



BETWEEN
THE SOUND
AND SEA

a novel

AMANDA
COX

“Amanda Cox does it again, delivering an emotionally gripping must-read. Taking readers to the captivating Outer Banks, she reminds us that life is a beautiful gift and that love overcomes all.”

Julie Cantrell, *New York Times* and *USA Today*
bestselling author of *Perennials*

“I love stories of restoration, and Amanda Cox delivers it twofold through her characters and a mysterious lighthouse. Steeped in Southern folklore and culture, *Between the Sound and Sea* is an intriguing novel you won’t want to miss.”

T. I. Lowe, bestselling author of *Under the Magnolias*

“Engaging and transportive, *Between the Sound and Sea* shines a beacon of light on a remarkable family history rooted in a place as mysterious as it is captivating. If possible, Cox’s mastery of sensory detail multiplied my love for North Carolina’s Outer Banks.”

Nicole Deese, Christy Award–winning author
of *The Roads We Follow*

“From the first sentence, you know you are in the hands of a master storyteller, who is ready to whisk readers off into another captivating novel. This one has plenty of wind, waves, struggle, and loss. Get ready to go deep, into fathoms of the heart.”

Chris Fabry, author and host of *Chris Fabry Live*

“Amanda Cox once again proves her talent for emotional depth. With an immersive setting and beautifully layered storylines that weave past into present, *Between the Sound and Sea* is perfect for readers who want resonating stories of hope amid waves of change.”

Sara Brunsvold, Christy Award–winning author
of *The Divine Proverb of Streusel*

“Amanda Cox is brilliant at drawing humanity from her characters and giving readers a setting they can hang their hat on. The

lighthouse on Bleakpoint Island captured my heart, and like that lighthouse, Amanda’s story is a beacon of light and hope shining on the stormy seas of life. I highly recommend this poignant and tender novel of healing, love, and new beginnings.”

Katie Powner, Christy Award–winning author of
The Wind Blows in Sleeping Grass

Praise for *He Should Have Told the Bees*

“Cox is a brilliant writer, and her characters feel like old friends. With humor and a tenderness for the struggling, the novel explores what happens when people let the light in on their journey to healing.”

Library Journal

“Cox’s hopeful, heartwarming novel touches on complicated relationships, the value of friendship, and the impact of trauma with great heart and kindness.”

BookPage

Books by Amanda Cox

The Edge of Belonging
The Secret Keepers of Old Depot Grocery
He Should Have Told the Bees
Between the Sound and Sea

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring two herons at the top, various flowers, leaves, and a starfish at the bottom.

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The Revell logo consists of a stylized 'R' symbol above the word 'Revell' in a serif font.

Revell

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan
RevellBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cox, Amanda, 1984– author.

Title: *Between the sound and sea* : a novel / Amanda Cox.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Revell, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2024.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024006061 | ISBN 9780800742744 (paperback) | ISBN 9780800745837 (casebound) | ISBN 9781493445509 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Family secrets—Fiction. | LCGFT: Christian fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PS3603.O88948 B48 2024 | DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20240213

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024006061>

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Cover illustration by Roberta Murray / Arcangel

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24 25 26 27 28 29 30 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To the only man who could convince me
to go beach driving in a hurricane.

Love,
Slick



You keep track of all my sorrows.

You have collected all my tears in your bottle.

You have recorded each one in your book.

Psalm 56:8 NLT

Prologue

NOVEMBER 2005

SWAN QUARTER, NORTH CAROLINA

The old woman observed the young boy kicked back in the adjacent recliner, his face practically glued to that tiny screen, as it had been since his visit began. Not that she blamed him. What fifteen-year-old wanted to spend an entire Saturday stuck in an assisted living apartment with a couple of old ladies for company?

“Listen here, boy, put down that Game Boy and I’ll tell you something you’ll never forget.”

He looked up at her, grinning. “Aw, this isn’t a Game Boy. It’s my new Nintendo DS, and I’m this close to beating the boss on my game.” He held up two fingers, pinching at the air.

“Maybe I oughta get me one of them things. Since I can’t get around on these old legs like I used to, I get bored sitting around here.”

He smiled and shook his head, continuing with his game.

She glanced up at the sound of pots and pans banging in the kitchen. “What’s your gramma up to?”

“Making supper for us, I think.”

“Good. That means we’ve got plenty of time before she comes nosin’ in. Now put that thing down like I said and scooch closer so

I can tell you something.” She lowered her voice. “Something nary a soul knows except me. It’s time I passed these stories down before I’m good and gone. And I’ve chosen you.” She mined her memories for just the right tale. It’d have to be a good one to compete with a kid stuck on video games.

He gave one last baleful look at the device before setting it on the table beside him. He scooted his chair closer to hers and adjusted the blanket that had slipped off her foot before sitting back down. Sweet boy.

“It was a dark and stormy night,” she began.

He groaned, looking back toward the game waiting on the side table. “A dark and stormy night? Really?”

She chuckled. “I’m not being funny. It really *was* a dark and stormy night. Way back in 1941. Now listen close, Peter, and I’ll tell you how the legend of Saint-Mae was born.”

She closed her eyes, concentrating on recounting the tale.

Fifteen-year-old Cathleen tied off her skiff. Adrenaline coursed through her body like the spidery tendrils of lightning dashing across the sky. The wind whipped about her head, unfurling her sodden scarf, sending it airborne until it settled somewhere over the seething Atlantic.

Hunched against the slanting rain, she jogged past her faithful light. A light that had guided her to the foolish drunk clinging to a vessel not seaworthy in even the fairest weather. A man who likely didn’t merit Cathleen risking her life over. But duty had called. No matter who was at the mercy of the unpredictable currents of the Outer Banks.

She opened her eyes a tiny slit. The boy leaned in close, eyes locked on her. She had him hook, line, and sinker now.

Cathleen entered the squat stone cottage where she lived, boots squelching on the stone floor. She sidled up to the fire and added enough wood to coax the embers back to life, then she stripped out of her sodden clothes and wrapped a wool blanket around her shoulders.

She winced. *Oops.* That was probably more detail than a fifteen-year-old boy needed to hear about a fifteen-year-old girl. She continued, more mindful of the particulars she shared.

“Cathy?” Her father’s voice cut through the silence. Rolling thunder sounded on its heels.

Cathleen cringed. “Yes, Da?”

“Everythin’ all right? Why are you up, lass?”

“Just checking the light,” she called and then pulled the scratchy wool tighter around her, sending up a silent prayer that he’d accept her answer and go back to sleep. She inched closer to the fire, aching for the heat to reach her bones. Moments later her father’s snores once again echoed through the room, and the tension she carried between her shoulder blades released.

He was having a good night.

Cathleen grabbed a kettle, filled it with water, and hung it over the fire. While the water came to a boil, she rubbed her hands together, trying to turn her blue-tinged nail beds pink. Once she’d downed her tea and her fingers burned white-hot with renewed circulation, Cathleen went to her father’s desk and pulled out his sacred book.

“This is our livelihood,” he’d told her a hundred times. “A lightkeeper is only as good as the records he keeps.”

She paused and looked at the boy. “Now, listen close. It might not sound like much, but this is the moment Saint-Mae was born.”

He nodded, eyes wide.

Into the book, she poured her account of the night. How she’d woken with an inner urging to check that all was well along the coast, how she’d climbed those endless spiral stairs, chiding herself for venturing into this unkind weather without cause. That was when the light beam had glinted off the overturned dinghy being tossed about in the storm.

She wrote of the waves that had crashed over her own vessel as she maneuvered her boat. Not just anyone could have managed

swells like that. Especially not someone as young as herself, be they male or female. But fifteen-year-old Cathleen had honed her skills on the water since her father had taken up his post at Bleakpoint Island when she was a little girl. Everything had been preparing her for that night. Her first solo rescue at sea.

She continued pouring her heart and soul onto the page, telling how the inebriated man had nearly capsized her when he'd grasped at the oarlocks to pull himself aboard. Though the skiff had tipped wildly, Cathleen had kept a cool head despite her knowledge that a merciless sea cared not whether it was a drunkard or a teenage girl dumped into its depths.

She'd calmed the cursing, thrashing man and coaxed him around to the stern like she'd seen her father do so many times before. And she'd saved him. Scarf and storm concealing her identity, she motored him to Ocracoke before disappearing back to her remote island home.

At the bottom of the log page, she impulsively signed a name she wished was her own. A person she craved to know but who was little more than a legend to Cathleen. A person who, if they were there, would know how to help her father.

But hadn't the night's events proven she was equal to the task life had handed her? As long as she continued doing whatever it took to conceal the fate of the real keeper of Bleakpoint Light, everything could stay as it had always been.

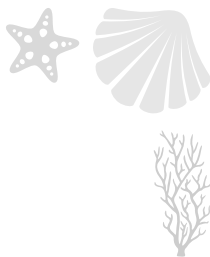
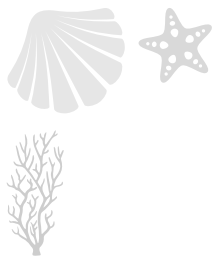
The girl stared at the page on which she'd poured out the events of the evening, all written in her scruffy hand instead of mimicking her father's writing as she normally did. Ever so carefully she removed her account from the precious book, leaving no trace of the torn-out page. As far as anyone knew, this rescue never happened. And that was the way it must remain.

She walked to the fire with the page in her hand. It would make better kindling than anything else. She stretched the paper toward the licking flames. "I am naught but a figment of a drunk man's imagination," she said to the empty room. But instead of releas-

ing it so that the fire could claim it, she clutched the paper to her chest, holding tight to the memory.

The woman opened her eyes to the young boy whose face was creased in concentration. “Why was she scared for her father to find out? And why did she need to keep what she did a secret?”

“That, my boy, is another story. I can tell you if you like.”



ONE

OCTOBER 2007

COPPER CREEK, TENNESSEE

Joey Harris stood from her desk chair and stared out the window of her second-story office. Golden leaves dropped from the trees and pasted themselves to the damp sidewalk bordering the historic town square. Two middle-aged women chatted below, their closed umbrellas propped at their sides. If only they would move from the sidewalk into her office and write their names down in the blank spaces in her appointment book.

She stepped back from the curtain, letting it fall closed.

A shrill tone permeated the space, and she edged away from its source. What if she just ignored the call and persisted in showing up at the last planned event still in her books? Refused to accept that her services were no longer required by the inhabitants of Copper Creek, Tennessee.

Joey squared her shoulders and lifted her portable phone from its cradle. “Events by Josephina.”

“Hey, honey. Just calling to check in. I’ve got you on speaker-phone.” *Mom.* Joey let out the breath she’d been holding. Road noise and the canned voice of a navigational guidance system filled her ears.

Joey sank onto the small sofa behind her, then kicked off her heels and tucked her legs beneath her.

“Say hi to your daughter, Ronnie.” Her mother hissed as though Joey couldn’t hear every word.

“Babe, I’m trying to listen to that newfangled GPS woman and change lanes without the U-Haul taking out a minivan. Joey, please tell your mother I’m only capable of doing one thing at a time.”

Joey stifled a snicker. “Is your trip going okay so far?”

Early that morning her parents had driven away from the house she’d helped her father build when she was only eight. How she remembered what it was like to be glued to his side, handing him any tool she was big enough to lift.

After saying their goodbyes, which hadn’t been easy, Joey denied her ridiculous urge to sneak inside the trailer with her parents’ displaced possessions and stow away on their fresh start.

“We’re about four hours outside of St. Petersburg.” It was a good sign, this lift of excitement in Mom’s voice. It had been absent for far too long.

“Sunshine and sea breezes, here we come.” Dad’s tone was light, but Joey knew better. For years her parents had been planning to move to Florida for retirement, but not under these circumstances.

Joey ended the call and retrieved her appointment book from her desk. All those erasure marks, traces of plans that were still on, just without her help. Birthday parties. Weddings. Reunions. Graduation celebrations.

Living in a small town where everyone knew your name had its pluses . . . and its minuses. She slapped the calendar shut and stood.

She grabbed her keys and gave a parting look to the pristine space meant to communicate to everyone who walked through the door that she had an eye for beauty and detail. It was a prime location, sandwiched between a day spa and a boutique. She sighed. She wasn’t ready to give up on this dream just yet, but she was starting to wonder if it was worth the fight.

Joey locked the door behind her and exited the building, inhaling the scent of damp autumn leaves. Margaret Pierce, the owner of Simple Things Bed-and-Breakfast, walked toward her, her low heels clicking on the pavement. Joey's stomach tightened.

Margaret lifted her head from her cell phone screen. She gave Joey a curt nod and chose to cross the street rather than walk past her.

Joey growled under her breath, biting back the words rushing to her lips. She'd tried to explain her family's innocence six months ago, after Margaret convinced her niece to fire Joey as her wedding planner. But if Margaret hadn't listened to reason then, she wouldn't listen now.

A drizzle started and, without missing a step, Margaret snapped open her umbrella and lifted it overhead. Joey peeled her gaze from the woman's retreating form and walked to her truck—a pearl-pink outfit with her company name decaled on the side. The thing was ugly as all get out, but her parents had been proud as peacocks when they presented it to her after she landed her first planning gig. She chuckled to herself. Dad had said she needed something practical and pretty to haul things around for her events. It was the wrong vehicle for slipping through town inconspicuously though.

She ducked into the driver's side, swiping the droplets from her bare arms and smoothing back the curls that had sprung loose from her bun. Joey pulled out of her reserved space and cruised once around the town square.

As a teenager she'd loved working alongside her father and brother, giving each of those historic buildings a facelift in preparation for the series of heartwarming movies that would be filmed outside them. Tourists and new residents alike now flocked to Copper Creek, wanting to experience that fairy-tale town they'd watched on the screen.

Too bad the people had forgotten that her father's work had been what charmed those producers in the first place.

As she drove home, she attempted to brainstorm ways to restore honor to the Harris name, but all she could see was that empty appointment book and the determined scowl on Margaret Pierce's face.

Once inside her apartment, she grabbed a ready-made meal from the freezer and popped the casserole in the microwave. While it cooked, Joey flopped onto the couch, pulling a tattered patchwork quilt over her lap. She opened her laptop and typed the name of her parents' new neighborhood into the search bar. It was beautiful. Maybe she should have stowed away in that U-Haul, after all. Despite the weight on her chest, she smiled at the mental image of taking up residence in their retirement community at the age of twenty-six and planning posh one hundredth birthday parties and fiftieth wedding anniversaries for the rest of her life.

Her search then drifted to scrolling through realty listings as she was drawn to beautiful coastal homes well out of her price range. She pictured herself standing on the front porch of one of them. In her imagination, a man appeared by her side. The preppy lumberjack wore a buffalo plaid shirt and had her ex-boyfriend Paul's face. She shook off the image. That was weird. Paul never wore flannel, nor had she ever imagined herself marrying him. What was she thinking?

She grabbed her meal from the microwave, and thankfully it tasted better than it looked.

Her cell rang. Sophie's name lit up the screen.

Joey set the cardboard tray on her side table, answered the call, and lay back, staring at the popcorn ceiling. "Hey, Soph," she said through a burden-laden exhale.

"Don't sound so excited to talk to me. You'll give me a complex."

Joey smirked at her friend's wry remark. "Don't take it personally. I said goodbye to my childhood home this morning. Mom and Dad are on their way to a new life in Florida. Plus, my business is in a rapid downhill spiral with no rescue in sight because the

Harris name makes me a pariah. Oh, and since we last talked, Paul broke it off with me for someone new.”

Sophie sucked air through her teeth. “Ouch.”

“Yeah, I feel like a million bucks.” Joey cradled the phone against her ear with her shoulder and unwound her long brown hair from its bun.

“What happened?”

“I thought I had at least two promising events on the books, something to remind Copper Creek that I’m not a scam artist, nor am I a child of one.” Joey rolled her eyes skyward. “There’s this lady Cara who just moved here to open a gift shop. She asked me to help her plan her grand opening block party.” Joey rubbed the back of her neck, attempting to defuse the beginnings of a tension headache. “But she stopped me on the street yesterday and said that Ada at the boutique next door said that if she used me, people wouldn’t come. I know Margaret is behind this, because her B&B was almost bankrupted when—”

“Stop the train, Jo-Jo. I meant about Paul, the guy you’ve been seeing for eight whole months. Why didn’t you call me?”

Joey huffed. “It just didn’t feel like that big of a deal in light of everything else.”

“What happened?”

“Last week he met this girl at the soup kitchen where his men’s group volunteers, and he really hit it off with her. He felt like the right thing to do was to break things off with me before even talking to her about his feelings.”

“This is the same Paul we went to high school with? Who never even bought a new shirt without taking a month to think about it?”

Joey massaged her scalp, releasing tension brought on by her heavy updo. “He said he’s never felt this way about someone before. What can I say to that?”

“What can you say to that? Y’all’ve been together almost a year and he ditches you for some girl he just met who might not even like him back? Who does that?” Joey couldn’t help but smile.

Too bad Sophie didn't live closer. She'd set all of Copper Creek straight for her.

"That's the thing though, Soph. The fact that I didn't cry or feel like throwing something . . . I . . . I just don't know what I'm doing anymore." She grabbed her casserole from the side table and stuffed a generous bite into her mouth.

"You don't think it had something to do with the lawsuit and all that mess with Margaret, do you?"

"I don't want to think that it does. But you know Paul. He's always preferred to keep things simple. And my life is not that. Not anymore."

"I vote that you pack it all up and move to Nashville. The apartment next to me is coming open in a few weeks. There would be way more opportunities to event plan here than in touristy Copper Creek. Before you know it, you could be planning parties for the biggest names in country music."

Joey set her casserole aside and sank deeper into her couch. She twirled a curl around her finger, examining the way it reflected in the lamplight. "I appreciate your vote of confidence and your chronic spontaneity, but you and I both know opportunities like that don't just happen. I would be an itty-bitty fish in a far bigger pond. Besides, at the moment, I think I'd prefer anonymity to fame. I just need to stick it out a little longer. I've still got that welcome home bash for Evelyn's son. After I ace that, things are bound to turn around, aren't they?"

"Why are you so obsessed with making things work in Copper Creek?"

Joey sat up, tucking her knees to her chest. "I . . . it's home." She picked at the nail polish she'd chipped while compulsively tightening down the squeaky floorboards in her office after a long day with nothing to fill her time.

"After everything that happened?" Sophie scoffed. "Is it really worth it? Working so hard to regain the favor of a group of people who've chosen your family as the scapegoat for all their misery?"

Any idiot ought to be able to see that the bad things that happened with Harris Construction occurred after your dad sold it. There's more to the world than Copper Creek."

Easy for Sophie to say. She'd left after high school to attend college in Nashville and had never looked back. Meanwhile, Joey had jumped straight into launching her business in her beloved hometown while taking business classes at night.

A life in Copper Creek was all that was left of Joey's dreams. Growing up here had been a lot like living in one of those feel-good movies that had been filmed right outside her office windows. Joey had even played an extra in some of them. But her reality was nothing like the movies that ended with a resurrected family business and a sweet kiss in the town square. "My dad did not deserve what happened to him. Being dragged through the mud like that. I need to—"

"Fix this somehow? Joey, come on . . ." The sound of a baby cry came through the line. "Uh-oh, Liam is awake again. Sorry, friend, I better run. I know Nashville isn't what you're looking for, but think how much fun we'd have as neighbors!"

After she ended the call, Joey rested her forehead against her tucked knees.

Starting all over again? Was this really what it had come to? Eight years of building a business down the drain. Did she really have it in her to start from scratch? Did she even want to?

A few hours later, a text came through from Sophie. "*You'll probably write this off as more evidence of my so-called chronic spontaneity, but I think I found the perfect thing for you. Check your email.*"

Joey opened her laptop. The subject line read "You said you wanted to be anonymous." Joey skimmed the attached job listing and eyed the grainy photograph of a lighthouse surrounded by wilderness. Sophie's scheme to get Joey to move to Nashville was absurd enough. But this? She shook her head. She wasn't *that* desperate yet. Was she?