

Tessa Bailey 

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

HOOK, LINE, AND SINKER

a novel

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and contemporary as a
Netflix rom-com."

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HOOK, LINE,
AND
SINKER

a novel



AVON

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Dedication

*To the nurses and doctors of NYU Langone Health—particularly 15 West,
Tisch Building, Manhattan*

Contents

Cover

Title Page

Dedication

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter Twenty-Five

Epilogue

Acknowledgments

An Excerpt From It Happened One Summer

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

About the Author

By Tessa Bailey

Copyright

About the Publisher

Prologue

September 15

HANNAH (6:00 PM): **Hey. Fox?**

FOX (10:20 PM): **Yeah.**

H (10:22 PM): **It's Hannah. Bellinger? I got your number from
Brendan.**

F (10:22 PM): **Hannah. Shit. Sorry, I would have answered
sooner.**

H (10:23 PM): **No, it's fine. Is it weird of me to text you?**

F (10:23 PM): **Not weird at all, Freckles. You make it back to LA
safely?**

H (10:26 PM): **Not a scratch on me. Missing that signature
Westport fish aroma already (only half kidding). Anyway, I just
wanted to say thank you for the Fleetwood Mac record you left
on my sister's doorstep. You really didn't have to do that.**

F (10:27 PM): **No big deal. I could tell you wanted it.**

H (10:29 PM): **How could you tell? Was it me openly sobbing
when I left it behind at the expo? ☺**

F (10:30 PM): **Kind of tipped me off. ☺**

H (10:38 PM): **Ah. Well. I wish you could hear it play in person.
It's magic.**

F (10:42 PM): **Maybe someday.**

H (10:43 PM): **Maybe. Thanks again.**

F (11:01 PM): **You didn't have to tell me your last name. There's
only one Hannah.**

H (11:02 PM): **Sorry, can't say the same. I know several Fox's. 🐾**

October 3

FOX (4:03 PM): **Hey Hannah**

HANNAH (4:15 PM): **Hey! What's up?**

F (4:16 PM): **Just pulled back into the harbor after 3 days out.**

F (4:18 PM): **This is stupid, but you're okay, right?**

H (4:19 PM): **I mean, my therapist would probably say that's
debatable. Physically I'm in one piece tho. Why?**

F (4:20 PM): **Just a weird dream. IDK . . . I dreamed you were
missing. Or lost?**

H (4:25 PM): **That wasn't a dream. Send a chopper. 🚁**

F (4:25 PM): ☹️

F (4:26 PM): **Fishermen don't ignore the dreams they have on water. Sometimes they're nothing, other times they're a premonition.**

H (4:30 PM): **If anyone worries in this friendship, it should be me. I've seen the Perfect Storm.**

F (4:32 PM): **That makes me Wahlberg in this scenario?**

H (4:33 PM): **Depends. Can you pull off white boxer briefs?**

F (4:34 PM): **And then some, babe.**

F (4:40 PM): **So this is a friendship?**

H (4:45 PM): **Yeah. Are you on board? (fishing puns, they are happening) 🐟**

F (4:48 PM): **I'm . . . yeah. So I can just text you whenever?**

H (4:50 PM): **Yeah.**

F (4:55 PM): **Okay then.**

H (4:56 PM): **Okay then.**

October 22

FOX (10:30 PM): **Hey, Freckles. What are you up to?**

HANNAH (10:33 PM): **Hey. Not much. How can you tell if you have a "flat" tire?**

F (10:33 PM): **Why what's going on??**

H (10:35 PM): **My car was making a weird noise, so I pulled over. I'm going to go check if it popped.**

F (10:35 PM): **Hannah it's past ten o'clock at night. Stay in the car. LOCK THE DOORS and call a tow truck.**

H (10:36 PM): **Yeah . . . I won't know how to describe where I am to them. One of the makeup artists at work had a séance. I think I'm in Los Feliz?**

F (10:37 PM): **You don't know where you are?**

F (10:38 PM): **This is my dream. It's happening. Premonition.**

H (10:39 PM): **Come on. No way.**

F (10:40 PM): **You were just at a séance and don't get to be skeptical.**

H (10:41 PM): **You know what? That's fair.**

F (10:42 PM): **Map your location on your phone and call a tow truck.**

F (10:43 PM): **Please?**

H (10:45 PM): **Are you this protective of all your female friends?**

F (10:48 PM): **You're the only one I've got.**

H (10:49 PM): **Fine. I'm calling a tow truck.**

F (10:49 PM): 🙏

November 22

HANNAH (12:36 AM): **Are you awake?**

FOX (12:37 AM): **Wide.**

H (12:38 AM): **Are you alone?**

F (12:38 AM): **Yes, Hannah. I'm alone.**

H (12:40 AM): **Let's start "Leaving on a Jet Plane" at the exact same time and listen to it together.**

F (12:41 AM): **Hang on. I have to download it.**

H (12:42 AM): **You're killing me. 🤔**

F (12:42 AM): **Sry my phone isn't a music encyclopedia like yours. Why this song?**

H (12:44 AM): **IDK. I miss my sister. A little in my feelings about it. Have you seen her around town?**

F (12:45 AM): **I've seen her lipstick on Brendan's collar. That count?**

H (12:47 AM): **That's why I'm bugging you, instead of her. I don't want to burst their bliss bubble.**

F (12:48 AM): **You're not bugging me, Freckles. Ok ready?**

H (12:48 AM): **Yup. Go.**

F (12:51 AM): **It's crazy how much better this song is than I remember. Why am I not listening to this all the time?**

H (12:52 AM): **Now you can. Isn't it amazing?**

F (12:53 AM): **Uh-huh. Do I get to pick next?**

H (12:55 AM): **Oooh. Okay. Whatcha got for me, Peacock?**

F (12:57 AM): **Something to cheer you up. You have the Scissor Sisters in that encyclopedia phone?**

H (12:58 AM): **Studio albums or live? Yes to both.**

F (12:59 AM): **Jesus, should have known. Start "I Don't Feel Like Dancin'" in 3 . . . 2 . . . 1 . . .**

January 1

FOX (12:01 AM): **Happy New Year.**

HANNAH (12:02 AM): **Same to you! May it bring you crabs.**

F (12:03 AM): **☺ Any resolutions?**

H (12:07 AM): **Normally I would say no. But I want to take more risks this year. Put myself out there a little more workwise, you know? Don't copy me. You are AT CAPACITY on workplace risks.**

F (12:09 AM): **How else am I going to get crabs?**

H (12:10 AM): **At a restaurant, like a normal person.**

F (12:10 AM): **I always order the steak.**

H (12:11 AM): **That's irony for you.**

February 5

FOX (9:10 AM): **It's raining here. Give me something moody to listen to.**

HANNAH (9:12 AM): **Hmm. The National. Start with "Fake Empire."**

F (9:14 AM): **On it. Got any plans for this weekend?**

H (9:17 AM): **Not really. My parents are in Aspen, so I have the house to myself. I have it to myself a lot lately. I keep expecting Piper to walk around the corner in a charcoal mask.**

F (9:18 AM): **Women put charcoal on their faces?**

H (9:20 AM): **That's tame. There is such a thing as a snail facial.**

F (9:21 AM): **Jesus. I'm just going to pretend I never heard that.**

H (9:28 AM): **Do you have plans this weekend? Heading to Seattle?**

F (9:35 AM): **That's always a possibility.**

F (9:36 AM): **But it's my mother's birthday. Might just run her over some flowers and say hey.**

H (9:38 AM): **You're a good son. Does she ever come see you in Westport?**

F (9:45 AM): **No. She doesn't.**

F (9:46 AM): **Thanks for the music rec, Freckles. Text you later.**

February 14

HANNAH (6:03 PM): **Happy Valentine's Day! Doing anything special?**

FOX (6:05 PM): **God no. I'd rather light myself on ♠**

F (6:09 PM): **Are you? Doing something special?**

H (6:11 PM): **Yes, sir. I'm on a date.**

F (6:11 PM): **With who??**

H (6:15 PM): **Myself. Very charming. Might be the one.**

F (6:16 PM): **Lock that girl down. She's the kind you bring home to mom.**

F (6:20 PM): **Do you want to be on a date? With someone besides yourself?**

H (6:23 PM): **IDK. It wouldn't suck? Unfortunately, my type would probably define this whole holiday as a commercial gimmick. Or he'd buy me dead roses to represent the evils of consumerism. ☹**

F (6:26 PM): **That's a pretty specific type. Are we talking about your director crush? Sergei, right?**

H (6:28 PM): **Yes. My sister likes to tease me about pining for starving artists.**

F (6:29 PM): **You like them dark and dramatic, huh?**

H (6:30 PM): **Careful! You're going to give me an orgasm.**

F (6:30 PM): **If that was the plan, babe, you'd have had two already.**

F (6:33 PM): **Shit, Hannah. Sorry. I shouldn't have gone there.**

H (6:34 PM): **No, I went there first. Blame it on the single glass of wine I've had. #lightweight ☹**

F (6:40 PM): **Apart from being dark and dramatic . . . what makes a man your type? What is eventually going to make a man The One?**

H (6:43 PM): **I think . . . if they can find a reason to laugh with me on the worst day.**

F (6:44 PM): **That sounds like the opposite of your type.**

H (6:45 PM): **It does, doesn't it? Must be the wine.**

H (6:48 PM): **He'll need to have a cabinet full of records and something to play them on, of course.**

F (6:51 PM): **Well obviously.**

February 28

FOX (7:15 PM): **How was your day?**

HANNAH (7:17 PM): **It had sort of a "Fast Car" by Tracy Chapman feeling to it.**

F (7:18 PM): **Like . . . nostalgic?**

H (7:20 PM): **Yeah. A little blue. I think I miss Westport?**

F (7:20 PM): **Come here.**

F (7:23 PM): **If you want.**

H (7:25 PM): **I wish! We just started casting a new movie. Not a great time.**

F (7:27 PM): **Have you kept your resolution? To take more risks at work?**

H (7:28 PM): **Not yet. I'm working up to it, tho.**

H (7:29 PM): **Seriously. Aaaany minute now. (crickets)**

F (7:32 PM): **This is where I remind you that the first time we met, you were facing off with a boat captain twice your size, ready to tear his limbs off for shouting at your sister. You're a badass. 🐣**

H (7:35 PM): **Thanks for the reminder. I'll get there. It's just . . . imposter syndrome, I guess. Like, what makes me think I'm qualified to make movie soundtracks?**

F (7:37 PM): **I get imposter syndrome.**

H (7:37 PM): **You do?**

F (7:38 PM): **If you could only hear me laughing.**

H (7:39 PM): **I . . . wish I could. Hear you laughing.**

F (7:40 PM): **Yeah. Wouldn't mind hearing your laugh, either.**

H (7:45 PM): **How was your day, Peacock?**

F (7:47 PM): **Worked on the boat with Sanders, so a shit ton of Springsteen.**

H (7:49 PM): **Blue collar boys. Making money! Sweating in jeans! Bandanas in pockets! 😊**

F (7:50 PM): **It's like you were right there with us.**

March 8

HANNAH (8:45 AM): **Hey. I think you're out on the boat.**

H (8:46 AM): **Hope you're being safe.**

H (9:02 AM): **When you're out on the water and can't text back, I really notice it.**

H (9:03 AM): **The lack of you.**

H (9:10 AM): **So I'm glad we're friends. That's all I'm awkwardly trying to say.**

H (9:18 AM): **If you dream of me this time, try dreaming I can fly or turn invisible. Or that my best friend is Cher. That's way cooler than a flat tire.**

H (9:19 AM): **Not that I'm assuming you regularly dream of me.**

H (9:26 AM): **I don't dream of you that often, of course. So.**

H (9:39 AM): **Anyway. Talk soon!**

Chapter One

Hannah Bellinger had always been more of a supporting actress than a leading lady. The hype girl. If she'd lived in Regency England, she would be the second at every duel, but never wield the pistol. That distinction was never more obvious than now, as she sat in the dark audition room watching a girl with pure leading-lady material emote like her life depended on it.

Hannah's hands disappeared into the sleeves of her sweatshirt like twin turtles ducking into their shells, her hidden fingers curling around the clipboard in her lap. Here it came. The big finale. Across the Storm Born production studio, their lead actor ran through a scene with their final actress hopeful of the day. Since eight A.M., the studio had been a revolving door of wide-eyed ingénues, and didn't it figure that not a single one of them would click with Christian until Hannah was past the point of starving, her mouth tasting like stale coffee?

Such was the life of a production assistant.

"You forgot to trust me," the redhead whispered brokenly, tears creating trails of mascara down her cheeks. Dang, this girl was fire. Even Sergei, the writer and director of the project, was held in a rare thrall, the tip of his glasses inserted between his full, dreamy lips, that ankle crossed over the opposite knee, jiggling, jiggling. That was his *I'm impressed* posture. After two years of working as his production assistant—and nursing a long-unrequited crush on the man—Hannah knew all his tells. And this redhead could bet the rent on getting cast in *Glory Daze*.

Sergei turned to Hannah where she huddled in the corner of the freezing conference room and raised an excited black eyebrow. The shared moment of triumph was so unexpected, the clipboard slid off her lap and clattered to the ground. Flustered, she reached for it but didn't want to lose the moment with the director, so she jackknifed and gave Sergei a thumbs-up. Only to remember her thumb was trapped inside the sleeve of her

sweatshirt, creating a weird, starfish-looking gesture that he missed, anyway, because he'd turned back around.

You absolute turnip, you.

Hannah replaced the clipboard in her lap and pretended to write Very Serious notes. Thank God it was dark in the rear of the studio. No one could see the tomato-colored tidal wave surging up her neck.

“End scene!” Sergei crowed, standing up from the table of producers that faced the audition area to deliver a slow clap. “Extraordinary. Simply extraordinary.”

The redhead, Maxine, beamed while simultaneously trying to wipe away her dripping mascara with the hem of her black T-shirt. “Oh wow. Thank you.”

“That felt fine.” Christian sighed, signaling Hannah for his cold brew.

I have been summoned.

She rose from her chair and set the clipboard down, retrieving the actor's beverage from inside the mini-fridge along the wall and bringing it to him. When she held out the metal travel tumbler and he made no move to take it, she gritted her teeth and held the straw to his lips. When he had the nerve to look her in the eye while sucking noisily, she stared back stone-faced.

This is what you wanted.

A regular job that would allow her to earn money—and not rely on the many millions her stepfather had in the bank. If she dropped her last name, slurpy ol' Christian would spit out his cold brew. But apart from Sergei, no one knew that Hannah was the legendary producer's daughter, and that's how she chose to keep it.

Stepdaughter, she mentally corrected herself.

A distinction she never would have bothered to make before last summer.

Had that trip to Westport six months ago really happened? The weeks she'd lived above the Pacific Northwest bar, restoring it lovingly with her sister in tribute to their birth father, seemed like a hazy dream. One she couldn't seem to shake. It rode her consciousness like dolphins outlined in a barrel wave, making her wistful at the oddest times. Like now, when Christian was bugging his heartthrob eyes out, letting her know he was ready for straw removal.

“Thanks,” he huffed. “Now I'm going to have to pee.”

“Look at the bright side,” Hannah murmured, so as not to interrupt an effusive Sergei. “There are mirrors in the bathroom. Your favorite.”

Christian snorted, allowing a grudging uptick to one side of his mouth.

“God, you’re such a bitch. I love you.”

“. . . is what you say into the mirrors?”

They traded a lip-twitching glare.

“I think I speak for the production team when I say we’ve found our Lark,” Sergei said, coming around the table to kiss both cheeks of the bouncing actress. “Are you available to begin shooting in late March?” Without waiting for the girl to answer, Sergei pressed a row of knuckles to his forehead. “I am seeing an entirely different location for the shoot now. The energy Christian and Maxine create together does not work against the backdrop of Los Angeles. I’m certain. It’s so earthy. So original. They sanded the edges off each other. We need a softer location. The sharp corners of LA will only snag them, hold them back.”

Hannah stilled, watched the table of producers trade nervous glances. The artistic temperament was real—and Sergei’s tended to be more volatile than most. He’d once made the entire crew wear blindfolds on set so they wouldn’t dilute the magic of a scene by viewing it. *Every set of eyes strips another layer of mystery!* But that temperament was one of the main reasons Hannah gravitated toward the director. He operated on chaos, bowing to the whims of creativity. He believed his choices and didn’t have time for naysayers.

Real leading-man material.

What was that like? To be the star in the movie of your life?

Hannah had been playing second fiddle so long, she was getting arthritis in her fingers. Her sister, Piper, had demanded the spotlight since childhood, and Hannah was always comfortable waiting in the wings, anticipating her cue to walk on as best supporting actress, even providing bail money on more than one occasion. That was where she shined. Bolstering the heroine at her lowest point, stepping in to defend the leading lady when necessary, saying the right thing in a pivotal heart-to-heart.

Supporting actresses didn’t want or need the glory. They were content to prop up the main character and be instrumental in their mission. And Hannah was content in that role, too. Wasn’t she?

A memory trickled in without her consent.

A memory that made her jumpy for some reason.

That one afternoon six months ago at a vinyl convention in Seattle when she’d felt like the main character. Browsing through records with Fox Thornton, king crab fisherman and a lady-killer of the highest caliber. When they’d stood shoulder to shoulder and shared a pair of AirPods, listening to “Silver Springs,” the world just kind of fading out around

them.

Just an anomaly.

Just a fluke.

Restless, probably because of the nine cups of black coffee she'd drunk throughout the day, Hannah returned Christian's cold brew to the fridge and waited on the periphery to see what kind of curveball Sergei was about to throw the team. Honestly, she loved his left turns, even if no one else did. The tempest of his imagination could not be stopped. It was enviable. It was hot.

This guy was her type.

She just wasn't his, if the last two years were any indication.

"What do you mean you no longer see Los Angeles as the backdrop?" one of the producers asked. "We already have the permits."

"Am I the only one who saw the rain falling in this scene? The quiet melancholia unfolding around them?" Who didn't want to date a man who dropped that kind of terminology without batting an eyelash? "We cannot pit the raw volume of Los Angeles against them. It'll drown them out. We need to let the nuance thrive. We need to give it oxygen and space and sunlight."

"You just said you wanted to give it rain," the producer pointed out drily.

Sergei laughed in that way artists do when someone is too dense to grasp their vision. "A plant needs sunlight *and* water to grow, does it not?" His frustration was causing his normally light Russian accent to thicken. "We need a more subtle location for the shoot. A place that will lend focus to the actors."

Latrice, the new location scout, raised her hand slowly. "Like . . . Toluca Lake?"

"No! Outside of Los Angeles. Picture—"

"I know a place." Hannah said it without thinking. Her mouth was moving, and then the words were hanging in the air like a comic-strip quote bubble, too late to pop. Everyone turned to look at her at once. A very un-supporting actress position to be in, even if it was refreshing to have Sergei's eyes on her longer than the usual fleeting handful of seconds. It reminded Hannah, rather inconveniently, of the way someone else gave her his undivided attention, sometimes picking up on her moods simply via text message.

So she blurted the next part in an attempt to block out that useless thought. "Last summer, I spent some time in Washington. A small fishing town called Westport." She was only suggesting this for two reasons. One,

she wanted to support Sergei's idea and possibly earn herself one of those fleeting smiles. And two, what if she could sneak a trip to see her sister in the name of work? Counting their brief visit at Christmas, she'd only seen Piper and her fiancé, Brendan, once in six months. Missing them was a constant ache in her stomach.

"Fishing village," Sergei mused, rubbing his chin and starting to pace, mentally rewriting the screenplay. "Tell me more about it."

"Well." Hannah unwrapped her hands from inside her sleeves. One did not pitch a genius director, a location scout, and a panel of producers with her fists balled in a UCLA sweatshirt. Already she was cursing her decision to pile her straw-colored hair into a baseball cap this morning. *Let us not add to the kid-sister vibe.* "It's moody and misty, set right on the water. Most residents have lived there since they were born, and they're very, um"—*set in their ways, unwelcoming, wonderful, protective*—"routine-oriented. Fishing is their livelihood, and I guess you could say there's an element of melancholy there. For the fishermen who've been lost."

Like her father, Henry Cross.

Hannah had to push past the lump in her throat to continue. "It's quaint. Has kind of a weathered feel. It's like"—she closed her eyes and searched through her mental catalogue of music—"you know that band Skinny Lister that does kind of a modern take on sea shanties?"

They stared back at her blankly.

"Never mind. You know what sea shanties sound like, don't you? Imagine a packed bar full of courageous men who fear and respect the sea. Imagine them singing odes to the water. The ocean is their mother. Their lover. She provides for them. And everything in this town reflects that love of the sea. The salt mist in the air. The scent of brine and storm clouds. The knowledge in the eyes of the residents when they look up at the sky to judge the oncoming weather. In fear. In reverence. Everywhere you go there's the sound of lapping water against the docks, cawing seagulls, the hum of danger . . ." Hannah trailed off when she realized Christian was staring at her like she'd swapped his cold brew for kitty litter.

"Anyway, that's Westport," she finished. "That's how it feels."

Sergei said nothing for long moments, and she forced herself not to fidget in the rare glow of his attention. "That's the place. That's where we need to go."

The producers were shooting flamethrowers at Hannah from their eyes. "We don't have it in the budget, Sergei. We'll have to apply for new permits. Travel expenses for an entire cast and crew. Lodging."

Latrice tapped her clipboard, seeming kind of eager for the challenge. “We could drive. It’s a trek, but not out of the question . . . and skipping the plane would save on funds.”

“Let me worry about the money,” Sergei said, waving a hand. “I’ll crowdsource. Put my own cash toward it. Whatever is necessary. Hannah and Latrice, you’ll work out the permits and travel details?”

“Of course,” she said, agreeing to a slew of sleepless nights.

Latrice nodded, shooting Hannah a wink.

More flamethrowers from the men who’d been silly enough to think they were in charge. “We haven’t even scouted locations—”

“Hannah will take care of it. She obviously knows this place like the back of her hand. Did you hear that description?” Sergei gave her a once-over, as if seeing her for the first time, and her toes curled inside her red Converse. “Impressive.”

Don’t blush.

Too late.

She was a cherry tomato.

“Thank you.” Sergei nodded and started collecting his things, draping a worn leather satchel over his slim shoulder, messing up his dark boyish locks in the process. “We’ll be in touch,” he called to Maxine, sailing out of the studio.

And that, as they say in the business, was a wrap.

* * *

Hannah escaped the collective glare of the producers and jogged from the room, already drawing the phone from her back pocket to call Piper. She ducked into the ladies’ lounge for privacy, but before she could hit the call button, Latrice popped her head in through the door.

“Hey,” she said, sticking a thumbs-up through the opening. “Good job in there. I’ve been dying to stretch my legs a little. Between us, we’ve got this.”

Thank God they’d hired Latrice to take location-scout duties off Hannah’s plate. She was a dynamo. “We’ve so got this. I’m starting an email to you as soon as I make this call.”

“You better.”

Latrice dipped out again, and, bolstered by the vote of confidence, Hannah dialed Piper. Her sister answered on the third ring sounding out of breath.

Followed by the very distinct groan of bedsprings.

“I don’t even want to know what you were doing,” Hannah drawled. “But say hi to Brendan for me.”

“Hannah says hi,” Piper purred to her sea captain fiancé, who’d obviously just rung her bell, which was a constant event in their household. A fact Hannah unfortunately knew all too well after living with them for a couple of weeks over the summer. “What’s up, sis?”

Hannah hopped up onto the counter beside the end sink. “Is your guest room free?”

A rustle of sheets in the background. “Why? Oh my God. Why?” Hannah could almost see the wild flutter of her sister’s hands in the vicinity of her throat. “Are you coming here? When?”

“Soon.” Then she qualified: “If we can get permits to film.”

A beat passed. “Permits to film in Westport?”

“Pretty sure I just convinced Sergei it’s the only place on earth that will work for his vision.” Hannah sniffed. “My powers of persuasion often go unrecognized.”

“Like hell a film crew is coming here,” Brendan said in the background.

Hannah’s chest squeezed at the familiarity of her sister’s ebullient nature set alongside her fiancé’s growly, no-bullshit personality. She missed them so much.

“Tell the captain it will only be for a couple of weeks. I’ll make sure to scrub the Hollywood stink off every precious cobblestone before we leave.”

“Let me worry about him,” Piper said playfully. “He’s forgetting what a good mood I’ll be in having my sister in town. And of course you can stay here, Hanns. Of course. Just . . . I hope you’re not planning for *this* month? Brendan’s parents are coming to visit soon. They’ll be using the guest room.”

“Ooh.” Hannah winced. “If we get a fast enough turnaround on the permits, it could be late March. Sergei is on a mission.” Hannah turned on the counter to check her reflection, wincing at the hair sticking out of the sides of her ball cap. “But don’t stress, I can just stay wherever they put up the crew. Getting to see you will be more than enough.”

“Can’t you stall Sergei? Maybe tell him Westport is extra moody in April?”

“How did you know he was going for a moody vibe?”

“His last film was called *Fragmented Joy*, wasn’t it?”

“Valid point.” Hannah laughed, pressing the phone tighter to her ear, trying to feel her sister’s warmth over the phone. “Seriously, though. Don’t

worry about the guest-room thing. It's no big—"

"You know, there is one poss . . ." Piper trailed off. "Never mind."

Hannah's head tilted at her sister's hasty retreat. "What?"

"No, really. It was a bad idea."

"Then tell me. I want to pooh-pooh it, too."

Piper humphed. "I was going to say that Fox has that empty bedroom at his place. And as you know, he's out on the boat with Brendan for long stretches. But, like, he's also home for stretches, which is why it's a bad idea. Forget I said it."

Stupid, really. The way Hannah sprang off the counter at the mention of the devilish charmer's name and started shoving pieces of her hair back under the brim of her hat. "It's not a bad idea," she said, automatically defending Fox, even though they hadn't seen each other in six months.

There had only been the daily texts.

That she definitely wouldn't be mentioning to Piper.

"We're friendly." *Lower your voice.* "We're friends."

"I know that, Hanns," Piper said indulgently.

"And you know"—she dropped her volume even more—"I still have that thing for a certain someone." Why Hannah suddenly felt the need to prove to Piper—and possibly herself—that she was, indeed, only friends with a man who went through women like nickels in a slot machine, she had no idea. But there it was. "Staying with Fox isn't a terrible idea. Like you said, he'll only be there half the time. I'll be able to keep food in the fridge, which I won't in a hotel room. It will slice a little off the production's expenditures and earn me points with Sergei."

"Speaking of Sergei, are you finally going to ask him?"

Hannah took a deep breath, glancing toward the door of the bathroom. "Yeah, I think this might be my moment, since I just proved my worth in there. There is already a music coordinator on the payroll, but I'm going to ask to assist. It's a step in the right direction, at least, right?"

"Damn right," Piper said, clapping at the rate of a hummingbird's wings in the background. "You got this, bish."

Maybe.

Maybe not.

Hannah cleared her throat. "Will you talk to Fox for me about using the guest room? He might feel pressured if I ask him directly. It's just to put the idea out there, in case it's March for sure and the guest room will be taken."

Piper hesitated briefly. "Okay, Hanns. Love you."

"Love you, too. Hugs to the mean one."