

#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Elin
Hilderbrand
*The
Hotel Nantucket*

By the author of *Golden Girl*



#1 BESTSELLING AUTHOR

Elin
Hilderbrand
*The
Hotel Nantucket*

By the author of *Golden Girl*



*The Hotel
Nantucket*



A Novel

Elin Hilderbrand



Little, Brown and Company
New York Boston London

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Copyright © 2022 by Elin Hilderbrand

Cover design by Lauren Harms

Cover photograph by OJO Images / Getty Images

Cover © 2022 Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Hachette Book Group supports the right to free expression and the value of copyright. The purpose of copyright is to encourage writers and artists to produce the creative works that enrich our culture.

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book without permission is a theft of the author's intellectual property. If you would like permission to use material from the book (other than for review purposes), please contact permissions@hbgusa.com. Thank you for your support of the author's rights.

Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104

littlebrown.com

facebook.com/LittleBrownandCompany

twitter.com/LittleBrown

First ebook edition: June 2022

Little, Brown and Company is a division of Hachette Book Group, Inc. The Little, Brown name and logo are trademarks of Hachette Book Group, Inc.

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

The Hachette Speakers Bureau provides a wide range of authors for speaking events. To find out more, go to hachettespeakersbureau.com or call (866) 376-6591.

ISBN 9780316259088

E3-20220421-NF-DA-ORI

Table of Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

1. The Cobblestone Telegraph

2. The Fifth Key

3. Ghost Story

4. Help Wanted

5. Opening Day

6. Staff Secrets

7. Bad Reviews

8. Lie, Cheat, and Steal

9. The Cobblestone Telegraph

10. Last Friday of the Month: June

11. The Blue Book

12. Graveyard Shift

13. Affirmations

14. A Desk Thing

15. Behind Closed Doors

16. The Cobblestone Telegraph

17. Hot-Girl Summer

18. Last Friday of the Month: July

19. The Blanket, the Belt, the Burglary

20. Here Comes Trouble

21. The Cobblestone Telegraph

22. Cedar and Salt

23. Full Send

24. Heartbreaker

25. The Last Friday of the Month: August

26. The Cobblestone Telegraph

27. Long Shot

28. The Cobblestone Telegraph

29. Mosaic

The Blue Book

Discover More

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Also by Elin Hilderbrand

*For Mark and Gwenn Snider
and the entire staff of the Nantucket Hotel
with my love and gratitude*

Explore book giveaways, sneak peeks, deals, and more.

[Tap here to learn more.](#)



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

1. The Cobblestone Telegraph

Nantucket Island is known for its cobblestone streets and red-brick sidewalks, cedar-shingled cottages and rose-covered arches, long stretches of golden beach and refreshing Atlantic breezes—and it's also known for residents who adore a juicy piece of gossip (which hot landscaper has been romancing which local real estate mogul's wife—that kind of thing). However, none of us are quite prepared for the tornado of rumors that rolls up Main Street, along Orange Street, and around the rotary out to Sconset when we learn that London-based billionaire Xavier Darling is investing thirty million dollars in the crumbling eyesore that is the Hotel Nantucket.

Half of us are intrigued. (We have long wondered if anyone would try to fix it up.)

The other half are skeptical. (The place, quite frankly, seems beyond saving.)

Xavier Darling is no stranger to the hospitality business. He has owned cruise lines, theme parks, racetracks, and even, for a brief time, his own airline. But to our knowledge, he has never owned a hotel—and he has never set foot on Nantucket.

With the help of a local real estate mogul, Eddie Pancik—aka “Fast Eddie” (who, for the record, has been happily reunited with his wife)—Xavier makes the savvy decision to hire Lizbet Keaton as his general manager. Lizbet is an island sweetheart. She moved to Nantucket in the

mid-aughts from the Twin Cities, wearing her blond hair in two long braids like the younger princess in *Frozen*, and at the start of her first summer on island, she found a “prince” in JJ O’Malley. For fifteen seasons, Lizbet and JJ ran a wildly popular restaurant called the Deck; JJ was the owner/chef and Lizbet the marketing whiz. Lizbet was the one who came up with the idea for the rosé fountain and the signature stemless wineglasses printed with the day’s date that became a social media phenomenon. Not all of us cared about Instagram, but we did love spending long Sunday afternoons at the Deck drinking rosé, eating JJ’s famous oyster pan roast, and gazing out over the shallow creeks of Monomoy, where we spied the occasional white egret fishing for dinner among the eelgrass.

We all believed that Lizbet and JJ had achieved what our millennials called #relationshipgoals. In the summer, they worked at the restaurant, and in the off-season, they could be found scalloping in Pocomo or sledding down the steep hill of Dead Horse Valley or shopping together at Nantucket Meat and Fish because they were planning to cure a side of salmon into gravlax or make a twelve-hour Bolognese. We’d see them holding hands in line at the post office and recycling their cardboard together at the dump.

We were all *shocked* when JJ and Lizbet broke up. We first heard the news from Blond Sharon. Sharon is the turbo engine behind Nantucket’s rumor mill, so we were hesitant to believe it, but then Love Robbins at Flowers on Chestnut confirmed that Lizbet *sent back* a bouquet of roses that JJ had ordered. Eventually the story came out: At the Deck’s closing party back in September, Lizbet had discovered 187 sexually explicit texts that JJ had sent to their wine rep, Christina Cross.

Lizbet was, according to some, *desperate* to reinvent herself—and Xavier Darling provided a way. We wished her well, but the once-grand

Hotel Nantucket had a tattered reputation to repair (along with the roof, windows, floors, walls, and sinking foundation).

Throughout the winter of 2021 and into the early spring of 2022, we watch local contractors, architects, and interior designer Jennifer Quinn entering and leaving the hotel—but every single employee has been sworn to secrecy about what’s going on inside. There are whispers that our favorite fitness instructor, Yolanda Tolentino, has been hired to run the wellness center and that Xavier Darling is looking for someone with an “island pedigree” to operate the hotel’s new bar. We see Lizbet Keaton come and go, but when Blond Sharon bumps into Lizbet in the vehicle-inspection line at Don Allen Ford—Lizbet in her Mini Cooper and Sharon in her G-Wagon—and asks how the hotel is coming along, Lizbet changes the subject to Sharon’s children. (Sharon has no interest in talking about her children; they’ve just become teenagers.)

Jordan Randolph, the editor of the *Nantucket Standard*, ignores the first two calls he gets from Lizbet Keaton telling him the interior of the hotel is finished and asking if he would like a “behind-the-scenes first look.” Jordan is one of the skeptics. He can’t stand the idea of someone like Xavier Darling—a business titan from overseas—buying a historically significant property like the Hotel Nantucket. (Jordan is aware that Herman Melville wrote *Moby-Dick* before he ever visited the island. Does that make him feel any better? Not really.) But, Jordan reasons, if not Xavier Darling, then who? The place has been left to rot. Even the Nantucket Historical Association has deemed the hotel too big (and expensive) a project to take on.

When Lizbet calls the third time, Jordan answers the phone and reluctantly agrees to send a reporter.

Home and Lifestyle editor Jill Tananbaum is *obsessed* with interior design, as anyone who checks her Instagram will immediately realize (@ashleytstark, @elementstyle, @georgantas.design). Jill would love to use this job at the *Nantucket Standard* as a stepping-stone to a position at *Domino* or even *Architectural Digest*. Covering the renovation of the Hotel Nantucket could be just the way to do it. She's not going to leave out a single detail.

As soon as Jill steps through the grand front doors, her jaw drops. Hanging from the vaulted ceiling of the lobby is the skeleton of an antique whaling boat that has been ingeniously repurposed into a statement chandelier. The ceiling's beams, salvaged from the original structure, lend the room a sense of history. There are double-wide armchairs upholstered in hydrangea blue (which Jill soon learns is the hotel's signature color), suede tufted ottomans, and low tables that tastefully display books and games (backgammon, checkers, and four marble chess sets). The far corner of the room is anchored by a white baby grand piano. On the large wall next to the front desk hangs an enormous James Ogilvy photograph of the Atlantic off Sankaty Head that succeeds in bringing the ocean into the hotel.

Wow, Jill thinks. *Just...wow*. Her hand is itching to reach for her phone but Lizbet told her that, for the time being, photos are forbidden.

Lizbet gives Jill a tour of the guest rooms and suites. Local artist Tamela Cornejo has hand-painted the ceiling of each room with a mural of the Nantucket night sky. The light fixtures—glass spheres wrapped in brass chain link—evoke buoys and ropes. And the beds—*Excuse me, the beds!*

Jill thinks. The beds have canopies fashioned from driftwood and thick nautical rope. They're a custom size—emperor—and they have ethereal white sheers hanging at the sides.

The bathrooms are the most spectacular Jill has ever seen in real life. Each one has a shower tiled with oyster shells, a hatbox toilet in a separate water closet, and a slipper tub, the base of which is painted the hotel's signature hydrangea blue.

“But the secret to success for any bathroom,” Lizbet says to Jill, “isn't how *it* looks; it's how it makes the *guest* look.” She flips a switch. Surrounding the long rectangular mirror over the double vanity is a soft halo light. “See how flattering?”

Jill and Lizbet gaze at themselves in the mirror like a couple of teenagers. *It's true*, Jill thinks; she has never looked dewier than she does standing in the bathroom of suite 217.

Then—then!—Lizbet tells Jill about the complimentary minibar. “I can't count the times I've been in a hotel room and just wanted a glass of wine and a salty snack, but being charged seventy dollars for a bottle of chardonnay and sixteen dollars for a pack of peanuts is offensive when I've already paid so much for the room. So our minibars will be stocked with a thoughtfully curated selection of Nantucket-sourced products”—she mentions Cisco beers, Triple Eight vodka, and smoked bluefish pâté from 167 Raw—“and everything is free, replenished every three days.”

Free minibar! Jill writes in her notes. *Nantucket products!* Jordan should give her article front-page placement for this announcement alone.

Lizbet leads Jill out back to see the pools. One is a sprawling family affair with cascading waterfalls. (“There will be lemonade and fresh-baked cookies served every day at three,” Lizbet says.) The second pool is an adults-only sanctuary, a teal-blue lozenge surrounded by gray-shingled

walls that will be covered with pale pink climbing roses in the height of summer. Around the pool are “the most comfortable chaise longues in the known world, extra-wide and easy to adjust,” and stacks of custom-ordered Turkish cotton towels in hydrangea blue.

Next, it’s off to the yoga studio. Jill has never been to Bali, but she *has* read *Eat, Pray, Love*, so she appreciates the aesthetic. The ceiling of the studio is an elaborate teak carving salvaged from a temple in Ubud. (Jill considers how much it must have cost to ship and install such a ceiling... *mind-exploding emoji!*) There’s a gurgling stone fountain in the form of the somewhat terrifying face of the god Brahma that empties into a trough of river stones. The light from outside is diffused through rice-paper shades, and gamelan music plays over the sound system. *All in all*, Jill thinks, *the new yoga studio will be an idyllic place to find a child’s pose.*

But as far as Jill is concerned, the ultimate reveal is the hotel’s bar. It’s a high-concept jewel box, a space painted Farrow and Ball’s Pitch Blue (which falls on the spectrum between sapphire and amethyst) and a blue granite bar. There are domed pendant lights that look like upside-down copper bowls and an accent wall *sheathed in bright pennies!* There’s also a copper disco ball that will drop from the ceiling every night at nine o’clock. There’s nothing like it anywhere else on the island. Jill is gobsmacked. Can she make a reservation now, please?

Jill races back to her desk at the *Standard* office. Has she ever been so inspired to write a piece? She types like a fiend, getting all the details down—including the rainbow-hued Annie Selke rugs, the curated selection of novels on the bookshelves of the suites, the pin-tucked velvet stools in the new hotel bar—and then goes back over the piece one sentence at a time, making certain the language is as gracious and rich as the hotel itself.

When she finishes her final edit, she takes the piece to Jordan Randolph's office. He likes to read each feature article on paper and then mark it up with red pen like he's Maxwell Perkins editing Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Jill and her colleagues joke about this. Hasn't he ever heard of Google Docs?

Jill stands in the doorway as he reads, waiting for his usual "Outstanding." But when he finishes, he tosses the pages onto his desk and says, "Huh."

Huh? What is *huh*? Jill has never before heard her extremely articulate boss utter this syllable.

"Is it not okay?" Jill asks. "Is it...the writing?"

"The writing is fine," Jordan says. "Maybe it's *too* polished? This reads like one of those advertisement sections in the middle of *Travel and Leisure*."

"Oh," Jill says. "Okay, so..."

"I was hoping for more of a *story*," Jordan says.

"I'm not sure there *is* more of a story," Jill tells him. "The hotel was falling to pieces and Xavier Darling bought it. He hired local—"

"Yes, you say that." Jordan sighs. "I wish there were another angle..." His voice trails off. "I'm not going to run it this week. Let me think on it for a little while." He smiles at Jill. "Thank you, though, for going to get a 'behind-the-scenes first look.'" He uses air quotes, which makes him seem like *such* a boomer. "I appreciate it."

Privately, Jordan Randolph suspects that the Hotel Nantucket will be like a work of art by Banksy—after it is unveiled, it will shine for one glorious moment and then self-destruct. One person who agrees is a ninety-four-year-old resident of Our Island Home named Mint Benedict. Mint is the only child of Jackson and Dahlia Benedict, the couple who owned the hotel

from 1910 to 1922. Mint asks his favorite nurse, Charlene, to push him all the way to Easton Street in his wheelchair so that he can see the spiffy new facade of the hotel.

“They can fix it up but it won’t succeed,” Mint says. “Mark my words: The Hotel Nantucket is haunted, and it’s all my father’s fault.”

Mint is talking nonsense, Charlene thinks, and he definitely needs a nap. She spins his chair toward home.

Haunted? we think.

Half of us are skeptical. (We don’t believe in ghosts.)

Half of us are intrigued. (Just when we thought the story couldn’t get any better!)

2. The Fifth Key.

Lizbet Keaton's Breakup Playlist

- “Good 4 U”—Olivia Rodrigo
- “All Too Well” (Taylor’s version)—Taylor Swift
- “If Looks Could Kill”—Heart
- “You Oughta Know”—Alanis Morissette
- “Far Behind”—Social Distortion
- “Somebody That I Used to Know”—Gotye
- “Marvin’s Room”—Drake
- “Another You”—Elle King
- “Gives You Hell”—The All-American Rejects
- “Kiss This”—The Struts
- “Save It for a Rainy Day”—Kenny Chesney
- “I Don’t Wanna Be in Love”—Good Charlotte
- “Best of You”—Foo Fighters
- “Rehab”—Rihanna
- “Better Now”—Post Malone
- “Forget You”—CeeLo Green
- “Salt”—Ava Max
- “Go Your Own Way”—Fleetwood Mac
- “Since U Been Gone”—Kelly Clarkson

“Praying”—Kesha

Ever since her devastating breakup with JJ O’Malley, Lizbet has been searching for an inspirational meme that will make her feel better. She spent seventy-seven dollars at Wayfair on a framed quote attributed to Socrates: *The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.* She hangs it on the wall at the end of her bed so that it’s the first thing she sees when she wakes up and the last thing she sees before she turns off the light.

All your energy. Not on fighting the old. But on building the new. The secret of change.

Easier said than done, she thinks. She spends all her energy fighting the old.

Reliving September 30, the Last Night at the Deck.

Last Night at the Deck is a bittersweet tradition—it marks the end of the summer season. Lizbet and JJ have to say goodbye to the team they poured so much time and energy (and money) into building. Some of the staff will return next spring, but not everyone, so a summer can never be replicated. This, they’ve found, is both good and bad. Last Night is a time of bacchanalian revelry for the staff. Lizbet and JJ throw down an excellent party, opening tins of beluga caviar and bottle after bottle of Laurent-Perrier rosé.

One of the traditions is the staff photograph that Lizbet takes of them all leaning up against the railing with the Monomoy creeks behind them. She frames these photographs and hangs them in the hallway that leads to the restrooms. It’s a record of sorts, an album, a history.

Tonight’s picture will be the fifteenth. She can hardly believe it.

Lizbet calls for everyone to gather, and they configure themselves into a creative and cozy pose. Shorties up front! Goose, the sommelier, and Wavy, the head server, pick up Peyton, who is everyone's favorite (and quite petite besides), and hold her lengthwise. Christopher and Marcus reach for each other's hands, their first public acknowledgment that they've become a couple this summer. Ekash and Ibo and all the prep chefs, dishwashers, and food runners fill in, finding their places.

Lizbet uses JJ's phone to take the picture because it's sitting right there on table 10 in front of her. She punches in JJ's passcode—0311, her birthday—and his text messages pop up, all of them in an amusingly large font (JJ won't admit that he needs readers). Lizbet is about to click out of the texts when something catches her eye: *I want you so badly*. This is followed by *Tell me what you want me to do to you*. Lizbet freezes, but then she thinks, *Wait, this isn't JJ's phone after all*. It must be someone else's iPhone 13 Pro Max with an electric-blue cover and a photo of Anthony Bourdain on the back and her birthday as its passcode. A split second later—it's incredible how fast the brain processes even counterintuitive information—she understands that this *is* JJ's phone. These texts—she scrolls back until she finds pictures of a woman's breasts and what she knows to be JJ's erect penis—are being sent to and received from Christina Cross, their wine rep.

Goose calls out, "Take the picture already, Libby. This bitch is getting heavy!"

Lizbet's hands are shaking. What has she found? Is it real? Is this happening? Somehow she manages to play through (later, she will consider this a show of superhuman strength). She takes the pictures. They're good. They're the best ever. Then Lizbet takes JJ's phone and hurries to the ladies' room, where, sitting in a stall, she reads through the pornographic

text messages—187 by Lizbet’s count—that JJ and Christina have sent each other over the past three months, the most recent of which was earlier that night. Lizbet wants to flush the phone but she doesn’t; she has the wherewithal to take screenshots of the messages and text them to herself.

Then Lizbet returns to the party. It’s in full swing—Polo G is singing “Martin and Gina” at top volume, and Christopher, Marcus, and Peyton are dancing. Lizbet finds JJ in the corner at table number 1, the most sought-after in the restaurant, drinking a beer with a couple of guys from the kitchen.

“There’s my queen,” JJ says when he sees her. He places a hand on Lizbet’s waist and tries to draw her in for a kiss, but she stiff-arms him, pushing his phone into his chest.

“I’m going home,” she says.

“What?” JJ says. He takes his phone, and the texts from Christina brighten on the screen. “Oh God, no. Wait, Libby—”

Lizbet doesn’t wait. She walks away, pushing past Wavy, who senses something is wrong and tries to stop her.

“It’s not what it looks like!” JJ says.

Oh, but it is what it looks like, Lizbet thinks once she gets back to the Bear Street cottage she owns with JJ and reads through the texts one by one. *It’s exactly what it looks like.*

The Hotel Nantucket is perhaps the only place on the island where Lizbet doesn’t have any history or memories with Jonathan James O’Malley, so when Lizbet hears that Xavier Darling has bought the hotel and is looking to hire a general manager, she drives straight to Bayberry Properties to see Fast Eddie.