

THREE-TIME RITA AWARD WINNER

# IRENE HANNON



*Sandcastle Inn*

A Hope Harbor Novel

### Praise for *Windswept Way*

“Hannon’s nuanced character development and snappy pacing make this tale of second chances a pure delight.”

*Publishers Weekly*

“Another warm, satisfying Hope Harbor novel.”

*Booklist*

“*Windswept Way* is a wonderfully entertaining, impressively original, wholesome romance.”

*Midwest Book Review*

### Praise for *Sea Glass Cottage*

“Hannon hits the right notes of romance and comfort in this winning story.”

*Booklist*

“Heartwarming and inspirational.”

*Military Press*

“Hannon’s characters glow with life.”

*Evangelical Church Library Association*

### Praise for *Blackberry Beach*

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

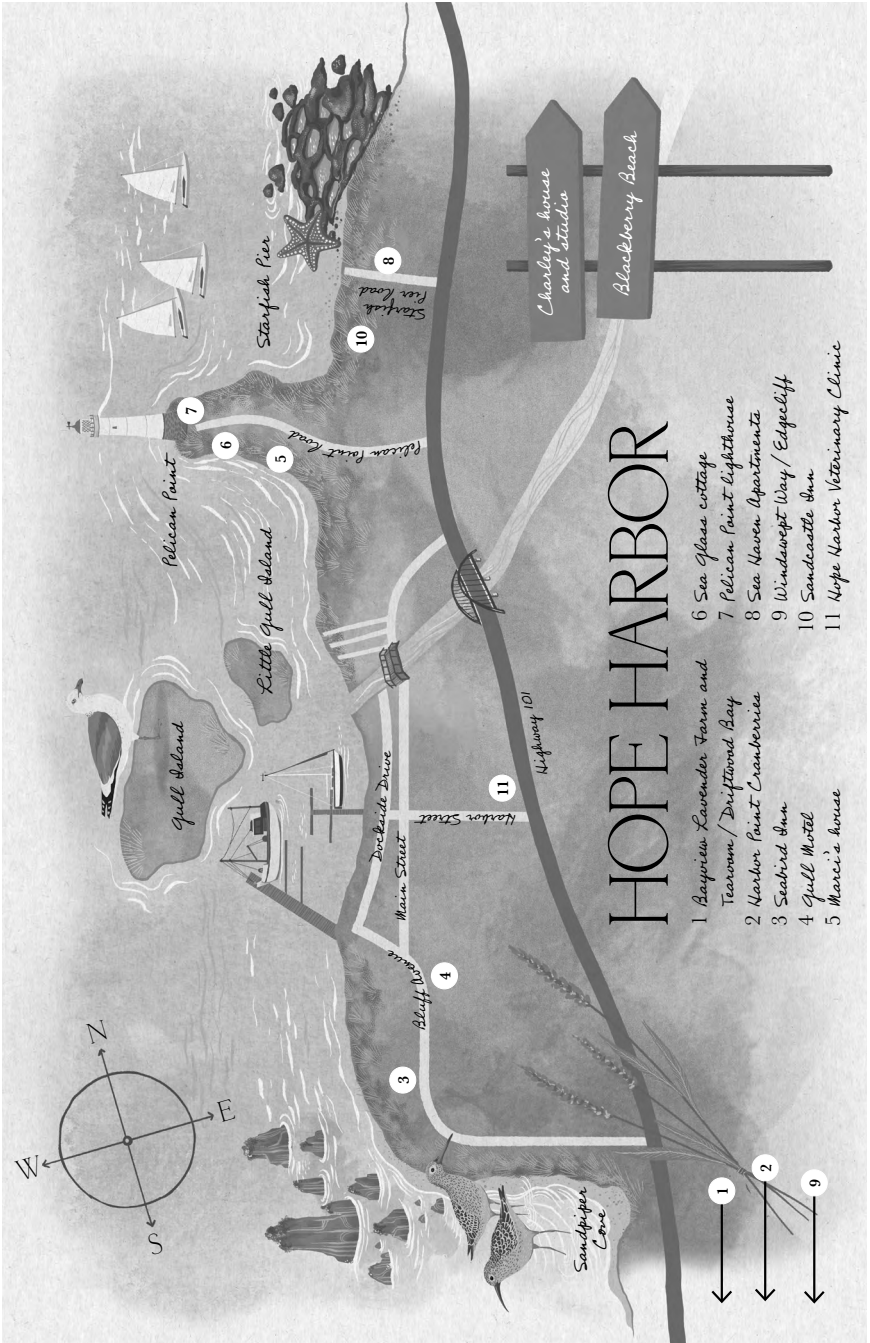
*Publishers Weekly*

“Irene Hannon is a master of setting and conveying emotional tone.”

*All About Romance*

“*Blackberry Beach* clearly showcases Irene Hannon’s complete mastery of the Christian romance genre.”

*Midwest Book Review*



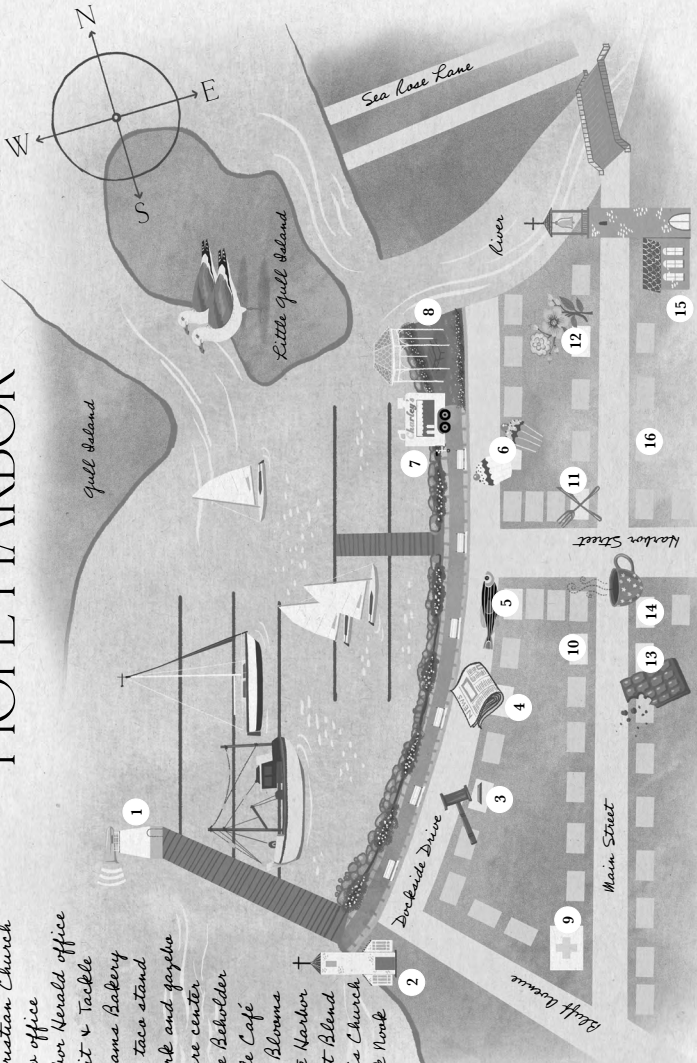
# HOPE HARBOR

- 1 Bayview Lavender Farm and Tearoom / Driftwood Bay
- 2 Harbor Point Cranberica
- 3 Seabird Inn
- 4 Gull Motel
- 5 Marci's house
- 6 Sea Glass cottage
- 7 Pelican Point Lighthouse
- 8 Sea Haven Apartments
- 9 Windswept Way / Edgcliff
- 10 Sandcastle Inn
- 11 Hope Harbor Veterinary Clinic

# HOPE HARBOR

DOWNTOWN

- 1 Foghorn
- 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 gazebo
- 9 Urgent care center
- 10 Eye of the Beholder
- 11 The Myrtle Café
- 12 Audubon Blooms
- 13 Chocolate Harbor
- 14 The Perfect Blend
- 15 St. Francis Church
- 16 Ben's Book Nook



# *Sandcastle Inn*

A Hope Harbor Novel

## IRENE HANNON



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To my brother and sister-in-law,  
Jim and Teresa Hannon,  
as you celebrate your 25th anniversary.

May all your tomorrows be as happy as your yesterdays.

And may you always be blessed  
with the three things that abide—  
faith, hope, and love.

I love you both. Now and forever.

# 1

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Good grief.

What on earth had Kay gotten herself into?

Matt Quinn braked, gravel crunching beneath the tires as his Mazda came to a stop in front of his sister's new business.

No. Scratch new.

Beachview B&B might be new to Kay, but that adjective didn't come anywhere close to describing this cedar-shake-covered structure with the whimsical turret on one end.

Exhaling long and slow, he wiped a hand down his face as his hopes for the much-needed R&R that had fueled his long drive north from San Francisco evaporated.

His sister may not have summoned him for help with her business, but how could he ignore the elephant in the room?

An elephant that likely wouldn't be here if he'd done what he should have done and asked way more questions nine months ago when she'd announced that she was going to buy a B&B on the Oregon coast. Or even come up here to look the place over. He could have accomplished that in a weekend trip if necessary.

One more regret to feed the gnawing guilt that had been his constant companion for two long years.

Knuckling the road grit from his eyes, he tried to coax the ever-present knot in his stomach to untwist. After all, it was possible the few rotted pieces of shake siding above the foundation, the missing roof shingles, the potholes on the inn's access drive, and the listing shutter on the second floor weren't an omen of what was to come inside.

Nevertheless, the empty parking lot suggested he wasn't the only one who'd been put off by a negative first impression.

Did his sister have *any* customers?

The knot cinched tight again, like a hangman's noose.

But this whole scenario did have one bright side.

There would be plenty to distract him from his own problems while he was here.

The front door opened, and Kay stepped out, shadowed under the large A-frame roof above the entryway at this twilight hour.

Since it was too late to drive away even if that had been an option, he pulled into a parking space, set the brake, and pushed the engine stop button.

She jogged over, waiting to speak until he opened the door and slid from behind the wheel. "I've been watching for you." Her lips tipped up, fine lines feathering at the corners of her eyes as she held out her arms. "Welcome to Oregon on this beautiful June day."

"Thank you." He gave her a hug.

After returning the squeeze, she eased back to scrutinize him. "You look tired. Tell me you took a couple of breaks during the drive."

"I did." But only long enough to fill up with gas.

"This wasn't an emergency, you know. You didn't have to make it a marathon."

"A nine-hour drive isn't exactly a marathon."

She rolled her eyes, just as she'd been doing for the past twenty-six years whenever he exasperated her—which had been often in the early days. Few eighteen-year-olds thrust into a dual parent-

ing role were equipped to deal with a grieving nine-year-old who tended to get into a lot of messes.

If Kay had ever resented being saddled with such a heavy responsibility at that young age, though, she'd never let on.

One of the many reasons he loved her.

"Hey." He put one hand on her shoulder and used the pad of his other thumb to smooth out the furrows on her brow. "No frowns allowed. I'm here, safe and sound."

Her features relaxed a hair. "That's one worry off my plate, anyway."

Meaning there were others. Plural.

And one of them had to include the condition of the inn.

But that discussion could wait until he'd clocked some z's and his brain was fully functional again. Better to focus on the situation that had summoned him here.

"Is Cora still trying to convince you not to go back to Boise for her surgery?"

"Yes. But it's a major operation, and she doesn't have any family. I don't want her to go through that alone."

"I don't either. She may not be related to us by blood, but I'll always think of her as a grandmother."

"Me too. I don't know what I would have done if she hadn't unofficially adopted us after we moved into the other half of her duplex. She was always there to lend a hand or offer advice when I was at my wit's end."

He propped a hip against the car and folded his arms, mouth bowing. "Not to mention the chocolate chip cookies she plied us with."

"That too." The twin creases reappeared on Kay's forehead. "I know bypass surgery is a common procedure these days, and her heart is healthy other than the blockage, but she's getting up in years."

"She'll be fine, Kay. She's a strong woman, physically and mentally."

“Do you talk to her often?”

“Yes.” Though that was more Cora’s doing than his over the past two, dark years. How often, when he’d most needed to hear an encouraging voice, had he answered the phone and found her on the other end? Too often to count. It was as if, across the miles, she’d sensed his plunges into despair. “She told me the doctors gave her a very optimistic prognosis.”

“I heard the same story.” Kay sighed and brushed back a few strands of wind-ruffled hair. “I’ve missed her these past five months. I mean, I love the ocean, and this inn is a wonderful opportunity to start a new chapter in my life, but . . .” Taking a deep breath, she put on a bright face. “Let me help you with your bags.” She circled around to the trunk and waited.

Rather than probe for more information about her regret-infused *but*, he took her lead and followed her to the trunk. There should be ample opportunity to get the lay of the land with the inn and with her before she left for Boise in three days.

After giving her the smaller of his two bags to tote, he picked up the heavier one, closed the trunk, and followed her inside to the spacious foyer.

A quick perusal revealed a small room to the left that appeared to be an office. A wide doorway on the wall that faced the front door offered a glimpse of the sea through windows at the rear of the structure. A staircase led to a balcony above the foyer, and two doorways on the second level were visible before a hallway disappeared to the right.

At first glance, there were less obvious signs of wear and tear inside than out.

That was encouraging.

“Do you want to drop your bags here and have something to eat, or would you like to freshen up first?” Kay stopped in the center of the foyer. “I made the spaghetti sauce you always liked.”

His stomach rumbled, and he gave her a sheepish grin. “Sorry. My last meal was hours ago.” And the drive-through burger he’d

wolfed down hadn't put much of a dent in his hunger. "Give me five minutes to dump my bags in my room and wash my hands."

"That'll work. I'll get the noodles going. Your room is up the stairs and down the hall, last door on the left."

"Got it." He took the smaller bag from her. "See you in five."

He had no trouble finding the spacious room that was cluttered with too much furniture—nor spotting a few signs of wear as soon as he entered. While the space appeared to be spotlessly clean, scrubbing couldn't erase the faint vestiges of two sizeable stains on the carpet. Nicks in the doorframe and baseboards were past due to be touched up. A few marks above the luggage rack suggested the entire room could use a fresh coat of paint.

But the view from the sliding door that led to the balcony?

World class.

Matt left his bags at the foot of the bed and crossed to the far side of the room.

Through the expanse of glass, the azure ocean stretched to the horizon past several dramatic sea stacks. Billowing clouds tinged with gold and pink massed where sky met sea as the sun began its grand exit for the day. To the left, on a tree-covered headland, the top of a lighthouse soared over the distant point. And straight in front, visible through the branches of the spruce and pine trees that nestled the inn? A gorgeous, secluded beach that extended as far as he could see to the right behind a long stretch of low dunes.

Wow.

The location alone would sell this place to potential customers—if they could look past the obvious deficiencies in the inn itself.

So why hadn't Kay corrected them? Had she spent every dime of her husband's insurance money on the purchase price alone? Was she living on fumes and regretting her hasty purchase?

Those were among the questions he'd ask before she left for Boise.

But that discussion would have to be handled with kid gloves,

and after almost a full day on the road, it would be wiser to keep their conversation on the lighter side tonight.

Except Kay had other ideas.

After giving him five minutes to down a significant portion of the large serving of pasta she set in front of him, she wrapped her fingers around her glass of iced tea and angled toward him on the stool at the counter where he'd elected to eat. "So tell me how you're doing—and how you managed to take a month off from your vet practice. You didn't give me a straight answer on the phone."

The last bite he'd taken stuck in his windpipe, and he fumbled for his glass of Sprite. Took several gulps while he tried to formulate a response that was short on details but sufficient to satisfy his sister.

"I'm fine. I got a glowing report at my physical six weeks ago. And my backlog of unused vacation days was getting unwieldy."

She narrowed her eyes. "You know I'm not talking about your physical health, and unused vacation days never compelled you to take time off in the past. Especially four weeks in a row. It's not like you to leave your partner in the lurch for that long."

If he told her Steve was the one who'd suggested he not only take a break but extend it even longer than he'd finally agreed to, he'd have to tell her why.

Another discussion he didn't want to have tonight.

Or ever.

He put on his dancing shoes.

"Steve was fine with the idea. We have a recent vet graduate on temporary staff who wanted to get a feel for working in a private practice setting, and she's more than capable of filling my shoes while I'm gone."

"Sorry. Not buying. Someone fresh out of vet school wouldn't have all your experience."

"Steve was comfortable with the arrangement." And that was all he was going to say on that subject. "You should be glad I was able to get away."

“I am, trust me.” She motioned to his plate. “You want another helping?”

“Yes. But heavy food and sleeping don’t mix, and sleep is next on my agenda.” He gathered up the remaining noodles on his plate. “What’s on the schedule tomorrow, other than a crash course on how to run an inn?”

She flashed him a smile that seemed a bit strained. “Why don’t you sleep in after your long drive? Maybe take a walk on the beach. The tide pools about half a mile to the north are worth visiting. You could do that while I run a few errands in the morning.”

“What if a guest shows up or needs help while we’re both gone?”

Faint creases marred her brow as she focused on the melting ice cubes in her glass. “Don’t worry about that.”

Suspicion confirmed.

There were no paying guests at Beachview B&B.

The pasta he’d ingested hardened in his stomach.

It appeared the light duties he’d agreed to handle last month in exchange for some R&R while she was gone would be far lighter than he’d anticipated.

Tempted as he was to ask questions about her new business, however, he was too tired to tackle what could be a hard discussion tonight.

After swigging the last of his soda, he rose. “This may be the earliest I’ve called it a night since you made me go to bed at nine when I was a kid.”

“A battle we fought every night.” She shook her head, lips twitching as she stood and gave him another hug. “Sleep well.”

“Thanks.”

But as he returned to his room, taking in the drywall cracks where the walls met the ceiling and the worn tread on the stairs, his chances of having a restful slumber plummeted with each step he climbed.

Because Kay had a mess on her hands—and now he was in the middle of it.



Slinking home to Oregon with her tail between her legs was the last thing Vienna Price had ever expected to do.

But when all the rules in your carefully planned, by-the-book life got thrown out the window, the familiar tended to beckon.

Braking at the top of Bluff Ave, she cranked down her window, inhaled a lungful of the briny air, and scanned Hope Harbor spread out below.

The soothing ambiance seeped into her pores, dissipating the tension in her shoulders as she drank in the view.

This was exactly how she remembered the charming town from the occasional weekend trips she and Mom had taken here during her growing-up years.

The planters that served as a buffer between the sloping pile of boulders above the waterline and the sidewalk still brimmed with lush flowers. As on previous trips, boats rested safe and secure in the placid harbor that was protected by a long jetty on the left and a pair of rocky islands on the right.

Vienna shifted her gaze to the other side of Dockside Drive, where storefronts with colorful awnings and window boxes faced the sea, matching the image in her memory to a T. Farther down the two-block-long, crescent-shaped road that dead-ended at the river, the same charming white gazebo graced the tiny pocket park.

Best of all, the taco stand with Charley's name emblazoned in colorful letters over the serving window remained ensconced beside the park.

Her lips curved up as memories flitted through her mind of her last trip here with Mom ten years ago during one of her brief visits to the state of her birth, to celebrate her new MBA and plum job offer. In those days, the renowned artist had still been dispensing philosophy and gentle wisdom along with his famous fish tacos.

Of course, it was possible he'd sold the business and moved on. Things changed—sometimes overnight.

Mouth flattening, she heaved a sigh, put the car in gear, and continued down the hill, turning right onto Main Street.

If fate was kind, change hadn't beset Charley. Having an empathetic sounding board would be a godsend when she and Mom clashed, as they inevitably would. Much as they loved each other, a free-spirit mother paired with a by-the-book daughter generated a subtle but ever-present tension that often led to conflict.

*"Your destination is on the right."*

As the voice on her phone spoke, Vienna slowed and glanced inland.

There it was, the second building past the intersection of Main and Harbor.

Bev's Book Nook.

Once she pulled into a parking space and set the brake, Vienna read the banner that hung over a display of books in the front window.

*Start a New Chapter!*

An appropriate tagline for Mom, from both a business and personal standpoint. How many retirees would launch a new business after wrapping up a thirty-year career? Weren't most people at that stage of life happy to have fewer responsibilities and more free time?

Then again, Bev Price wasn't most people. Never had been, never would be.

Vienna picked up her purse, slid from behind the wheel, and locked the doors. Probably not necessary in Hope Harbor, but the habit was hard to break after living in a city the size of Denver for the past ten years.

"Vienna! Welcome to Hope Harbor!"

At the enthusiastic greeting, she swiveled toward the shop as the door was flung open and a woman emerged.

Vintage Mom, from the bright, patterned muumuu more appropriate for a luau than an Oregon seaside town to the purple

swath in her long, flowing locks. While the silver streaks in her hair were far more prominent than they'd been during their last in-person visit at the retirement party in Eugene two years ago, her expression radiated exuberance and joy.

Her new life agreed with her.

Despite Vienna's diligent effort to contain it, resentment bubbled up inside her at the irony.

The woman who'd never cared about climbing the corporate ladder, who did her job with passion during the work day but cherished her free hours, who lived a paycheck-to-paycheck and go-with-the-flow philosophy, had retired from a stable job after three decades and pursued her dream business while the fast-track daughter who'd toed the line and devoted herself to work 24/7 was out on her ear.

Another example of how life wasn't always fair.

Shoring up her flagging spirits, Vienna circled the car.

Her mother met her in the middle of the sidewalk, arms extended, and pulled her into a tight embrace.

The familiar scent of jasmine swirled around her, stirring up memories of the bedtime kisses Mom had bestowed every night as she tucked in the covers and whispered, "Happy dreams, sweet girl. Never forget how much Mama loves you."

Vienna's throat tightened.

How sad that their diametrically opposed personalities had always created a barrier between them despite their mutual love.

"Hi, Mom." She tried for a light tone as she returned the hug, shifting slightly away from the purple hair tickling her nose. "Your prodigal daughter has returned."

"Prodigal." With a snort, Mom released her and waved the comment aside. "That implies extravagance, recklessness, and imprudence. You don't have an ounce of any of those in your body."

True. Her DNA came from her maternal grandparents, not Mom. And maybe from her father, based on the little Mom had told her about him.

“It’s been a while since my last visit, though.”

“I’ll agree with that. It’s been way too long. But I know that job of yours keeps you hopping. I want to hear all about your latest adventures as soon as you get settled in.”

Somehow Vienna hung onto her smile.

In hindsight, it might have been easier to tell Mom about her career disaster on the phone. Except once she’d said she was thinking about coming out for a visit, it had been hard to get a word in edgewise or put a damper on her mom’s enthusiasm.

Nor was there an urgent need to spring it on her this moment. Why not catch her breath after the early morning flight and the drive down from North Bend?

“I promise to fill you in on everything, but first I want to see your shop.”

Mom gave the façade of Bev’s Book Nook a satisfied sweep. “You mean my pride and joy.” Beaming, she pushed open the front door, setting off a musical tinkle of wind chimes, and ushered her in.

Given her mother’s propensity to cram every available space with color, crafts, items she’d collected on her international travels, flea market finds, and natural art like feathers, shells, shiny rocks, and displaced birds’ nests, Vienna braced for a sensory onslaught.

Three steps inside the door, she jolted to a stop.

The shop’s website only featured the front of the building, and the photos Mom had emailed as she prepared for the opening six months ago had been close-ups of bookshelves and décor rather than overall views.

They hadn’t hinted at the oasis within.

Yes, there were eclectic elements that gave a subtle Bohemian vibe to the space. A wicker swing chair in one corner, padded with comfortable-looking cushions. An intricate macramé wall hanging. Pottery lamps. A few pieces of wave-sculpted driftwood on the bookshelves. A patterned jute rug on the polished hardwood

floor. Two woven baskets filled with glass floats. A flat-topped inlaid wood trunk with a Moroccan motif, two cushioned rattan wicker swivel chairs beside it.

Many of the items had been in their apartment while she was growing up, lost in the general clutter of the small space crammed with Mom's treasures.

But here, used as accent pieces, they stood out and enhanced the quiet, restful, welcoming mood.

"You're speechless." Mom took her arm and drew her deeper into the shop, amusement sparking in her irises.

"Um . . . it's not quite what I expected."

"Which goes to show you should never judge a book by its cover." With a wink, Mom swept a hand down her attire.

While true in general, that adage hadn't applied to Mom in the past. What you saw was what you got with Bev Price.

Apparently the adage applied now.

The orchid-and-fern-bedecked fabric of her muumuu was a major disconnect with the peaceful, soothing, book-filled haven she'd created in her shop.

"It's just that I thought you'd have more . . . that the shop would be . . ." Vienna's voice trailed off.

"Jammed to the gills like our apartment back in Eugene?" Mom gave her arm an understanding pat. "Not anymore. The sign in the window says it all. I started a new chapter when I moved here. I took inventory of my life, literally and figuratively, and let go of a bunch of stuff I'd been hanging on to for too long."

Major disconnect.

Not to mention a bit unsettling.

What other unexpected changes were in store?

The disconcerting question added yet another ripple to the already turbulent waters of her world only minutes into a visit she'd assumed would be comforting due to its predictability.

Once again the wind chimes pealed, followed by the appearance of a middle-aged couple.

“Welcome to Bev’s Book Nook.” Her mother leaned around her and lifted a hand in greeting. “I’ll be with you in a sec.”

“No rush. Vacations are meant for unhurried browsing with your favorite girl.” The man slipped his arm around the woman beside him. “Especially on an anniversary trip.”

“Well, congratulations to you both. You may want to take a look at the jewelry near the checkout. I make all of it myself. You might find a memento to help you remember your trip.”

“We’ll do that. Thanks.”

While the couple ambled toward the display case, Mom took her arm and tugged her toward the back room.

Vienna let herself be led as she digested the news about her mother’s handiwork. “I saw the jewelry display in one of the photos you sent me. I didn’t know you made it.”

“I took a class about six years ago, remember?”

Vaguely, now that Mom had reminded her. But her mother took all kinds of classes. In general, they were one-offs.

“Yes. I didn’t realize you’d stuck with it, though.”

“I didn’t expect to, but I fell in love with the creative process. It started out as a hobby, but after people began asking to buy pieces, I decided to launch an online business.”

“Why didn’t you ever mention that?”

Mom shrugged. “It was just small potatoes for a long while. But several jewelry stores in Eugene did carry my work. Who knew a labor of love could end up being profitable?”

One more surprise.

Mom pushed through a swinging door into a stock room/office and stopped at a desk to rummage through her purse. “I’ll give you a key to the apartment so you can unpack. Help yourself to the lunch fixings in the fridge. I plan to close early today and take you out to dinner. The Myrtle has an amazing spinach quiche.”

“Why don’t I take you to dinner instead?” Unless her mom’s financial philosophy had changed too, her bank account would

be lean. Excess cash had always been in short supply in the Price household. And once her offspring had flown the nest, Mom had begun spending her hard-earned money on theater tickets, travel, yoga classes, and who knew what else. Perish the practicality of saving for a down payment on a house.

“No. First dinner is on me. But I’ll let you treat me to Charley’s tacos while you’re here.”

Vienna’s spirits took an uptick. “So he still owns the stand?”

“Of course. The man is a town fixture. Hope Harbor wouldn’t be the same without him. He’s on a visit to Mexico right now, though.” Mom withdrew a key and handed it over. “My place is easy to find. Just head north on 101 and hang a left on Starfish Pier Road. Sea Haven Apartments are on the right. There isn’t much else down that way.”

“What time will you be home?” Vienna slid the key into her pocket.

“As soon as the delivery I’m expecting arrives. I have several customers waiting for those books.”

“You don’t have to close early because of me.”

“Yes, I do. I want to take full advantage of this rare treat.” The comment was matter-of-fact, with no hint of recrimination, but guilt pricked at Vienna’s conscience anyway.

“Won’t your customers be disappointed if they stop by and find the shop closed?”

“No. Hope Harbor is laid-back. People here go with the flow. Is it any wonder I love this place?” She reached over and once again pulled her close. “It’s so good to see you, sweet girl. I love our phone chats and Zoom sessions, but nothing beats a hug.”

Vienna inhaled the jasmine-infused air as she squeezed her mom back, letting the love envelop her and seep into her soul.

Leaving Denver behind temporarily had been a smart move. While she and Mom didn’t agree on much, at least her mother’s love was predictable.

Unlike the future she’d planned with such meticulous care.

As she left the shop behind, Vienna paused at her rental car to read the sign in the window again.

*Start a New Chapter!*

A worthy mantra during her stay.

For perhaps here, in this quiet seaside community, she'd discover a new path for her life after the unexpected detour that had thrown her so off course.