

EMILY HENRY

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
BOOK LOVERS

HAPPY PLACE

A NOVEL



TITLES BY EMILY HENRY

Happy Place

Book Lovers

People We Meet on Vacation

Beach Read

HAPPY PLACE



EMILY HENRY

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For Noosha, who made it safe to be me, and who regularly answers the question “Why not?” with “Because I don’t want to.” I love you, always.

HAPPY PLACE

KNOTT'S HARBOR, MAINE

A COTTAGE ON the rocky shoreline, with knotty pine floorboards and windows that are nearly always open. The smell of evergreens and brine wafting in on the breeze, and white linen drapes lifting in a lazy dance. The burble of a coffee maker, and that first deep pull of cold ocean air as we step out onto the flagstone patio, steaming mugs in hand.

My friends: willowy, honey-haired Sabrina and wisp of a waif Cleo, with her tiny silver septum piercing and dip-dyed box braids. My two favorite people on the planet since our freshman year at Mattingly College.

It still boggles my mind that we didn't know one another before that, that a stodgy housing committee in Vermont matched the three of us up. The most important friendships in my life all came down to a decision made by strangers, chance. We used to joke that our living arrangement must be some government-funded experiment. On paper, we made no sense.

Sabrina was a born-and-raised Manhattan heiress whose wardrobe was pure Audrey Hepburn and whose bookshelves were stuffed with Stephen King. Cleo was the painter daughter of a semi-famous music producer and an outright famous essayist. She'd grown up in New Orleans and showed up at Mattingly in paint-splattered overalls and vintage Doc Martens.

And me, a girl from southern Indiana, the daughter of a teacher and a dentist's receptionist, at Mattingly because the tiny, prestigious liberal arts school gave me the best financial aid, and that was important for a premed student who planned to spend the next decade in school.

By the end of our first night living together, Sabrina had us lined up on her bed watching *Clueless* on her laptop and eating a well-balanced mix of popcorn and gummy worms. By the end of the next week, she'd had custom shirts made for us, inspired by our very first inside joke.

Sabrina's read *Virgin Who Can't Drive*.

Mine read *Virgin Who CAN Drive*.

And Cleo's read *Not a Virgin but Great Driver*. We wore them all the time, just never outside the dorm. I loved our musty room in the rambling white-clapboard building. I loved wandering the fields and forest around campus with the two of them, loved that first day of fall when we could do our homework with our windows open, drinking spicy chai or decaf laced with maple syrup and smelling the leaves curling up and dropping from branches. I loved the nude painting of Sabrina and me that Cleo made for her final figure drawing class project, which she'd hung over our door so it was the last thing we saw on our way out to class, and the Polaroids we taped on either side of it, the three of us at parties and picnics and coffee shops in town.

I loved knowing that Cleo had been lost in her work whenever her braids were pulled into her neon-green scrunchie and her clothes smelled like turpentine. I loved how Sabrina's head would tip back on an outright cackle whenever she read something particularly terrifying and she'd kick her Grace Kelly loafers against the foot of her bed. I loved poring over my biology textbooks, running out of highlighter as I went because *everything* seemed so important, breaking to clean the room top to bottom whenever I got stuck on an assignment.

Eventually, the silence would always crack, and we'd end up giggling giddily over texts from Cleo's prospective new girlfriend, or outright shrieking as we hid behind our fingers from the slasher movie Sabrina had put on. We were *loud*. I'd never been loud before. I grew up in a quiet house, where shouting only ever happened when my sister came home with a questionable new piercing or a new love interest or both. The shouting always gave way to an even deeper silence after, and so I did my best to head the shouting off at the pass, because I *hated* the silence, felt every second of it as a kind of dread.

My best friends taught me a new kind of quiet, the peaceful stillness of knowing one another so well you don't need to fill the space. And a new kind of loud: noise as a celebration, as the overflow of joy at being alive, here, now.

I couldn't have imagined being any happier, loving anywhere else as much.

Not until Sabrina brought us here, to her family's summer home on the coast of Maine. Not until I met Wyn.

2

REAL LIFE

Monday

THINK OF YOUR happy place, the cool voice in my ear instructs.

Picture it. Glimmering blue washes across the backs of my eyes.

How does it smell? Wet rock, brine, butter sizzling in a deep fryer, and a spritz of lemon on the tip of my tongue.

What do you hear? Laughter, the slap of water against the bluffs, the hiss of the tide drawing back over sand and stone.

What can you feel? Sunlight, everywhere. Not just on my bare shoulders or the crown of my head but *inside* me too, the irresistible warmth that comes only from being in the exact right place with the exact right people.

Mid-descent, the plane gives another sideways jolt.

I stifle a yelp, my fingernails sinking into the armrests. I'm not a nervous flier, *per se*. But every time I come to *this* particular airport, I do so on a tiny plane that looks like it was made out of scrap metal and duct tape.

My guided meditation app has reached an inconvenient stretch of silence, so I repeat the prompt myself: *Think of your happy place, Harriet.*

I slide my window shade up. The vast, brilliant expanse of the sky makes my heart flutter, no imagination required. There are a handful of places, of memories, that I always come back to when I need to calm myself, but *this* place tops the charts.

It's psychosomatic, I'm sure, but suddenly I *can* smell it. I *hear* the echoey call of the circling gulls and *feel* the breeze ruffle my hair. I taste

ice-cold beer, ripe blueberries.

In mere minutes, after the longest year of my life, I'll be reunited with my favorite people in the world, in our favorite place in the world.

The plane's wheels clatter against the runway. Some passengers in the back burst into applause, and I yank out my earbuds, anxiety lifting off me like dandelion seeds. Beside me, the grizzled seatmate who'd snored through our death-defying flight blinks awake.

He looks at me from under a pair of curly white eyebrows and grunts, "Here for the Lobster Festival?"

"My best friends and I go every year," I say.

He nods.

"I haven't seen them since last summer," I add.

He harrumphs.

"We all went to school together, but we live in different places now, so it's hard to get our schedules to line up."

The unimpressed look in his eye amounts to *I asked one yes or no question*.

Ordinarily, I would consider myself to be a superb seatmate. I'm more likely to get a bladder infection than to ask a person to get up so I can use the lavatory. Ordinarily, I don't even wake someone up if they're asleep on my shoulder, drooling down my chest.

I've held strangers' babies and farty therapy dogs for them. I've pulled out my earbuds to oblige middle-aged men who will perish if they can't share their life stories, and I've flagged down flight attendants for paper bags when the post-spring break teenager next to me started looking a little green.

So I'm fully aware this man in no way wants to hear about my magical upcoming week with my friends, but I'm so excited, it's hard to stop. I have to bite my bottom lip to keep myself from singing "Vacation" by the Go-Go's into this grumpy man's face as we begin the painfully slow deboarding process.

I retrieve my suitcase from the dinky airport's baggage carousel and emerge through the front doors feeling like a woman in a tampon commercial: overjoyed, gorgeous, and impossibly comfortable—ready for any highly physical activity, including but not limited to bowling with

friends or getting a piggyback ride from the unobtrusively handsome guy hired by central casting to play my boyfriend.

All that to say, I am *happy*.

This is the moment that's carried me through thankless hospital shifts and the sleepless nights that often follow.

For the next week, life will be crisp white wine, creamy lobster rolls, and laughing with my friends until tears stream down our cheeks.

A short honk blasts from the parking lot. Even before I open my eyes and see her, I'm smiling.

"O Harriet, my Harriet!" Sabrina shouts, half falling out of her dad's old cherry-red Jaguar.

She looks, as ever, like a platinum Jackie O, with her perfectly toned olive arms and her classic black pedal pushers, not to mention the vintage silk scarf wrapped around her glossy bob. She still strikes me the same as that first day we met, like an effortlessly cool starlet plucked from another time.

The effect is somewhat tempered by the way she keeps jumping up and down with a poster board on which she's scrawled, in her god-awful serial-killer handwriting, *SAY IT'S CAROL SINGERS*, a *Love Actually* reference that could not, actually, make less contextual sense.

I break into a jog across the sunlit parking lot. She shrieks and hurls the poster at the car's open window, where it smacks the frame and flaps to the ground as she takes off running to meet me.

We collide in an impressively uncomfortable hug. Sabrina's exactly tall enough that her shoulder always finds a way to cut off my air supply, but there's still nowhere I'd rather be.

She rocks me back and forth, cooing, "You're heeeeere."

"I'm heeeeere!" I say.

"Let me look at you." She draws back to give me a stern once-over. "What's different?"

"New face," I say.

She snaps her fingers. "Knew it." She loops an arm around my shoulders and turns me toward the car, a cloud of Chanel No. 5 following us. It's been her signature scent since we were eighteen and I was still sporting a Bath & Body Works concoction that smelled like vodka-soaked

cotton candy. “Your doctor does great work,” she deadpans. “You look thirty years younger. Not a day over newborn.”

“Oh, no, it wasn’t a medical procedure,” I say. “It was an Etsy spell.”

“Well, either way, you look great.”

“You too,” I squeal, squeezing her around the waist.

“I can’t believe this is real,” she says.

“It’s been too long,” I agree.

We fall into that hyper-comfortable kind of silence, the quiet of two people who lived together for the better part of five years and still, after all this time, have a muscle memory for how to share space.

“I’m so happy you could make this work,” she says as we reach the car. “I know how busy you are at the hospital. Hospitals? They have you move around, right?”

“Hospitals,” I confirm, “and nothing could have stopped me.”

“By which you mean, you ran out of there mid-brain surgery,” Sabrina says.

“Of course not,” I say. “I *skipped* out of there mid-brain surgery. Still have the scalpel in my pocket.”

Sabrina cackles, a sound so at odds with her composed exterior that the whole first week we lived together, I jumped every time I heard it. Now all her rough edges are my favorite parts of her.

She throws open the car’s back door and tosses my suitcase in with an ease that defies her lanky frame, then stuffs the poster in after it. “How was the flight?”

“Same pilot as last time,” I tell her.

Her brow lifts. “Ray? Again?”

I nod. “Of sunglasses-on-the-back-of-the-head fame.”

“Never seen him without them,” she muses.

“He absolutely has to have a second set of eyes in his neck,” I say.

“The only explanation,” she agrees. “God, I’m so sorry—ever since Ray got sober, I swear he flies like a dying bumblebee.”

I ask, “How did he fly back when he was still drinking?”

“Oh, the same.” She hops in behind the steering wheel, and I drop into the passenger seat beside her. “But his intercom banter was a fucking delight.”

She digs a spare scarf out of the center console and tosses it at me, a thoughtful if ultimately meaningless gesture since my bun of chaotic dark curls is far beyond saving after three back-to-back flights and a dead sprint through both the Denver airport and Boston Logan.

“Well,” I say, “there wasn’t a pun to be found in those skies today.”

“Tragic,” she tuts. The car’s engine growls to life. With a whoop, she peels out of the parking lot and points us east, toward the water, the windows down and sunlight rippling over our skin. Even here, an hour inland, yards are dotted with lobster traps, pyramids of them at the edges of lots.

Over the roar of the wind, Sabrina shouts, “HOW ARE YOU?”

My stomach does this seesawing thing, flipping from the absolute bliss of being in this car with her and the abject dread of knowing I’m about to throw a wrench into her plans.

Not yet, I think. Let’s enjoy this for a second before I ruin everything.

“GOOD,” I shout back.

“AND HOW’S THE RESIDENCY?” she asks.

“GOOD,” I say again.

She glances sidelong, wisps of blond snaking out of her scarf to slap her forehead. “WE’VE BARELY SPOKEN IN WEEKS AND THAT’S ALL I GET?”

“BLOODY?” I add.

Exhausting. Terrifying. Electrifying, though not necessarily in a good way. Sometimes nauseating. Occasionally devastating.

Not that I’m involved in much surgery. Two years into the residency, and I’m still doing plenty of scut work. But the slivers of time spent with an attending surgeon and a patient are all I think about when I clock out, as if those minutes weigh more than any of the rest.

Scut work, on the other hand, goes by in a flash. Most of my colleagues dread it, but I kind of like the mundanity. Even as a kid, cleaning, organizing, checking off little tasks on my self-made chore chart gave me a sense of peace and control.

A patient is in the hospital, and I get to discharge them. Someone needs blood drawn, and I’m there to do it. Data needs to be plugged into the computer system, and I plug it in. There’s a before and an after, with a

hard line between them, proof that there are millions of small things you can do to make life a little better.

“AND HOW’S WYN?” Sabrina asks.

The seesaw inside me jolts again. Sharp gray eyes flash across my mind, the phantom scent of pine and clove wafting over me.

Not yet, I think.

“WHAT?” I shout, pretending not to have heard.

This conversation is inevitable, but ideally it won’t take place while we’re going eighty miles an hour in a pop-can car from the sixties. Also, I’d rather have it when Cleo, Parth, and Kimmy are all present so I won’t have to rip off the Band-Aid more than once.

I’ve already waited this long. What’s a few more minutes?

Undeterred by the vortex of wind ripping through the car, Sabrina repeats, “WYN. HOW’S WYN?”

Electrifying, though not necessarily in a good way? Sometimes nauseating? Occasionally devastating.

“GOOD, I THINK.” The *I think* part makes it feel less like a lie. He probably *is* good. The last time I saw him, he was virtually illuminated from within. Better than he had been in months.

Sabrina nods and cranks up the radio.

She shares the cottage, and its associated cars, with about twenty-five Armas cousins and siblings, but there’s a strict rule about returning the radio presets to her dad’s stations at the end of a stay, so our trips always begin with a burst of Ella Fitzgerald; Sammy Davis, Jr.; or one of their contemporaries. Today, Frank Sinatra’s “Summer Wind” carries us up the pine-dotted drive to where the cottage perches atop a rocky cliff.

It never gets any less impressive.

Not the sparkling water. Not the cliffs. Certainly not the cottage.

Really, it’s more like a mansion *swallowed* a cottage, and then wore its bonnet and imitated its voice in an unconvincing falsetto, Big Bad Wolf-style. At some point, probably closer to the year 1900 than to now, it was a family home. That part of it still stands. But behind it, and on either side of it, the expansions stretch out, their exteriors perfectly matched to the original building.

Off to one side there's a four-car garage, and across the creek on the other, a guesthouse sits tucked among the moss, ferns, and salt-gnarled trees.

The car glides right past the garage, and Sabrina cuts the engine in front of the front door.

Nostalgia, warmth, and happiness rush over me.

"Remember the first time you brought me and Cleo here?" I ask. "That guy Brayden had ghosted me, and you and Cleo made a PowerPoint about his worst qualities."

"Brayden?" She unbuckles her seat belt and hops out of the car. "Are you talking about *Bryant*?"

I peel my thighs off the hot leather and climb out after her. "His name was *Bryant*?"

"You were convinced you were going to *marry* Bryant," Sabrina says, delighted. "Now you don't even remember the poor guy's name."

"It was a powerful PowerPoint," I say, wrestling my bag out of the back seat.

"Yeah, or it could have something to do with one Ms. Cleo James giving us free psychotherapy that whole week. My dad had just gotten engaged to Wife Number Three before we took that trip, remember?"

"Oh, right," I say. "She was the one with all the dogs."

"That was Number Two," Sabrina says. "And to be fair, she didn't have them all simultaneously. More like she had a revolving door that magically brought new designer puppies in as it swept her adult dogs straight back to the pound."

I shudder. "So creepy."

"She was, but at least I won the cousins' divorce betting pool that year. That's how I scored access to the cottage during Lobster Fest. Cousin Frankie's loss was our gain."

I clasp my hands together in a silent prayer of thanks. "Cousin Frankie, wherever you may be, we thank you for your sacrifice."

"Don't waste your gratitude. I think he lives on a catamaran in Ibiza these days." Sabrina yanks my bag free from the crook of my elbow, taking my hand to haul me up to the front door. "Come on. Everyone's waiting."

“I’m last?” I say.

“Parth and I got in last night,” she says. “Cleo and Kimmy drove up this morning. We’ve all been sitting on our hands and vibrating, waiting for you to get here.”

“Wow,” I say, “things descended into orgy territory pretty quickly.”

Another Trademark Sabrina Laugh. She jiggles the doorknob. “I guess I should’ve specified we were all sitting on our *own* hands.”

“Now, that changes things considerably,” I say.

She cracks open the door and grins at me.

“Why are you looking at me expectantly?” I ask.

“I’m not,” she says.

I narrow my eyes. “Aren’t lawyers supposed to be good at lying?”

“Objection!” she says. “Speculative.”

“Why aren’t we going inside, Sabrina?”

Wordlessly, she nudges the door wider and gestures me through.

“Okaayyyy.” I creep past her. In the cool foyer, I’m hit with the smell of summer: dusty shelves, sun-warmed verbena, sunblock, the kind of salty damp that gets into the bones of old Maine houses and never quite dries out again.

From the end of the first-floor hallway, back in the open kitchen–slash–living room (part of the extension, of course), I hear Cleo’s soft timbre followed by Parth’s low chuckle.

Sabrina kicks off her shoes and drops the keys on the console table, calling, “Here!”

Cleo’s girlfriend, Kimmy, comes bounding down the hall first, a blur of curves and strawberry blond hair. “Harryyyy!” she cries, her tattooed fingers grabbing for my face as she plants loud kisses on each of my cheeks. “Is it really *you*?” She shakes me by the shoulders. “Are my eyes deceiving me?”

“You’re probably confused because she got a new face on Etsy,” Sabrina tells her.

“Huh,” Kimmy says. “I was wondering what Danny DeVito was doing here.”

“That probably has more to do with the edibles,” I say.

Kimmy doesn't cackle; she guffaws. Like every one of her laughs is Heimlich'd out of her. Like she's constantly being caught off guard by her own joy. She's the newest addition to our little unit by years, but it's easy to forget she hasn't been there since day one.

"I missed you so much," I tell her, squeezing her wrists.

"Missed you more!" She claps her hands together, her red-gold bun wobbling like an overeager pom-pom. "Do you *know*?"

"Know what?"

She glances at Sabrina. "Does she know?"

"She does not."

"Know *what*?" I repeat.

Sabrina threads an arm through mine. "About your surprise." On my right, Kimmy catches my other elbow, and together, they perp-walk me down the hall.

"What surpri—"

I stop so hard and fast that my elbow hits Kimmy's ribs. I only dimly register her grunt of pain. My senses are fully concerned with the man rising from the marble breakfast bar.

Dark blond hair, broad shoulders, a mouth improbably soft when compared to the hard lines that make up the rest of his face, and eyes that shine steel gray from afar but, I know from experience, are ringed in mossy green once you get up close.

Like, for example, when you're tangled with him beneath a blush sheet, the diffused glow of your bedside lamp painting his skin gold and giving his whisper a texture.

His shoulders are relaxed, his face totally calm, like being in the same room as me is *not* the worst thing that could have possibly happened to either of us.

Meanwhile, I'm basically a walking, breathing bottle of soda into which a Mentos has been plopped, panic fizzing up, threatening to spew out between my cells.

Go to your happy place, Harriet, I think desperately, only to realize I'm literally *in* my happy place, and he. Is. *Here*.

The very last person I expected to see.

The very last person I *want* to see.

Wyn Connor.
My fiancé.