



the  
**SECRET** to  
**HAPPINESS**



CAPE COD CREAMERY



**SUZANNE**  
**WOODS FISHER**

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *ON A SUMMER TIDE*



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CAPE COD CREAMERY · 2

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SUZANNE  
WOODS FISHER



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# Cast of Characters

**Callie Dixon** (age 28), recently fired executive chef, cousin to Dawn, niece to Marnie.

**Dawn Dixon** (age 28), half owner of the Main Street Creamery, ice cream maker extraordinaire.

**Marnie Dixon** (a woman of a certain age), mother of Dawn, half owner of the Main Street Creamery.

**Kevin Collins** (age 28), fiancé to Dawn. Studying for his master's degree in preservation architecture.

**Lincoln Hayes** (a man of a certain age), Chatham resident, full-time volunteer to charitable causes, lover of ice cream, friend to all.

**Leo the Cowboy** (age 6), lover of any and all ice cream.

**Bruno Bianco** (age thirtysomething), professor at 4Cs (Cape Cod Community College), author of *The Secret to Happiness*.

**Jesse** (age 23), friend and colleague of Callie, works at Penn State's Creamery.

**Brynn** (age 28), former roommate of Dawn's.

## The Secret to Happiness

**Nanette** (age seventysomething), Chatham resident, runs a T-shirt shop, known for being on the nosy side of nosy.

**Mrs. Nickerson-Eldredge** (age seventysomething), Chatham resident born and bred, chair of the Historical Commission. Considers herself to be the guardian of Chatham.

**Richard Dixon** (age 61), father to Callie, brother-in-law to Marnie.

# Glossary of Popsicle Making

**base**—the egg-dairy-sugar (cream) mixture or juice-water (fruit) mixture that is the main ingredient in all popsicles

**blender or food processor**—to mix or purée the base

**cornstarch**—add a tablespoon of cornstarch to cream-based popsicles to make them creamy. Acts as a stabilizer to keep popsicles from getting icy

**cream base**—whole milk plain Greek yogurt (lower water content than usual yogurt = less water crystals to make popsicle icy). Other options for a cream base: full fat coconut milk, heavy cream, almond milk

**dips**—milk/dark chocolate or white chocolate, melted, to coat frozen popsicle (all or part). Allow to harden before returning to freezer

**freezing**—popsicles require 4–8 hours to freeze solidly

**fruit base**—ripe or slightly overripe fruit. (Most fruits work well.) Juice or water works well as liquid for fruit-based popsicles

**herbs**—bring extra flavor to popsicles (organic herbs such as mint, cilantro, basil, rosemary, lavender)

**molds**—silicone molds (easy to clean and unmold)

**sprinkles**—add preferred toppings (chopped nuts, sprinkles, raspberry dust) after dipping in chocolate or white chocolate

**sticks**—food-safe and environmentally friendly wooden sticks to hold popsicle

**sweetener**—honey, agave, maple syrup, sugar (ingredients lose flavor when they freeze, so it's best for purée to have a strong flavor and be heavily sweetened before freezing)

**zest**—adding citrus zest (lime, lemon, orange, grapefruit) enhances flavor and adds texture

I doubt whether the world holds for anyone a more soul-stirring surprise than the first adventure with ice cream.

—Heywood Broun, sportswriter

# Chapter ONE

The cold never bothered me anyway.

—Elsa, “Let it Go,” *Frozen*

**Penn State Ice Cream School  
State College, Pennsylvania  
Friday, January 21**

Two months ago, Callie Dixon had been the executive chef at one of the largest convention hotels in Boston, a hotel so highly esteemed that the Food Safety Conference chose to hold their annual meeting there. Today, she was serving up bowls of ice cream to amateurs who had hopes to become the next Ben & Jerry. She wore a shapeless smock and a hair net that made her look like a cafeteria lady, and her salary had dropped from six figures to minimum wage.

Even worse, she was lucky to have the job. A temporary job that would be over after Penn State’s Ice Cream School ended. From that point on, she had no idea what she would do. Her sterling reputation in the culinary world was ruined.

And it wasn’t her fault! Well, mostly it was. But not entirely.

During the conference, the hotel’s event planner had kept circling

through the kitchen, clapping her hands, telling the staff to step it up because attendees complained of waiting too long for their meals. Flustered, Callie had neglected to put a sauce for tomorrow's chicken entrée in the refrigerator. It stayed on the counter overnight, warming to room temperature, bacteria dividing and multiplying. Sauces could be tricky like that.

The next day, her sous-chef assumed it had been put on the counter, ready for him to use, and a meal contaminated with *C. perfringens* had been served . . . resulting in food poisoning. And the rest of the conference was ruined for over two hundred attendees.

While her boss informed her that he was sorry to have to let her go (oh, just say it. *Fired!*), he was sure she realized someone had to take responsibility for this. It was no small mistake. It was catastrophic. Then he added, "Callie, you do seem extremely distracted lately."

No, she wasn't extremely distracted lately. But yes, she did understand that someone's head had to roll. What irked her was how pleased the event planner looked as Callie bid her goodbyes to the staff. This woman—who'd been at the hotel for ages and ages—had never been a fan of Callie's. They'd had numerous run-ins, holding vastly different opinions about menu options. Quite simply, she did not like Callie. (That in itself was absurd! Who didn't like Callie?! During high school, she was president of the student body, homecoming queen, and—her favorite—voted most likely to become a benevolent dictator. Once a month, she went down to the shelter and fed the homeless. Everyone liked Callie! Except for the event planner.) The unfortunate sauce incident became the golden opportunity to have her fired.

And just like that, Callie's meteoric rise in the culinary world . . . was DOA. Who would ever hire a chef responsible for poisoning the entire Food Safety Conference?

But that was how she ended up at Penn State's Ice Cream School. When Jesse, her friend who helped run the school, heard what had happened at the conference, he insisted she come to Penn State

during January. “No one’s hiring in the winter months, anyway,” Jesse had said.

True, but timing wasn’t going to be the problem in finding a new job. It was her name. It was mud. She was no better than the dirt beneath people’s feet.

So she packed up her bags and she drove to State College. Penn State’s Ice Cream Short Course had been held every January since 1892. Past participants read like a Who’s Who in the world of ice cream: Baskin-Robbins, Ben & Jerry’s, Dreyer’s, Dairy Queen, on and on. There was also a three-day Ice Cream 101 workshop held later in the month for serious ice cream lovers and small business owners.

Today was day one for that workshop. The class had been listening to the principal instructor give an overview of ice cream making and were about to taste samples made with different grades of milk.

Callie carried a tray full of ice cream cups to the table in the back and set a cup in front of a woman.

“Callie? Is that you?”

Callie stopped to see who had recognized her. A woman, middle-aged-ish, pretty features, blue eyes, her strawberry blond hair held back in a ponytail.

“Aunt Marnie?” Marnie Dixon had been married to her dad’s eldest brother, Philip, and Callie hadn’t seen her in years. She’d been unable to attend Uncle Philip’s memorial service. There simply wasn’t time. No, that wasn’t true. She’d been so absorbed in her work that she didn’t *make* time for it.

Marnie was peering up with a puzzled look on her face. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine!” But Callie was hardly anything close to being fine. *Change the subject*, she thought. *Quick*. “What in the world are you doing here?”

Marnie lifted the ice cream cup. “I came for this.”

The man sitting next to Marnie cleared his throat to remind Callie of people waiting for ice cream. She handed a cup to the man and

kept working her way down the line, but her attention stayed on her aunt. “But . . . why?”

“Didn’t you hear our news? No? Dawn and I moved to Cape Cod and bought an ice cream shop.”

“GET OUT!”

Chairs clattered as everyone spun to look at Callie. She looked around the room at the confused group. “I didn’t mean get out, like ‘go,’” she said to everyone. “I meant, like ‘you’ve got to be kidding me!’”

“Perhaps,” the instructor said, “you could save this conversation for after class.”

“Right,” Callie said. She emptied her tray of ice cream cups and bent low as she swept past her aunt. “You and me. During the break. I want to hear all about this.” Marnie grinned and gave her a thumbs-up.

Wow . . . Aunt Marnie had left Needham and bought an ice cream shop on the Cape. Gutsy! Bold! Brave! She tried to remember the last updates she’d heard about her cousin Dawn. She was rocking it as a CPA and engaged to her high school sweetheart, and . . . hmm . . . whatever happened to that wedding, anyway?

Callie went back to the kitchen to get more cups of ice cream from Jesse. He looked up from scooping when he realized she was standing right in front of him. “What’s that big smile for?”

“Because I just saw someone special!”

He grinned. “Ah, shucks. Thanks.”

“Funny.” She rolled her eyes. “My aunt is attending the workshop. My favorite aunt of all. The world’s best aunt.”

“Yeah? What makes her the world’s best?”

“Aunt Marnie’s the type who always remembered to send cards. Cards for birthdays, cards for graduations, cards for Valentine’s Day, for Easter. Sometimes cards to just say she was thinking of me. She’s just . . . wonderful.”

“What’s she doing here?”

“She and her daughter are running an ice cream shop on Cape

Cod.” She turned the tray around so he could add more cups on the other side.

“I didn’t know you had a cousin.”

“Lots of them. But Dawn and I are closest in age. Close in everything. More like sisters than cousins. We adore each other.”

“Yeah? I’ve never even heard you talk about her.”

“You know, life gets”—she shrugged—“busy.”

He put the last cup on the tray. “Well, you’ve got some spare time now.”

She snorted. True. In fact, she had a surfeit of spare time. A frightening abundance of it. Callie had never done well with downtime. She avoided it.

“Maybe it’s no accident that you’re here now, and your aunt is here now.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why don’t you go visit your best-aunt and sister-cousin on Cape Cod?”

“Not happening.” She shook her head. “I’ve got my next best job to find.”

He paused. “Callie, have you ever thought that there’s a reason you got fired?”

She froze. “Uh, because the sauce that smothered the chicken should’ve spent the night in the refrigerator instead of on the counter.”

He rubbed his chin. “Well, that’s one way of looking at it. Maybe this . . . pause . . . could give you a little time for personal reflection.”

“Personal *what*?” Her eyebrows shot up.

“Never mind. All I’m saying is that a little breather right now could do you some good.”

She took all that in. Then she let out a long sigh.

He added the last few cups on her tray. “Everybody needs a little help sometimes.”

“Tell me about it.” Callie nodded, as if she knew exactly what Jesse meant. She certainly knew what it was like when someone needed help. She just wasn’t clear on how to ask for it.

## The Secret to Happiness



**Marnie**

Dawn! Guess who's at Penn State's Ice Cream School?

**Dawn**

Who?

Your cousin Callie! She says she's in between jobs.

Mom—do NOT invite Callie to Cape Cod.

I didn't invite her.

Good.

She invited herself.