawed observations of a chronic worrier. But now she wondered if there might be some truth to them.

Gigi felt a jab of anger toward her dad and how he still kept stringing Eloise along after all this time. She understood why he had left, but she didn’t understand why he couldn’t stay gone. Eloise refused to move on in case one day he came back for good.

There was something so infuriating about a mother wound that always seemed to trace back to a father wound.

Perhaps this absurd matchmaking scheme would be good for Eloise. Get her out of her shell and on an actual date. Gigi should be awarded a special medal for getting such an improbable feat to happen. And in return, she could tolerate a couple hours with the doctor. He couldn’t possibly be the *worst* person she’d ever gone out with, given the bar was set in hell.

Besides, the dates would serve as a decent distraction from all that had happened here in the past. And what better reason was there to do something than the promise of stirring up new waves in old lakes?

“You’ve got yourself a deal, Mother,” Gigi said, offering up a freckled hand.

Eloise shook it firmly, a feistiness in her own gaze. “May the best matchmaker win.”



Gigi pitched Clyde on the date the next day. While doing some beach yoga so Eloise wouldn’t eavesdrop, she called the Grand Hotel and

asked to be transferred to Clyde MacDougal's room. He picked up promptly.

"It's Gigi from the ferry yesterday," she said. "The serial dater who nearly vomited on you."

"How could I forget?" Clyde said with a chuckle. "It's good to hear from you."

"I have another story lead for you," Gigi said. "My mom is setting me up with the new town doctor. Everyone is obsessing over him. But in return for going on a date with him, I'm setting up my mom with someone. We're playing matchmaker for each other."

"Your mother is single?" Clyde asked, intrigued. "You didn't mention that yesterday."

"Because she doesn't date," Gigi said. "This is very out of character for her."

"It's quite the hook for a book, isn't it?" Clyde said. "Family saga and romance, set against the backdrop of a characterful island town."

Gigi kicked the sand under her bare feet. She liked how it stuck between her toes. "It's not just that," she said. "I want you to be the man she goes out with. What do you say?"

It took a moment for Clyde to answer. "You're asking me to date your mother?"

"Go on a date with her," Gigi said. "Singular. I think you'll get along. Her name is Eloise. She's fifty-five years old, very pretty, very smart, and much better mannered than me."

"Is she open to a real relationship?" Clyde asked. "Or does she just see this date as a means to an end so you'll go out with the gentleman of her choosing?"

"Your guess is as good as mine." Gigi stretched, feeling strong in warrior two as she listened through her earbuds. "But either way you'll get a good story out of it."

"I wouldn't want her to think I'm using her for that," Clyde said.

"It's not like she's innocent," Gigi said. "Given how she's been scheming. Both of you have tainted intentions. It's as promising a

starting point as any.”

Clyde paused. “I’d like to speak with her and take it from there. May I have her phone number?”

Gigi thought that sounded fair and gave it to him. “Call before 5:00 p.m. Eloise finds it rude when people call too late.”

“I’ll call right this moment,” Clyde said.

“Talk slowly,” Gigi advised. “She’s not a fan of accents; she hasn’t left the island much. And ask her to dinner, not drinks. She thinks drinks are tacky.”

“I appreciate the tips, but I think I’ll be all right. I do have my fair share of experience asking women out.”

“Everything works a little differently on Mackinac, though,” Gigi cautioned.

“Love is universal, lassie.”

Gigi transitioned into a wobbly tree pose. “Maybe, but we’re not talking about love. We’re talking about dating.”

“Shouldn’t those two things be linked?”

“Theoretically. But it rarely plays out like that, does it?”

“Perhaps it will this time.”

Gigi was taken aback by how excited Clyde sounded. This was the problem with creative types, how their imagination tumbled ahead of them. It was all right. Eloise would bring him back to earth.

Clyde thanked Gigi once more, then hung up. Gigi hurried back to Thistle Dew, hoping to listen in on the call. She wouldn’t believe Eloise had accepted the date unless she heard it with her own two ears.