

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SHORES

LIZ JOHNSON

*Beyond
the Tides*



“Once again Liz Johnson enchants us with life on Prince Edward Island. The story of Meg and Oliver resonates as they grapple with their future, their hopes and dreams, and the surprising romance developing between them. Take a ride out to sea with this charming tale. Another winner from Johnson.”

Rachel Hauck, *New York Times* bestselling author

“In *Beyond the Tides*, Liz Johnson has crafted a hopeful romance that expertly deals with love, loss, and the power of forgiveness. Set against the beautiful backdrop of Prince Edward Island, this is a fun twist on an enemies-to-more love story. *Beyond the Tides* is full of heart, charm, and a couple you can cheer for all the way to the very end.”

Courtney Walsh, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Meg Whitaker has only a few months to prove to her father that she is worthy of inheriting the family lobster fishing business. Never mind that mal de mer strikes as Meg steps foot on any boat, or that Oliver Ross, an old foe, is out to dethrone her yet again. With poignant self-discovery, Meg comes to term with the past, to the hopes and dreams that were stolen from her. In doing so, she unlocks the door to a future, including love. Liz Johnson has a gift for creating flawed and likable characters caught in a heart-wrenching yet romantic tale. Set on gorgeous Prince Edward Island, *Beyond the Tides* is a perfect summer vacation read.”

Suzanne Woods Fisher, author of Carol Award winner
On a Summer Tide

“Prince Edward Island once again comes alive in the capable hands of Liz Johnson. Readers will find themselves deeply invested in Meg and Oliver’s journey—one of legacy, love, and the healing power of forgiveness. Rich in beautiful imagery and drenched in heart, *Beyond the Tides* proves that the past you run from may just be the key to discovering a future worth chasing.”

Bethany Turner, award-winning author of *Hadley*
Beckett’s Next Dish and *Plot Twist*

Liz Johnson, *Beyond the Tides*

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Books by Liz Johnson

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND DREAMS

The Red Door Inn
Where Two Hearts Meet
On Love's Gentle Shore

GEORGIA COAST ROMANCE

A Sparkle of Silver
A Glitter of Gold
A Dazzle of Diamonds

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SHORES

Beyond the Tides

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND SHORES • 1

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For my dad



A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children.

Proverbs 13:22

one

Morning had a terrible habit of arriving too early, at least as far as Meg Whitaker was concerned. And it was too fond of adding a chill to the summer air at the shoreline.

She hunched into her oversized sweater and shivered against a gust of wind as a pair of headlights bounced into the red dirt parking lot across from the wharf. Finally. Her dad was already five minutes late, and she had only dragged herself from her bed at such an absurd hour because he'd told her he needed to see her, and this was the only time that Mama Potts could stay with her mom. Besides, after decades on the water, her dad loved this time of day.

As the vehicle rolled to a stop and flipped off its lights, she could see even in the darkness that it wasn't her dad's cherished red truck. This one was baby blue and sported over half a dozen rust spots from more than one harsh winter.

Squinting hard at the truck, she could make out the form of a man sitting behind the wheel. His shoulders were broader than her dad's lanky form, his neck straight like steel. But she couldn't see his features and didn't recognize his vehicle.

He didn't open his door. He didn't turn his head. He didn't move. He just sat there. Staring at her.

Beyond the Tides

Meg could feel the weight of his gaze, every ounce of it. She cringed at a memory she'd tried so hard to forget. Only one other man—well, he'd been a boy then—had ever stared at her so intently that she'd physically felt it. A few days later he'd destroyed her science fair project, her chance at a prestigious fellowship, and all hope of being accepted to Yale.

No way *he* was the one sitting in a truck at her dad's dock at 4:45 in the morning, staring at her through the darkness. He was barely a silhouette behind a windshield. But she couldn't look away. She could only wrap her arms about herself and pray that this man wasn't the one she remembered.

When the low purr of her dad's truck finally reached her on the cement wharf, Meg jerked her head up. The truck's shiny coat glittered even in the low light as he pulled halfway down the narrow lane and parked.

"Sorry I'm late, hon." Her dad's long strides ate up the ground between them until he greeted her with a peck on the cheek. "Your mom had a rough morning."

Meg cringed. She hadn't even thought about why her dad might be late, what he'd been doing in the morning hours that most people still considered night. "How is she?"

"Tired."

They all were. Tired of late nights and far-too-early mornings. Tired of praying for an answer that never seemed to appear. Tired of the mystery illness that was stealing her mom's mobility and very life one breath at a time.

Meg squeezed his big hand, ignoring the calluses from years of pulling in lines and tying traps. "How are you?"

His fingers gripped hers, and his gaze dropped to the space between his feet. "I'm ready to let go."

"Let go? Of what?" Surely not her mom. He hadn't asked

her there to make some grand announcement about how he was throwing away thirty-seven years of marriage because life had become something other than it was supposed to be. He wasn't that kind of man.

He shook his head, his shoulders slumped under a weight she couldn't see.

"Dad?"

"It's too much for me."

She grabbed his elbow. "What's going on?"

He brushed an errant lock of hair back from her face, even as the wind whipped more of it free from her ponytail. "I thought I'd be able to wait until you were married."

What was he talking about? She hadn't had a serious boyfriend in years. And even then they'd discussed marriage exactly once—just long enough for them to both know they weren't ready. They hadn't been particularly in love either.

"Dad." Her voice turned firm. "You're not making any sense. What are you talking about?"

"After you said you didn't want Whitaker Fishing and the *Pinch*, I hoped you'd marry someone who did. Or maybe you'd have kids who wanted it."

"The business?" Her gaze swept over the fishing boats rocking in the narrow dock, sitting low in the water beside the pier. Pale blue and white and barnacle free, *Just a Pinch* had been her father's pride and joy for more than a decade.

The realization sat in her chest, heavy and painful, slipping south with each creak of the mooring lines until her feet were rooted where she stood. He was selling his business. He was selling his livelihood. He was selling her birthright.

Okay, technically he'd asked her a few years ago if she wanted to take over the business. But how could she run a

fishing company when she couldn't stomach stepping aboard a boat? She'd never earn the respect of the crew—or enjoy a day at her job. Still, there was something terrifying about the idea that the license her great-grandpa had bought would go to someone without the Whitaker name. Even when everything else seemed unstable, Whitaker Fishing had been theirs.

“Dad! You can't. Not yet.”

He held up a hand that stilled her outburst, but it was the calm shake of his head that tore her heart apart. “You said you didn't want it.” Confusion seemed to add a question to the statement, his eyes sad. “Have you changed your mind?”

She tried to form a response, but her tongue couldn't shape it. She managed only a slight shrug.

“Your mom needs me now. She can't wait . . .”

There was no need for him to finish his thought. She knew. While the income from the sale would allow them to enjoy the days her mom had left, he really only cared about spending them with her. The money would be nice later. After.

And there would be plenty of money. Lobster fishing fleets were in high demand—mostly because there were a limited number of fishing licenses around Prince Edward Island. They rarely came up for sale, and when they did, they went for small fortunes, and her dad had been approached by brokers many times over the years.

Her eyes swung toward the blue truck. Was that a broker sitting inside?

She quickly dismissed the idea. Brokers on that level didn't drive rusted clunkers. So who was he, and what did he want with her and her dad?

“There has to be another way.” But even as she said it, she knew it wasn't true.

“Your mom and I have talked about it. I want to spend every moment I can with her. I’ve decided to sell.” His mouth twisted on the words, his facade beginning to crack, and she could do nothing but throw her arms around her dad and hold him tightly.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered into his shoulder, reining in her own emotions. He didn’t need her grief too. He needed her to be strong and sure.

She’d heard fishermen talk of ships in distress looking for any port in the storm. But her mom and dad didn’t need just any port. They needed to be able to lean on her in the face of the unknown. She couldn’t buckle under her own grief. She wouldn’t.

With a gentle pat on her back and a sniff just above her head, her dad pulled away. His long legs carried him back a step just as the glow of the morning sun lit up the ocean where it met the east, turning the water from black to inky blue. “I have to tell you something else.” His furry black eyebrows drew together, meeting over his crooked nose.

Her stomach dropped. There was no way this was good news. But what else could he possibly add?

“I’m going to sell to Oliver Ross.”

Was there another Oliver Ross on the island she didn’t know? Maybe this one was from away. From far, far away. Maybe he wasn’t the boy she’d gone to school with or the one she’d actively been avoiding for more than a decade. And it had required some concentrated effort not to run into him since she’d returned to Victoria by the Sea. It was worth it for her sanity.

But when her dad motioned in the direction of the truck, she knew. She knew with utter certainty that he was selling his business to her arch nemesis.

Oliver Ross took a deep breath, squeezed his eyes closed, and yanked on the handle of his old truck. The door swung open with a loud groan. He'd have made a similar noise if he wasn't sure it would just add ammunition to Meg Whitaker's arsenal.

He leaned his hip against a rust spot, and a creak was quickly followed by the soft catch of the door closing. Then all was silent save the morning birds trilling their song and the rolling of the water against the red rocks in the inlet.

He only imagined he could hear the steam coming out of Meg's ears. The thump-thump-thumping was his heart, not the unpleasant rhythm of her toe against the dock. True, her hands had found their way to her hips, and even at this distance, the shadows from the light above didn't hide the fury of her features. Eyes narrowed. Nostrils flared. Pretty pink lips drawn into a thin line.

She was mad. She probably—no, definitely—had a right to be. But he couldn't avoid her forever. He'd been doing a pretty good job of dodging her the last several years. Or maybe she was dodging him. It didn't matter. He'd come face-to-face with her every day if that's what it took to take care of his family, to give them a sure future.

The gravel gave way beneath his first step. Then his second.

He picked up his pace, circling the colorful shanties at the end of the dock and closing the distance before he could come up with a smooth opening line. Or even a bumbling one. So he said nothing.

Whitaker held out his hand, and Oliver returned the firm shake. "Morning, Oliver."

“Sir.” He dipped his chin toward the father and then the daughter.

Meg did not respond in kind. Her eyes were stone. He’d seen them laughing once when she was sixteen. She hadn’t uttered a sound, but her blue eyes glittered at a joke one of their classmates told. Oliver had wondered just what it took to make her laugh. And then he wondered if he could do it. They were friends. Not close, but they ran in the same circle.

A month later everything changed, and she’d never spoken to him again. That didn’t seem likely to change as she addressed her dad now.

“You can’t be serious. Why would you sell it to *him*?” She gestured toward him with a dismissive wave of her hand. “There must be a hundred people interested in buying your business. You don’t have to settle.”

Her words stung like winter wind whipping ice at his cheeks. He steeled himself against a further attack, squaring his shoulders and staring her down. He wanted to articulate every single one of his finer qualities, but the truth was, he didn’t know exactly why Whitaker had chosen him. Oliver had been on his crew for six years, and the year before, Whitaker had asked him to take over the day-to-day management of the business. He’d said he needed more flexibility. More time to make sure his wife got the medical care she needed.

It had been an absolute failure. Longtime vendors had called Whitaker directly, interrupting his wife’s appointments to question Oliver’s decisions. Supply companies had refused to give him the same deals they’d promised Whitaker. Even the local shore buyer had refused to negotiate with anyone but the older fisherman.

Whitaker was too ingrained in the business, and Oliver

had known almost immediately that he would eventually sell. He'd started saving for a down payment, praying that Whitaker would be willing to sell to someone who needed a loan.

Oliver had learned everything he knew from the older man. The week before, Whitaker had clapped him on the back and called him "son." And then he'd given him the best gift in the world. A stable future.

Whitaker pushed his fingers around his frown in slow motion, starting in the middle of his mustache and ending at the point of his chin. "I thought long and hard about who I wanted to pass our legacy on to. Did a fair bit of praying too."

Oliver's stomach clenched at the very suggestion that he might be the answer to that prayer. He'd been called a lot of things in his life—mostly by his dad—but never an answer to prayer.

"At the end of the day, I wanted to sell it to someone I knew I could trust to continue it well. Someone who would follow the rules—the written and the unwritten ones."

Meg's eyebrows jumped to the middle of her forehead. "But, Dad, you know what he did." She waved her hand in his general direction but jerked it back before her fingers could brush against his arm.

Shoving his hands into his pockets and hunching his shoulders—more to have something to do than because of the breeze—Oliver nodded slowly. "He knows." He'd made sure of that on the day he was offered a job as a deckhand.

Her eyes snapped toward him, and he could almost hear a hissed, "No one asked you, boy." But the voice in his head was deeper, meaner than hers. She hadn't even spoken those words to him when they'd faced each other down in the principal's office all those years ago. Oliver had mumbled

an unintelligible excuse for his actions. He'd steeled himself against the stinging smack of his dad's hand against the back of his head and the hiss in his ear.

Only it hadn't come, because his dad hadn't shown up that day. Or any day after. He'd been long gone.

Oliver expected an accusation from Meg. But she didn't speak. He couldn't quite read the look in her eyes, but her posture had turned stiff, her arms locked around her middle.

Whitaker held up his hand. "I made my decision with a full view. The past can't be changed, and I don't think he's the boy he once was."

She flinched. Oliver tried not to notice.

He'd been trying not to notice her for more than a decade. It hadn't worked very well in the high school halls either.

"Dad, have you talked with—"

"Your mother and I had a long conversation about this. Several of them, actually." Whitaker slapped him on the shoulder. "She agrees with me about Oliver."

The pinch of Meg's nose and her stumbled step back revealed the betrayal she felt, and a sudden punch to Oliver's gut almost made him refuse the offer. Maybe it should all go to her. Although her dad had said she didn't want it, and she couldn't keep her legs beneath her even in the shallows. But she should still have some say in who took over her family's fishing business.

"There's no way he's saved up enough money to buy it outright," she said.

Whatever inclination he'd had to decline the offer vanished. So he wasn't wealthy, and he'd wondered more than once how he was going to help support his mom and little brother. He was the one up at four every morning, reeling

in traps and breaking his back. And if he worked two jobs in the off-season to make sure he paid every one of his bills and his mom's lights were never again turned off, what concern was that of Meg's?

He worked hard, and he'd make sure the Whitakers' legacy wasn't tarnished.

Whitaker's bushy eyebrows lowered over his eyes, his gaze hard on his daughter. "I'm going to give him an interest-free loan. Let him do the job and earn what he needs. He'll pay me back in five years, and then we'll be square."

Oliver patted the folded square of paper in his jeans pocket. He'd worked the numbers, figured out just how many pounds he'd need to sell each season to pay the crew and pay off the loan. The numbers checked out. As long as demand—and the price per pound—stayed high, the license would be his in a few years.

A slow grin inched across his mouth. His mom and Levi would never have to worry about losing their home again.

But the glint in Meg's eyes promised him it might not be as easy as he'd hoped—not that six years of back-breaking labor and the last year of pinching every penny just to make a down payment had been easy. There was a light in her, a fire that made him shuffle back. Her eyes were wild, unfocused. Every breath she took sounded like it had been scraped over gravel.

Then she opened her mouth and ruined his day.

"Don't sell it to him. Sell it to me."