

**ANNABEL
MONAGHAN**

Bestselling Author of **SAME TIME NEXT SUMMER**

SUMMER ROMANCE

a novel

**"I loved it—brims with
heart, wit, and longing."**

—CARLEY FORTUNE

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *SUMMER ROMANCE*

A *Scary Mommy* Best New Book

A BookBub Best Romance

“Annabel Monaghan delivers yet another unputdownable love story about the messiness of life and lust. *Summer Romance* brims with heart, wit, and longing—the signature ingredients of my favorite beach reads. Anything Annabel writes, I’m reading it.”

—Carley Fortune, author of *Every Summer After*

“A warm, funny, and bingeable five-star read.”

—Abby Jimenez, author of *Yours Truly*

“Annabel Monaghan knows how to write romance, how to sweep you up and make you feel as though you, the reader, are falling in love. This is what romance books are all about. Ali is such a relatable protagonist and Ethan a perfect book boyfriend. I devoured it. Annabel has another hit on her hands.”

—Sophie Cousens, author of *Just Haven’t Met You Yet*

“How I loved this book! Annabel Monaghan has joined my shortlist of instant autobuy authors. Her writing is packed full of chemistry and warmth, and I could not put this book down. Ali is a heroine you will want to root for, and Ethan is completely swoon-worthy. I’ll be recommending *Summer Romance* far and wide!”

—Paige Toon, author of *Only Love Can Hurt Like This*

“*Summer Romance* is a sweet, warm hug of a book. Annabel Monaghan’s latest is like a chat with your best friend at the end of a long day—comfort

personified. It's hopeful and fun, sprinkled with the kind of romance you wish for every summer."

—Elissa Sussman, author of *Funny You Should Ask*

SELECT PRAISE FOR *SAME TIME NEXT SUMMER*

A National Bestseller

A Good Morning America "Summer Breakout Pick"

Featured on *The View*

A Real Simple Must-Read Book of Summer

A Glamour BookTok Book That Will Be Blowing Up Your FYP This Summer

A Country Living Best Romance Novel

A Reader's Digest Best Beach Read for the Perfect Escape

"This book has magic in it, encapsulating those big, heady first-love feelings, and it simply feels like summer."

—*USA Today*

"This may be the ultimate summer beach read."

—*Real Simple*

"Annabel Monaghan is topping the list as our new favorite romance author.... This just might be the ultimate beach read of 2023."

—*Country Living*

"Bursting with the magic of first love, it's everything I want in a summer romance."

—Carley Fortune, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Every Summer After*

SELECT PRAISE FOR *NORA GOES OFF SCRIPT*

A Real Simple Best Book of 2022

A Cosmopolitan 30 Best Romance Novels of 2022

A Washington Post 10 Noteworthy Books

A USA Today Top Rom-Coms

A Southern Living Beach Read

“A witty and poignant roller coaster that springs a delightful surprise.”

—*People*

“Monaghan’s witty adult debut novel perfectly captures the apprehension and excitement of infatuation blended with life’s complications.”

—*The Washington Post*

“The perfect escape from reality...In the best way.”

—*USA Today*

“Readers who loved Emily Henry’s *Book Lovers* or Linda Holmes’s *Evvie Drake Starts Over* are sure to savor *Nora Goes Off Script*.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

“Filled with swoon-worthy moments and hilariously lovable characters.”

—*Woman’s World*

“Funny and smart, with a Nancy Meyers–movie quality you’ll love and a main character you’ll want to befriend. This is the perfect easy-breezy, feel-good read.”

—*Real Simple*

“Who is ready for their next stellar and sparkling beach read? *Nora Goes Off Script* is a freaking delight. Charming, funny, uplifting, and completely captivating, I devoured it in three days.”

—Elin Hilderbrand, author of *The Hotel Nantucket*

ALSO BY ANNABEL MONAGHAN

Same Time Next Summer

Nora Goes Off Script

SUMMER **Romance**

ANNABEL MONAGHAN

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For my mom, Joany, who is still as close as my breath



SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE TO THROW SHIT IN THE PANTRY. FLOUR, garbanzo beans, Oreos. Just throw it in there and shut the door. Sometimes your kids are fighting or there's a capless Sharpie sitting right between the dog and your one good couch, so you don't have time to unpack your groceries according to a system. Sometimes you just need to wing it. These are words I never say to my clients. I truly do believe in the mindful storing of food, according to activity. Are you baking? Are you snacking? Are you breakfasting? But over the past few years, I find that I'm doing all of those things at once. In a dirty pair of sweatpants. I'm starting to think there aren't enough labeled glass jars to contain the mess that is my life.

It's no secret that I'm more than a little stuck. I'm in a holding pattern, like a plane trying to land in too much fog. I am here but also not here. Married, but also not. Instagram thinks I need to engage in some serious self-care to get me back to living my best life. They're obsessed with my cortisol levels and the depth of my meditation practice, but I'm pretty sure this is a job for something bigger than the magnesium foot bath they've been putting in my feed all week. Today is the two-year anniversary of my mother's death, which makes it the one-year anniversary of the day Pete announced he didn't want to be married anymore. In fairness to Pete, he's never been one for remembering special dates.

I woke up that morning thick with grief. The calendar shouldn't have that kind of effect on us; there's no magic to the passing of three hundred and sixty-five days. It could have been a leap year and I would have had a whole extra day before I fell apart. I decided the night before that I'd make my

mom's oatmeal chocolate chip cookies for breakfast. That's the sort of thing she'd do all the time: break up the monotony of life by doing something fun and unexpected. I was going to show my kids that fun doesn't die.

I left the butter on the counter to soften overnight, and I got up at six to start baking. It was late June, like it is now, and the sun was already up. I moved my teetering stack of unread mail into the sink to make room for my mother's mixer. I creamed the butter with the sugars and combined the flour, baking soda, and cinnamon in a separate bowl. I was crying by the time I added the three cups of oatmeal, wiping my tears with the sleeves of my pajamas. It's really unbelievable how much oatmeal is in this recipe, and for some reason that made me miss my mom even more.

This is how Pete found me. Crying into the Costco-sized box of oatmeal with my back to a sink full of unopened mail.

"Jesus, Ali," he said. Of course, he said this all the time. But his tone wasn't angry like when he couldn't find a clean shirt or when one of his dress shoes had been filled with Cheez-Its and zoomed under the couch. And he wasn't sarcastic like when he waved his hand over the Leaning Tower of Paper and asked what I did all day. It was a soft, "Jesus, Ali," as if he'd run out of the energy to ever say it again.

I didn't usually react to Pete. His exasperation was sort of white noise in the background of my life. I sidestepped these comments and turned to the kids or the dog. Or my mother. But she'd been gone for a year, so I stood there crying. About the oatmeal, about the way Pete was looking at me and also not. And about the big chunk of my life I'd spent married to a man who would not cross the width of a kitchen to comfort me.

"I want a divorce," he said. When I didn't say anything, he said, "I don't want to be married anymore."

"That's what divorce usually means," I said. It was sarcastic and didn't even really sound like my voice. I felt pressure on my chest and a ringing in my head, like maybe I was going to leave my body. I have a memory of having had this feeling before, but it was when a doctor's voice put a time limit on my mother's days on this earth. Twelve to eighteen months. And I

wanted to say, *Why not nineteen?* I was enraged by the arrogance of his specificity.

Pete left that night, and it's been fine. We act like we're on a reality show called *America's Best Separated Couple*. We are civil, almost warm, in front of the kids. He comes to get the girls for their Tuesday night soccer practices and Saturday games and takes them out for ice cream after, Cliffy in tow. Cliffy does not like team sports in any way, a fact that Pete will not acknowledge, so he brings him to be his assistant coach. Cliffy packs crayons and a notebook. During the fall and spring seasons I go to the games, of course, and then we have an awkward goodbye in the parking lot during which I act like I'm in a hurry to meet a friend to do something outrageously fun.

I don't. Instead, I get in my car and talk to my dead mother. This is a new practice of mine, and I find it oddly therapeutic to lay it all out for her and just let my words echo off the dashboard. I wait for her to jump in with her red lips and wide smile to assure me that it will all be absolutely perfect in the end. But she doesn't, and I miss it the way you miss a lie. I miss the quick fix of her materializing at my door with a tray of chicken and the insistence that home life is easy and fun. It must be me, I would think, because I am finding this neither easy nor fun. The actual time with the kids, hunting stones in the creek out back or singing show tunes in the bathtub, was always easy and fun. But the rest of it—the house and the lawn and the appliances that take turns breaking and the plumber who says he'll come but doesn't come and charges my credit card anyway and the waiting on the phone and the explaining to the bank that yes, I had a broken toilet, and that yes, it is still unfixed, and then the explaining to Pete why he still has to use the kids' toilet in the middle of the night and his looking at me like, truly, I am capable of nothing. Neither easy nor fun.

But when she was around it was easier because I had a partner. She kept me company on Saturday afternoons, when Pete really should have been stepping up but needed to get in a thirty-mile bike ride. She was the one who helped me potty train and found the pediatric dentist that took our insurance. She was the one who caught my eye and smiled every time Cliffy said "angel

muffins” instead of “English muffins.” If I sounded stressed on the phone, she’d drop everything, pack a picnic, and take my kids to the beach so I could clean out a closet in peace. She was the only person alive who fully understood how restorative cleaning out a closet is for me.

My kids called her Fancy, because her name was Nancy, and it suited her. She was not a person whom I would describe as fancy; a lot of her clothes were hand sewn and she drove the same Volkswagen for twenty-five years. But she was prone to acting on a desire or a whim, anything easy and fun—a passing fancy. Sometimes her name plays tricks on me. A passing fancy. Fancy’s passing. Cancer struck my Fancy. I am now Fancy-free. What I really need to do is Fancy myself.

Which is why this morning I tried the cookies-for-breakfast thing again. I did not cry as I added that extraordinary amount of oatmeal, and when my kids came downstairs to the smell of butter and sugar, they were tickled in a way I haven’t seen them be in a long time. I felt like she was right there, with her long chestnut ponytail, dyed to match mine, and not a stitch of makeup besides her bright red lipstick, hatching an idea for an outing to the park or a science experiment called Baked Alaska. She’d clap her hands, bracelets jingling, and say, “You know what would be fun?” And this was rhetorical, because she was always the one who knew what would be fun. It’s taken two years, but watching my kids eat those cookies this morning, I felt a bit of the heaviness lift. Just an easing in my chest that has given me the energy to hire my own services and tackle my pantry today.

I open Instagram on my laptop so I can see all of my posts at once—my clients’ pantries look like they could belong to serial killers. Equidistant glass canisters labeled in my signature font. The images give me a quick dopamine rush. Bringing order to their homes satisfies a need in me that is so deep that I’m sure it’s innate. As a child I wouldn’t leave for school until my bed was made and my stuffed animals were arranged in order of size. My bedroom, my desk, my set of seven pencils. All of it washed me in stillness. The great thing about being an only child is that, at the end of the day, you find everything right where you left it.

I find it hard to believe that I was ever that person as I reach for the third nearly full box of cornstarch and place it at my feet next to a dozen open packages of crackers and stale tortilla chips. There is so much stuff on my floor that I fear it will rise up and engulf me. I will be swallowed whole by the Costco-sized box of granola bars that no one likes but I just can't throw out. Ferris rests his head on his paws, waiting for some of this bounty to come his way.

You have to make a mess to clean up. I'm always chipper when I tell my clients this. They're overwhelmed as I take every item out of their cupboards and spread them out on the floor. I am never overwhelmed in their houses. I talk as I go, and there's a forward-moving energy to my voice. "Now, we have everything out. Let's choose the items you use most often for breakfast!" In this way, I calmly guide them through the parts of their day, dividing their shelves into categories with pleasing storagescapes. Or I should say storagescapes™. It's a word I made up as an Instagram handle, and I'm trying to make it a thing. As I stand here in front of my pantry looking at all that cornstarch, I realize the calm I feel in those situations is because it's not my own mess. I don't resent the man who bought someone else's big jug of protein powder. I don't miss the mother who brought them that jar of Christmas chutney. My clients' messes are simple; my own mess is fraught.

I find a fourth box of cornstarch and it takes me down. I use one teaspoon of cornstarch once a year to make a pecan pie for Thanksgiving. How have I become a person who doesn't have the time or energy to check the pantry before she buys more cornstarch? How is it possible that I am a professional organizer who doesn't even make a grocery list? I ask myself this question and hear it in Pete's voice. He's asked me this before, and I can't remember how I explained it to him. You'd have to be here. You'd have to sit through a whole day of my life, right inside my head, to understand how that's possible. I'm not sure I understand it myself.

I give up and shove everything that's on the floor into a garbage bag. It's time to go get my kids anyway. It's the last week of school, and I just want summer to start already. Summer happens outside, and the mess of my garden is a much happier mess to be in. I find my keys under the camp T-

shirt order form that was due last week. I find my phone under a buttered piece of toast. I've missed three calls from Frannie, so I call her on my way into the garage.

"You're going to flip," she says. I can hear the heartbeat of the diner in the background. Dishes hitting the counter and cutlery tossed into a plastic bin.

"Can't wait. What?"

"My parents are leaving the zip code."

I find this very hard to believe. Frannie's parents never leave Beechwood. "Like to go to the Home Depot or what?"

"They've won the Sunbelt National Sweepstakes. A two-week-long vacation in Key West."

"What? That's so fun! I can sort of picture them down there in shirts with flamingos on them." I'm smiling into my phone because I adore Frannie's parents. They have matching green pantsuits for St. Patrick's Day. They once showed up to an important city council meeting in powdered wigs and black robes. My mother referred to them as "that couple with the themes." They are the most enthusiastic people in the world.

Frannie and I weren't good friends growing up, but we were in the same grade, and everyone knows Mr. and Mrs. Hogan because they're a little eccentric and also because they own the two mainstays of our town—the Hogan Diner and the Beechwood Inn. Frannie and I reconnected after Pete and I left Manhattan and moved back to Beechwood, so I've been watching them to see how they'd age. I wondered if Mr. Hogan would tire of wearing his (now vintage) Beechwood High football jersey to every single home game. Or if they'd stop wearing their Yankees uniforms to the Little League Parade. There's been no sign of a slowdown yet.

"I know," she says. "They've gone completely nuts. My mom cut her hair into a bob an hour ago—she says it's more of a Florida look. They leave Saturday."

"There's going to be a lot of pink. And drinks with umbrellas, I think." I'm backing out of my garage and the sunlight surprises me. My geraniums are blooming nicely in the pots by my front door. I plant them on Mother's

Day because they're the exact shade of my mother's lipstick, and they also have her stubborn resilience. Geraniums can handle a hot day much more gracefully than you'd expect. Don't overwater and don't be too fussy about them. Pick off the dead bits and new blooms will come. My eyes catch the coffee stain on my gray sweatpants, which used to be Pete's. I truly can't imagine how she would react to how poorly I've been coping without her.

"You okay?" Frannie asks when I've been quiet for too long.

"I'm fine."

"You let out a little sigh."

"I must be getting old."

"Stop with that, Ali. We're thirty-eight. We could be having babies, starting medical school."

"Why would you pick the two most exhausting things in the world as examples of things we still might get to do?" Frannie actually just had a baby last year, and it doesn't seem to be slowing her down all that much. She handles it all seamlessly while also running the diner. She's a different kind of person than I am, and certainly Marco is a different kind of husband.

"Spill it." I can picture Frannie cradling the phone in her neck and wiping down the diner counters after the lunchtime rush.

"Instagram wore me down, and I bought a bunch of floating aromatherapy candles last night. Do you think I'm a mess?"

"For sure. Tell me what pants you're wearing, and I'll tell you exactly how much of a mess you are."

I laugh. "No comment." Frannie's been trying to get me to start getting dressed since my mom died. I argue that, without my mom's help, I don't really have time for things as frivolous as an outfit. She argues that it takes just as long to put on a pair of jeans and a blouse as it does to pull on sweats and a T-shirt. I say, "For what?" She says, "For you." And we agree to disagree.

I pull into Beechwood Elementary's parking lot and get the last spot. "Okay, gotta go do hard time on the blacktop. Tell your parents congratulations and that I want photos."

As I'm pressing the red button to end the call, she shouts the two words that she truly believes will change my life: "Hard pants!"

Before I get out of the car, I say, "Mom." I rest my hands on the steering wheel, ten and two. "I'm so sick of being stuck. And I know I lean on you a lot, but can you work with me here? Like give me a sign?" She believed in signs more than I do, but I need help, so I ask. She doesn't reply, but I hear her laugh. It's her social laugh. The one that let people know she was amused. Not the body-racking, tear-inducing laugh she reserved for Will Ferrell movies and when Cliffy said "Massa-Cheez-Its" instead of "Massachusetts." Or "baby soup" instead of "bathing suit." She kept a tissue in the sleeve of her sweater in case something truly funny happened. You've got to love a person who leaves the house prepared to laugh.

Iris is on top of the jungle gym in conference with the A-one, top-dog alpha girls of the fifth grade. She's easy to spot in a purple tank top, orange shorts, and her soccer socks pulled up over her knees. Iris has a thousand looks that don't quite work, but she owns them completely. I pretend not to see Greer, who is sitting on a bench scrolling through her phone. She walks over from the middle school every day, to avoid the horror of being picked up by me. On the first day of sixth grade, I pulled up in front of the school, put down my window, and waved at her in front of her friends. So we don't do that anymore.

I stand in front of the kindergarten exit to wait for Cliffy. His teacher is outside already talking with the other parents, but I'm not concerned. He's always the last one out of the building. When he finally comes out, backpack secure over his SpongeBob T-shirt, he gives me the smile of a six-year-old boy who hasn't seen his mom in over six hours. This smile could power a small city, and every day I wonder when it will end. I wonder when he'll walk out of school, give me a nod, and then run off with his friends. I have never seen a forty-year-old man look at his mother this way.

Cliffy throws his arms around my waist and starts telling me about possums just as the clouds lower and the sky darkens. The girls spot us, and everyone runs for their cars. I grab Iris by the hand and laugh as the heavy drops of rain pelt my face. When we're in the car, I take a moment behind the

steering wheel and smile at the rain pummeling my windshield. This is the sign I was asking for. A storm is a new beginning, and I want to stay in this moment. Greer, Iris, Cliffy, and me, cocooned in this car with the sound of rain filling our ears. We're all together, we're safe, and we're going to be fine. I really do feel ten percent better today. Maybe it was the cookies, maybe it was the forward motion of throwing out one garbage bag of old food. Maybe it's just time. Greer looks up from her phone and I can see a hint of the girl she was before things started to unravel.

My phone rings and Iris hands it to me with her I'm-still-eleven-and-don't-hate-you-yet goodness. "It's Dad," she says.

"Hi, Pete," I say with my phone to my ear. I never take Pete's calls on speaker in front of the kids because I don't want them to hear how casual he sounds when he cancels plans. "It's pouring."

"Yeah, I can see that. Listen, I didn't want to text you. I mean, it's been a year. I think we should go ahead and file for divorce."

I guess Pete does remember special dates.

I say, in my most chipper voice, "Great! Text me the details!" as if he's just invited me to a party.

When I hang up, Greer asks, "Why are you smiling?"

Because now I feel fifteen percent better. I'm going to make a real break from Pete. I'm going to figure out how to make my own money. I know exactly how many boxes of cornstarch I have now. "Fancy keeps sending me signs. We're going to have a champagne summer."