

THREE-TIME RITA AWARD WINNER

IRENE HANNON

Sea Glass Cottage



A Hope Harbor Novel

Praise for *Blackberry Beach*

“Both series fans and newcomers will delight in the tender romance and comforting atmosphere.”

Publishers Weekly

“Hannon’s town of second chances continues to inspire sweet love stories like those in Debbie Macomber’s Blossom Street books.”

Booklist

“*Blackberry Beach* clearly showcases author Irene Hannon’s complete mastery of the Christian romance genre with its deftly crafted characters and memorable, narrative-driven storyline.”

Midwest Book Review

“Two charming romances, a lovely small-town setting near the ocean, gentle inspirational messages, and well-drawn characters. A wonderful gem.”

All About Romance

“Delivers all the heart and hope and second chances that have become trademark with the series.”

Best Reads

Praise for *Starfish Pier*

“With its nicely interwoven faith elements, Hannon’s multifaceted return to Hope Harbor focuses on how forgiving oneself is as important for healing as forgiveness from others. Series fans will be overjoyed by this complex, stirring tale.”

Publishers Weekly

“The restful location and quirky townsfolk are sure to be soothing to those who enjoy Christian romances set in small towns.”

Library Journal

“A pitch-perfect contemporary romance novel by a gifted author who is a complete master of the genre.”

Midwest Book Review

Praise for *Driftwood Bay*

“Readers will delight in this pleasant romance. Hannon’s take on loss and survival is simpatico with Debbie Macomber’s Blossom Street series.”

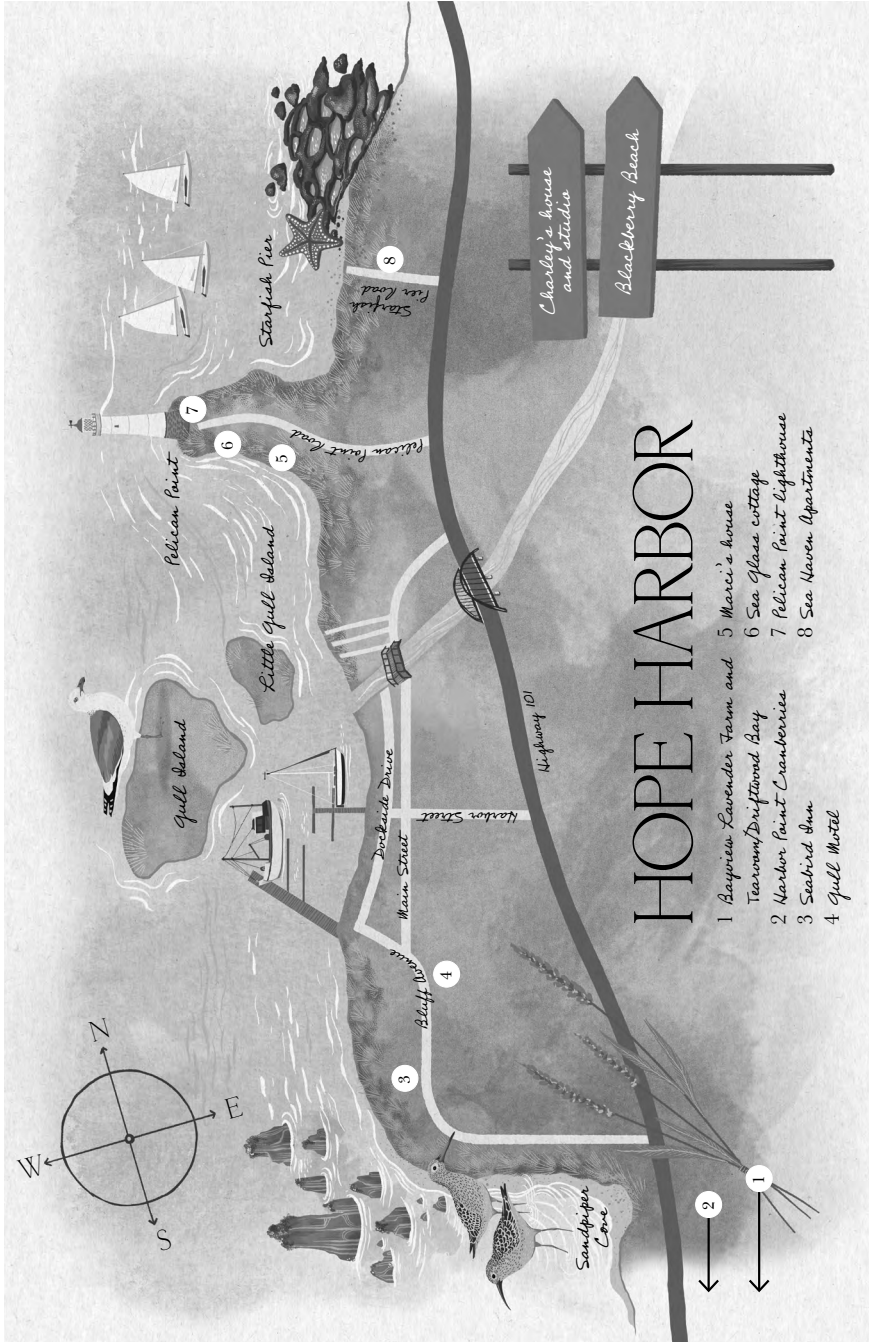
Booklist

“Full of faith and characters that readers will want to root for until the end.”

Publishers Weekly

“Character-driven, thought-provoking, and highly recommended for connoisseurs of the genre.”

Midwest Book Review

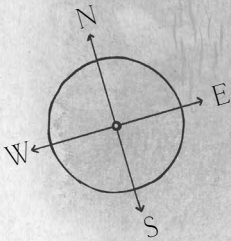


HOPE HARBOR

- 1 Bayview Lavender Farm and 5 Marie's house
- 2 Tearoom Driftwood Bay 6 Sea Glass cottage
- 3 Harbor Point Cranberries 7 Pelican Point lighthouse
- 3 Seabird Inn 8 Sea Haven Apartments
- 4 Gull Motel

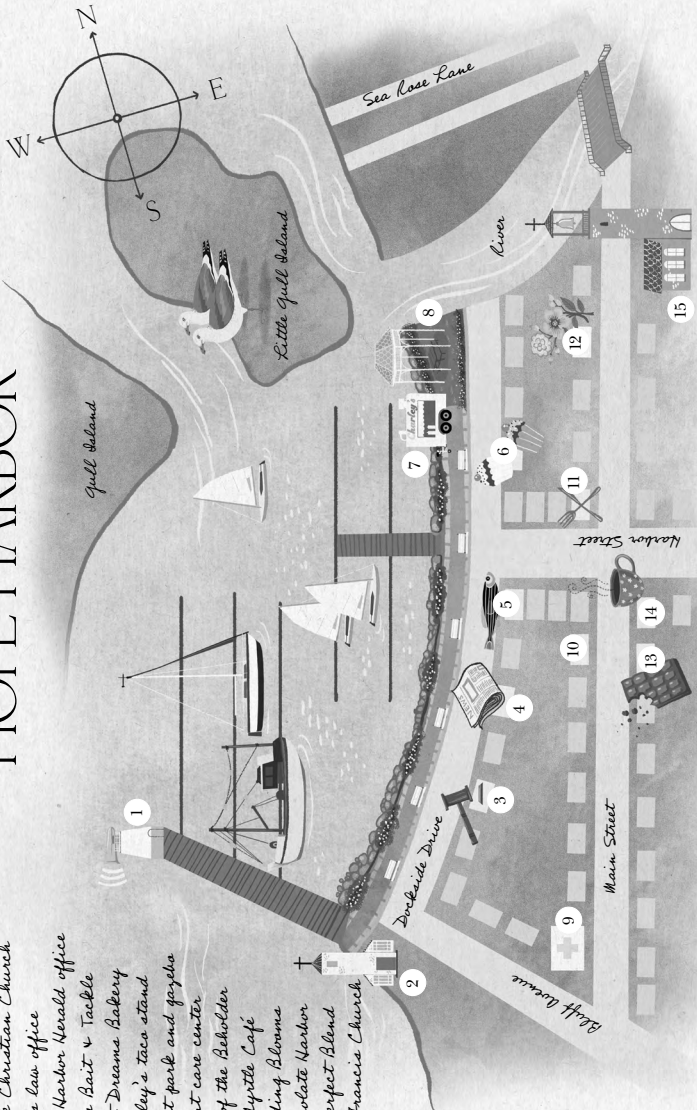
Charley's house and studio

Blackberry Beach



DOWNTOWN HOPE HARBOR

- 1 Fyghorn
- 2 Grace Christian Church
- 3 Eric's law office
- 4 Hope Harbor Herald office
- 5 Lou's Bait & Tackle
- 6 Sweet Dreams Bakery
- 7 Charley's taco stand
- 8 Pocket park and gazbo
- 9 Urgent care center
- 10 Eye of the Beholder
- 11 The Myrtle Cafe
- 12 Budding Blooms
- 13 Chocolate Harbor
- 14 The Perfect Blend
- 15 St. Francis Church



Books by Irene Hannon

HEROES OF QUANTICO

Against All Odds
An Eye for an Eye
In Harm's Way

GUARDIANS OF JUSTICE

Fatal Judgment
Deadly Pursuit
Lethal Legacy

PRIVATE JUSTICE

Vanished
Trapped
Deceived

MEN OF VALOR

Buried Secrets
Thin Ice
Tangled Webs

CODE OF HONOR

Dangerous Illusions
Hidden Peril
Dark Ambitions

TRIPLE THREAT

Point of Danger
Labyrinth of Lies

HOPE HARBOR

Hope Harbor
Sea Rose Lane
Sandpiper Cove
Pelican Point
Driftwood Bay
Starfish Pier
Blackberry Beach
Sea Glass Cottage

STANDALONE NOVELS

That Certain Summer
One Perfect Spring

Sea Glass Cottage

A Hope Harbor Novel

IRENE HANNON



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To the incredible team I've worked with at Revell
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Thank you for your professionalism, dedication, responsiveness,
commitment to excellence—and friendship.

It is a privilege and a pleasure to be your publishing partner.

1



Asking for help from a man who hated you was hard.

Really hard.

But she was out of options.

Jack Colby was her last resort.

Despite the cool Oregon breeze tripping along Dockside Drive, a bead of sweat trickled down Christi Reece's temple as Jack completed his purchase at the stand on the wharf. Prying one white-knuckled hand off the steering wheel, she inhaled a lungful of the briny Hope Harbor air and swiped away the external evidence of her nervousness. Thankfully she alone was privy to the pretzel twist in her stomach and the erratic lurch of her heart.

A savory aroma wafted toward her from the white truck that had been Jack's destination on this sunny end-of-April afternoon, setting off a rumble in her stomach. But eating was low priority—even if her last meal hours ago had consisted of a stale bagel and gas station coffee.

The man she'd driven thirty-plus hours to see lingered to exchange a few words with the cook, who adjusted the baseball cap over his long gray ponytail as the two shared a laugh.

Still smiling, Jack lifted a hand in farewell, picked up the brown bag containing his order, and strolled her direction.

Unless time had softened his heart, however, he wouldn't be smiling for long.

Pulse pounding, Christi fumbled with the handle on the older-model Nissan that had carried her more than two thousand miles. Pushed the door open. Swung her shaky legs to the pavement, praying they wouldn't fold.

Jack gave her a casual glance as she slid from behind the wheel and stood. The kind you bestowed on a stranger who happened to catch your momentary attention.

No hint of recognition flickered in his eyes.

A twinge of disappointment nipped at her—but that was foolish. Eleven years had passed. Her once-long hair had been cropped to shoulder length, and she didn't lighten the dark blond hue anymore. Oversized sunglasses hid most of her face. And life had taken a toll. The frothy twenty-year-old college student he'd known—and loved—was long gone.

Jack's pace slowed, as if he'd realized there was more to this encounter than chance.

Her cue to move forward.

Squeezing her fingers into tight fists, she approached him. Unlike her, he'd benefitted from the passage of time. The handsome twenty-three-year-old who'd brightened that carefree summer had filled out. Matured. Acquired an intriguing aura of worldliness that enhanced the considerable appeal she'd once found difficult to resist.

Christi stopped a few feet away and tried to fill her uncooperative lungs. "Hello, Jack." The greeting came out a bit husky, thanks to the tail end of the cold she'd been fighting for the past week.

His smile evaporated, and a pair of crevices creased his brow. "I'm sorry. Have we met?"

Still no glimmer of recognition.

"It's been a while." She drew a shaky breath and removed her sunglasses. "Christi Reece."



As the name of the woman who'd once stolen his heart—then trampled on it—reverberated in the quiet, peaceful air of the town he now called home, Jack's lungs locked.

Christi Reece, here?

Impossible.

Yet as he scrutinized her, reality smacked him in the face. Her hair was shorter and not as blond, and a decade of living had snuffed some of the youthful glow from her complexion, added a smudge of shadow beneath her lush lower lashes. But the brilliant cornflower blue of her eyes remained undimmed, and those full lips that had caressed his with eager abandon looked as soft as ever despite a slight droop at the corners.

It was her, even if her voice was deeper than he remembered.

His stomach bottomed out, and he swallowed past the sudden bitter taste in his mouth.

Why, after all these years, had she invaded his turf? Tainted the new life he'd created far from his Midwest roots? Resurrected the memories he'd banished of the day his world had crumbled?

He gritted his teeth, his appetite vanishing despite the savory aroma of Charley's tacos wafting up from the bag clenched in his fingers.

"What are you doing here?" If the question came out harsher and more resentful than he intended, so be it. The sentiment was spot-on.

She tucked a lank strand of hair behind one ear. "I came to see you. To t-talk to you."

He frowned at the subtle stammer. Christi Reece, nervous?

Major disconnect.

With her wealth and privileged upbringing, she'd always possessed an overabundance of confidence and composure. What was going on?

But curiosity wasn't sufficient motive to extend this conversation or probe for particulars.

"I have nothing to say to you." He pulled out his shades, slid them on, and prepared to make a fast exit.

As if sensing his intent, she took a step closer, palms extended in a placating gesture. "Look, I know I hurt you. I know what I did was wrong. Worse than wrong. It was unconscionable. Not a day has gone by that I haven't regretted my behavior. If I could fix the damage, I would."

He steeled himself against the trace of tears in her voice. "What happened between us is ancient history. If you came here for closure, consider it done." He turned on his heel and walked away.

"Wait! Please!"

Please?

He faltered midstride.

That word hadn't been in her vocabulary eleven years ago. Christi Reece had known how to cajole and sweet-talk her way into getting whatever she wanted, but she'd never resorted to pleading.

Keep walking, Colby. You know she's a master manipulator. Don't be fooled again.

He resumed his retreat.

"Please, Jack. I need help, and I-I don't have anywhere else to turn."

He hesitated again—and bit back a term that would have shocked his mother.

How could this woman who'd used him and hurt him still have the power to get under his skin?

But he'd always been a sucker for people in trouble—especially desperate ones.

And Christi sounded desperate.

Bracing, he slowly angled back.

Big mistake.

She'd followed him, stopping touching distance away. A brimming tear was poised to spill down her cheek.

A knot formed in his gut, and he took a quick step back.

Didn't help.

Seeing this once-poised, self-assured woman reduced to tears activated a potent—and unwanted—protective instinct.

“What kind of help?” He shifted into the intimidating, wide-legged stance that served him well as a cop, shoring up his resolve to keep his distance.

“I need money. A loan. I'll pay it back as fast as I can. With interest.”

Silence fell between them as he tried to process her request. Failed.

Why would a woman from her wealthy background need money?

“You'll have to explain that to me.”

“I just did. I need money.”

“Why don't you ask your father?”

Her throat worked. “He died six years ago.”

Hard as he tried to quash it, a brief surge of sympathy swept over him. Losing her father would have been tough. Hard-nosed and snooty as the man had been, he'd doted on Christi. They'd been as tight as father and daughter could be. As she'd told him during that golden summer, it had been the two of them against the world after her mother died when she was ten.

Good as David Reece's intentions may have been, however, giving his daughter everything she wanted had been a mistake. All he'd done was create a spoiled little rich girl—and a spoiled *big* rich girl.

Water under the bridge now. What was done was done.

But in light of her father's generosity to his only offspring, why was she having money problems? As his sole heir, she should have inherited his estate.

“Are you telling me your father didn't leave you well fixed?”

She moistened her lips. “His businesses weren't as successful near the end.”

He cocked his head. “As I recall, you had a penchant for designer

clothes, first-class trips to Europe, and high-end resorts. Did you squander the inheritance?”

A shaft of pain darted through her eyes, and she dropped her gaze. Picked at a piece of lint on her jacket. “No.”

“Then why do you need money?”

“Like I said, he didn’t leave me as much as you may think.”

“But he left you what he had.”

“Yes.”

“What happened to the money?”

“It’s a long story.”

And not one she intended to share.

Message received.

He switched gears. “Why come to me of all people?” He at least deserved an answer to *that* question.

She watched two seagulls flutter down and snuggle up together ten feet away. “Because you cared for me, once.”

He wasn’t going to fall for the hint of wistfulness in her inflection that suggested she’d harbored feelings for him too, back then. He knew better.

“Like I said, that’s ancient history. Over and forgotten.” He used his most dismissive tone.

She searched his face, her voice soft but certain as she responded. “If that were true, you wouldn’t still be angry with me.”

Checkmate.

But no way was he going to admit she had the power to rouse emotions in him—of any kind—after more than a decade.

“I’m not angry.” *Liar, liar.* “But I *am* in a hurry.” Also not true. His night shift didn’t start for hours. “How much money are you talking about?” Not that it mattered. Of course he wasn’t giving her a loan. But refocusing the conversation on her request would deflect attention away from the sudden, simmering anger she’d detected. Anger he thought he’d long ago put to rest.

She transferred her weight from one foot to the other and gave him the amount.

Not paltry—but not a fortune either. Well under six figures. Less than the amount her father had dropped on her each year as he indulged her every whim.

Strange how their situations had reversed. He could write a check for that total and never miss it.

But she didn't know that.

Or did she?

He narrowed his eyes. "That's a chunk of change. What makes you think I have that kind of money?"

"I saw your debut book in the library two weeks ago, on the bestseller rack." Her gaze didn't waver, suggesting she was telling the truth. "I picked it up because the title intrigued me, and when I flipped it over, I saw your photo on the back. The name didn't match, but I knew it was you. I remembered you telling me you wanted to write a book someday. Finding it on that shelf was like a sign from above. An answer to my prayers for guidance."

He didn't attempt to hide his skepticism. "Since when did you get religion?"

"I've learned a few things through the years."

"Like what?" The question spilled out before he could stop it, and he threw up a hand. "Never mind. Not interested. How did you track me down?"

"It wasn't hard. The author bio said you lived in the Pacific Northwest. That narrowed the search—and the internet is an amazing tool. I didn't find any mention of a wife who might object to a loan, and I know your family is gone. I figured a *New York Times* bestseller would have the financial resources to help me."

A common misperception. She may have researched *him*, but she hadn't done her homework on author income.

"A bestselling book sounds more impressive than it is. In general, you have to write them consistently to get rich. Most authors have day jobs."

"Do you?"

"Yes." However, the stellar performance of his first novel had

led to significant income far beyond his advance. And the lucrative three-book contract that had followed would provide a cozy cushion for his future unless he decided to live the high life—which was *not* in his plans.

But he didn't have to share any of that with Christi.

Some of the color leeches from her cheeks. "I knew you might refuse because you didn't *want* to help me, but I never thought it would be because you *couldn't*." She rubs her temple, her tension almost palpable.

"I didn't say that."

"You implied it."

Yeah, he had—and a man in his profession shouldn't shade the truth.

"My book's done well—and more are coming." He left it at that. "Why do you need such a large sum of money?"

"I have an obligation to fulfill."

The two seagulls stood and waddled closer, watching the human drama with their unblinking avian eyes.

Weird.

Why weren't they heckling tourists for handouts or hanging around the fishing boats in the harbor like normal gulls?

"I'm sorry you have financial issues." The comment was perfunctory at best. Her mess wasn't his problem. "But you were always adept at getting what you wanted. I imagine that skill will see you through this crisis."

Her lips quivered. "I don't have anywhere else to turn, Jack. If I did, I wouldn't be here. You were my last hope."

Were.

Past tense.

He didn't much like the sound of that. Desperate people could take desperate actions.

But again—not his problem.

He took another step back. "I'm sure you'll come up with something."

One of the gulls at his feet fluttered its wings, gave him a beady-eyed stare, and emitted a raucous squawk that sounded like a rebuke.

He stifled a snort. As if seagulls were capable of such a reaction. No doubt the bird was hoping for a scrap from his fish tacos. A handout.

Kind of like what the woman across from him was after.

They were both out of luck.

Christi's shoulders slumped, and dejection radiated from her. "I knew the odds were against me, but I didn't have anything to lose by asking except gas money."

A few beats passed. There was nothing else to say—unless he offered her the loan she'd asked for.

Not happening.

Tightening his grip on the cooling tacos, he spun away and strode toward his Jeep. He was *not* going to look back. Literally or figuratively.

Christi Reece was part of his past, and that's where she'd stay. He'd moved on, built a life he enjoyed, achieved his dream to write a bestselling crime thriller. He was exactly where he wanted to be.

And he wasn't about to let the woman it had taken him years to expunge from his dreams barge in and disrupt his peace of mind and placid existence.

Even if the dormant emotions she'd awakened were already messing with both.