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# THE COMPLETE SERIES

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Whispering Cove

CATHRYN FOX





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## COPYRIGHT

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**WET, BRAZEN, SILK, FLIRTY**

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**WET**

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**In Whispering Cove**



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## PROLOGUE

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“I’ll be seeing your bet.” Harold Adair slammed a dollar bill in the middle of the table making a loud booming sound. “And raise you another fifty cents.”

With three deuces and two face cards in his hand, he tossed two more coins into the pot. Inhaling the salty sea air wafting through the open window, he waited for the two men sitting around his kitchen table to respond. The soft breeze stirred the curtains and he glanced at the photo that sat below the windowsill. The pretty little redhead made him smile.

*Stubborn and willful, she be just like her father.*

The thought of his son brought a tear to Harold’s weathered eyes. He coughed into his hand trying to mask the emotion tightening his throat. Of course, if his pain was still raw after all this time, he could only imagine how Andrea felt losing both her parents in that dreadful boat accident.

He raked trembling fingers through his thick gray hair. His numerous requests for the lass to return home had failed. Even dangling her ten-year class reunion did not encourage

her to bury the memories and come back to visit old friends and her only living relative.

“You listening, you bloated, barnacle plucking ol’ goat?” Errol Wilson’s scratchy voice cut through Harold’s wool-gathering.

Harold’s bushy brows shot upward as he pinned the aging man with a steely glare. “Bloated?” Laying his cards down, he placed his laced fingers on his extended belly and cocked his head. “Barnacle plucking ol’ goat, ye say?” He slid his narrow gaze toward Byron Mitchell, another dear friend, and then winked. “I’ll ’ave ye know ’tis better than bein’ a pond suckin’, baldin’ beachcomber, who hasn’t seen the bottom of a boat in over a decade.”

Errol’s whiskered jaw dropped and he scowled. Slowly, he reached up to touch the sliver of thin hair plastered across the top of his shiny head. For a moment, silence reigned. Then the tall, slender man patted his head before his frown dissolved and he burst into laughter. “I’ll be damned if he isn’t right.”

Harold and Byron joined him, their deep guffawing filling the room.

When their chuckling died, Harold glanced back and forth between his friends and retrieved his cards. “So where are we?”

Byron, with his arthritic fingers gnarled and knobby, laid his cards before him. “I fold.” He looked up at Harold, sympathy softening his cloudy blue eyes. “It’s Andie, isn’t it?”

Harold quietly nodded. “Short of me heart stop beatin’, the lass may never return to Whispering Cove.”

Byron cleared his throat. “You know, it’s not a bad idea.”

Errol’s eyes widened. “*Byron!*” He tossed his cards on the table with something akin to disgust frowning his forehead. “I can’t believe you said that.”

Byron waved a shaky hand, dismissing Errol. “Braydon



wasn't coming home either, until I dropped a few hints that I was having health problems."

The pit of Harold's stomach knotted. The three of them had been friends since he had left Ireland and arrived on the rocky shores of Maine. Fear almost caused him not to ask, but in the end he did. "You okay?"

Byron raised a hand before him. "If not for this rheumatoid, I'd be fit as a fiddle, but my grandson doesn't need to know that." Lowering his arm to the table, he continued. "My wife refuses to play along. Ruth says, 'I shouldn't get involved.' But the boy is almost twenty-nine, unmarried. He needs to settle down."

"The hell you say?" Errol pursed his lips, nodding his head. "My Katy is unmarried, as well."

Harold didn't need to say it, but marriage had eluded Andie too. Before she left town she had been engaged to a young man who had later become Whispering Cove's sheriff. Their relationship was a storybook romance, until the accident. Then his loving granddaughter had moved away, disassociating herself with anyone from the past. Yes, she wrote on occasions, but he missed her, wanted her back where she belonged.

A big Cheshire grin spread across Byron's face. "Braydon arrives next week, and I have just the right woman picked out for him."

"Why ye conniving old windbag," Harold barked, unable to stifle his surprise.

"What?" If innocence was what Byron was fishing for, he was casting without bait.

"You know, every time my granddaughter writes home she asks about Trent Parker." The gleam in Errol's eyes brightened. "He's never married." He thrummed his fingers on the table several times and then they stilled. "Maybe we should try our hand at matchmaking."

Without a word, Byron reached into his pocket and extracted a twenty dollar bill. He slapped it in the middle of the table, turning his attention to Errol. His chin rose in challenge. "Bet I can get Braydon to the altar before your Katy."

Errol reach for his wallet sitting next to the half empty bottle of rum he had brought to share. "You're on." Digging out two tens, he put them atop Byron's twenty, before he began to pour each of them a shot of the dark liquor. "How about you, Harold?"

"I'll take that bet, but only if I can get the lass home for the reunion." Harold raised his shot glass into the air before him. "Here's to marriage, family, and great-grandchildren."

Katy Wilson shifted restlessly in the spacious leather seat of her rental and stifled a yawn as she peered into the night. The bright headlights on the SUV sliced through the dark and illuminated the quiet, seaside streets. Towering oak trees lined the deserted sidewalks like Coast Guard Cadets, protecting the inhabitants who slumbered inside the quaint fishing village. Her heart lurched with longing as her gaze panned the neighborhood, noting that very little had changed since she moved away some ten years ago, turning her back on everyone and everything she loved.

The invitation requesting her presence had arrived by email, but she hadn't made any summer plans to return home to Whispering Cove, Maine, to attend her high-school reunion. At least not until her granddaddy had sent a rather lengthy letter explaining how business was down at the Seafarer, the famous East coast lobster house owned by her folks—a restaurant where Katy had learned her way around a kitchen.

“Damn economy,” he'd explained. “Tourists ain't coming

like they used to.” Oddly enough, Granddaddy Errol had insisted she keep her folks’ financial woes to herself and had sworn her to secrecy. “They’re too proud to ask for help, lassie,” he’d warned.

Maybe so, but if her parents needed help, then she’d do whatever it took to help them, even if that meant braving her past and spending the summer in Maine. So here she was, back on the very street she used to cruise as a teen and hadn’t spent much time on since. She’d returned home over the years, of course, but those visits had always been brief. Traveling during off hours, and cruising like a wind-propelled vessel, she’d sailed out of town as quietly as she’d sailed in, never hanging around long enough to see *him*.

*Him*, as in Trent Parker.

The boy she’d grown up with, climbed trees and scraped knees with, and more importantly, the boy she’d shared her first kiss with. The same boy who’d grown into a respectable firefighter and had every right to hate her.

God, what would it be like to face him after all these years?

As Katy thought about him, and the reason for their premature break-up, need prowled through her veins and a lump pushed into her throat. The last ten years hadn’t been all they were cracked up to be. She’d left the quiet, unhurried streets of Whispering Cove behind and made her way to Chicago where her exceptional culinary skills had landed her a much coveted spot on daytime TV hosting her very own cooking show. Fame and fortune found her, but the hordes of fans who hustled along the bloated streets and stopped her didn’t know the real Katy Wilson, the girl who played with fire trucks instead of dolls, and preferred sneakers to heels. No, those people only know her TV persona, Kathleen Wilson, celebrity chef extraordinaire.

The empty feeling in the pit of her stomach mushroomed

like a soufflé. The sobering reality of it all was that even in a big city like Chicago, Katy had found herself alone in the crowd more times than not. And she hated to admit to the people she turned her back on that her life wasn't all glitz and glamour. Deep down she longed to be home.

Now, with her contract up for renewal and her show on hiatus for eight long weeks, she had one hell of a big decision to make, because when it came right down to it, she knew life in the fast lane wasn't for her. Then again, with waning viewership, she wasn't even sure the network would want to renew her for next season. Despite all that, she yearned to be surrounded by caring, down-home folk—the kind only found in Whispering Cove. Behind her, Katy heard the roar of the ocean, the sound wrapping around her like an old familiar sweater, cocooning her in a blanket of warmth and safety.

Why had it taken her so long to appreciate the beauty and comfort in her own backyard?

She fiddled with the radio station and smiled when she came upon an old favorite. Taking the turn down her parents' private lane, she took note of the colorful flowers and trimmed hedges. She smiled. If Martha Stewart had a green thumb, her mother had a green hand. As Katy rolled her window down to inhale the sweet summer fragrances, it occurred to her just how much she ached to be back, to have things return to the way they were.

But if there was one thing Katy's gut kept telling her, it was that the past was the past and things could never go back to the way they were. Specifically when it came to Trent, the sweet, kind boy she'd walked away from. The boy who'd kissed her goodbye, but couldn't hide the sadness in his eyes. Never looking back, she'd tossed him away like an undersized catch, all for a chance to experience life in the big city. He'd let her go because all he'd ever wanted was what was best for her. She didn't deserve him, and the reason she'd never faced

him over the last ten years was because she hated to see melancholy haunting his gaze, hated that she'd put it there.

She inched into her folks' driveway and watched the light in the upstairs room flick on. As Katy glanced up at the widow's peak, the glass turret overlooking the bountiful Atlantic Ocean lit up in the dark night, and she knew she'd awoken her parents. She knew how fast word of her arrival would spread, and in no time at all she'd be bombarded with questions about her future—mainly ones concerning her marital status. She also knew how complicated those answers would be. She couldn't tell anyone what her future held when she herself didn't know.

As she thought about the uncertainty of things to come, of how Trent would receive her after all this time, her heart crashed harder than the waves at Dresden Bluff. The rocky cliff was a place she and Trent had visited often, the same place she'd eagerly given up her virginity to him.

She patted the brakes, and as she tried to quiet her erratic heartbeat, wondered, for the hundredth time since she boarding the plane in Chicago, if she was making a big mistake by returning to her childhood home and facing her past, especially since her body and heart still ached to be back in the arms of the man who undoubtedly would rather run into a blazing building than rekindle their relationship's fiery embers.

Trent Parker didn't want to think about the plates of half-eaten food sitting on the long oaken table before him. Nor did he want to think about the pot of congealed spaghetti sauce waiting to be scrubbed. And he certainly didn't want to think about the suspicious fire up at Dresden Bluff that had caused them all to bolt from the firehouse late last night without finishing the meal he'd spent hours preparing.

But what he really, really didn't want to think about was that Katy Wilson was back in town, or the fact that he'd spotted her coming in under the cover of darkness, hoping to avoid any sort of run-in with him, he presumed.

A scraping sound behind him pulled his attention, and when he turned to see Adam Collins, his best friend and Whispering Cove's most sought-after bachelor, push open the swinging door and step into the kitchen, he shook his head to clear it.

"Hey, Trent, did you hear Katy's back in town?" Adam asked, as he sauntered across the room to grab a soda from the fridge.

Trent rolled his shoulder, hoping for casual, but the hitch in his voice belied his emotions when he said, "Yeah. So?"

Never one to be subtle, Adam added, "I hear she looks as good as ever."

Adam heard wrong. Katy didn't look as good as ever. She looked better than ever. He'd gotten a good look at her when she'd stopped her SUV at the corner of Main and Little. He was on the sidewalk next to the vehicle, and the overhead lamppost gave sufficient light for him to see her big blue eyes, dark wavy hair, creamy skin and plump lips that had his cock rising up for a front-row seat.

"I wouldn't know, and don't much care."

"So you think she's back for the reunion?"

"What part of *I wouldn't know, and don't much care* didn't you get?"

"The *don't much care* part." Adam tossed him a wry grin, and it pissed Trent off that his childhood friend and fellow firefighter could read him like an open book. Adam was as quick as a brush fire sweeping through the white pines. His bright intelligence, good looks and dazzling charm attracted women quicker than a shiny lure attracted fish.

"Is that right?" Adam probed. "You really don't care?"

"Yeah, that's right."

Adam twisted the cap off his soda and leaned against the table. He got quiet for a moment, a rarity for him since he always had an opinion on everything, then said, "I wonder if I can get her autograph."

Trent shrugged and walked to the sink, turning his back to his friend and their conversation, not wanting to talk or even think about Katy anymore. He flicked on the chrome tap and poured a generous amount of soap into the basin.

"You think she'll give it to me?" Adam pressed, refusing to give up on the subject.

"I'm sure she'll give it to you if you just ask," Trent finally



said, hoping to put an end to the discussion. He gestured with a nod. "Grab a cloth and dry."

Adam didn't move. Instead he said, "I wonder what else she'll give up if I just ask..."

Trent spun around. Fire rushed through his bloodstream and raised his anger from simmer to boil, but when he caught the cocky, knowing grin on his friend's face and realized Adam was simply baiting him, he grinned back and shook his head. "Fuck off, Adam."

Adam pushed off the table and clapped Trent on the back. "Come on, Trent. You want her now as much as you always have. Admit it."

"I don't want her." Trent thought about all the girls he'd bedded down with since Katy had left. "I moved on, remember?"

"What I remember is that you fucked nearly every single woman in town after Katy kicked your ass to the curb, yet here you are still pining over her like some lovesick school-boy. It's pathetic, pal. Just pathetic."

"Adam—"

"Look, why don't you try fucking *her*? Fucking all those other girls didn't help so maybe fucking Katy Wilson is the only way you're going to get her out of your system once and for all."

"Unlike you, I don't think fucking solves everything."

Adam grinned. "Well it doesn't hurt."

Trent gave an impatient sigh. "Look, I'm not going to fuck her, Adam. I'm not going to do anything with her. I probably won't even see her or talk to her when she's here, so drop it, okay?"

"Fine, if you don't want to fuck her, I will."

"Like hell you will." The words flew from his mouth before he could stop them.

Adam laughed and gave a slow shake of his head. "Yeah,

Trent. It's real clear that you've moved on."

Trent was about to open his mouth to voice an argument, but the fire alarm went off. They both dropped everything and bolted to the garage where they found the others already suited up.

Less than five minutes later they were rushing through town and heading back to Dresden Bluff. It was the second time within twenty-four hours someone had lit a fire on the hill. Trent knew the kids were antsy this summer, especially with the unusually high temperatures, and according to his friend, Sheriff Brody McGrath, teens seemed to be getting into more and more mischief lately, but rarely would they return to the scene of a crime and risk getting caught. Whoever was lighting these fires was brazen and it didn't bode well.

But something else was gnawing at him, something about the fact that the fires were set on Dresden Bluff, as if they'd been deliberately ignited at the location he and Katy used to go to make love.

Trent hadn't been back to the bluff in ten years and returning to the site now was simply a reminder of what he'd loved and lost.

They parked at the foot of the bluff and Trent and Adam ran to the top with the hose. Once the small fire was extinguished, Trent moved into the thick brush. He pushed low-hanging branches from his path and sifted through the pine needles looking for hot spots. The fire had been contained near the rocks and he was pleased to see that very little damage had been done.

As the trees closed around him, blocking him from the others, he couldn't help but think about Katy. Being so close to the spot they'd made love unlocked all those buried memories and had him reminiscing about what it felt like to hold her, kiss her, bring her to orgasm beneath the stars as they

listened to the waves crash against the rocks. He thought about the way she gave herself over to him, the way she trusted him with her body, her pleasure, her heart. He thought about her unique, arousing scent—honeyed vanilla and sweeter than candy—and the way it always seeped under his skin and filled him with longing.

Jesus, it was so perfect. She was so perfect.

Then she'd left.

"Fuck!"

Trent turned back around and shelved those thoughts to the recesses of his mind, not wanting to travel too far down memory lane. Christ, Adam was right. He was pathetic. Totally fucking pathetic.

Maybe Adam was right about fucking her, too.

The truth was, he'd never gotten over Katy and loved her now as much as he had back then, which was why he hadn't begged her to stay when she said she wanted to move on to bigger and better. It cut to his core when she left, but he couldn't fault her for wanting to experience life outside Whispering Cove. Not everyone was cracked up for small-town living. He knew that truth firsthand.

Right after high school, his mother had gotten pregnant. Some said she trapped his father, but Trent didn't like to believe it. His father had gotten a scholarship upstate, but with a child on the way, he never had the chance to go. Instead, he'd ended up working the fishing vessels like his father before him. His dreams of pursuing a career in engineering were flushed out to sea. Resentment ran deep, and his dad had ended up searching for happiness in the bottom of a bottle. He'd never found it. Instead he found his way to an early grave, his mother not too far behind.

Trent swallowed down the lump in his throat as old, painful memories rose to the surface like air bubbles. Jesus, he never wanted Katy to resent him the way his dad had

resented his wife and son. He knew Katy belonged in Whispering Cove, it was in her blood, but if she had to go away to find herself, to forget who she really was and take on the persona of big-city-girl Kathleen Wilson until she came to that conclusion herself, then who was he to stop her? But deep down he'd thought she'd be back. Thought she'd come home. To him.

He'd thought wrong.

So maybe Adam *was* right and it was finally time to do something to get over her.

Something drastic.