

THREE SISTERS ISLAND

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*On a Coastal Breeze*

SUZANNE  
WOODS  
FISHER



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## *Cast of Characters*

*Paul Grayson* (age 60)—retired sports announcer, father of Cam, Maddie, Blaine; grandfather of Cooper

*Camden Grayson* (age 30)—eldest daughter of Paul, adoptive mother of Cooper, creating a self-sufficient, renewable energy program for Three Sisters Island

*Madison Grayson* (age 26)—middle daughter of Paul, recently certified as a marriage and family therapist; setting up a counseling practice on Three Sisters Island

*Blaine Grayson* (age 20)—youngest daughter of Paul, attends culinary school

*Cooper Grayson* (age 8)—adopted son of Camden Grayson

*Rick O’Shea* (age 27)—new pastor of the small church on Three Sisters Island that has been meeting in the Baggett & Taggett store for the last few years

*Artie Lotosky* (age 22)—college friend of Blaine

*Bob Lotosky* (age 50-ish)—Artie’s dad, a potato farmer from Aroostook County, Maine

*On a Coastal Breeze*

*Peg Legg* (won't reveal her age)—runs the Lunch Counter, mayor of Three Sisters Island (though it's officially too small for a mayor)

*Seth Walker* (age 30)—schoolteacher at Three Sisters Island

*Porter and Peter Phinney* (in their 20s)—sons of (formerly) prominent selectman Baxtor Phinney, serving jail time for lobster thievery

*Captain Ed* (ageless)—runs the Never Late Ferry between Mount Desert and Three Sisters Island

*Tillie* (somewhere in her 50s)—the übervolunteer church secretary

*Maeve O'Shea* (60s)—Rick O'Shea's awesome mother

# One

JUST BEFORE MADDIE UNLOCKED THE DOOR to her office, she straightened the name plaque on the wall: MADISON GRAYSON, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST.

Her career was finally underway. Today was the starting day of her first real job, and she actually had clients. An engaged couple, who had made an appointment on the very day Captain Ed helped hang her shingle.

She opened the door and walked inside, smiling. The space she had rented was in the basement of an old house on First Street, just around the corner from the Lunch Counter, the hub of Three Sisters Island. Peg Legg owned and ran the diner, and advised Maddie not to rent space right on Main Street. “You won’t get any customers if they think folks see them coming and going from the shrink’s office.”

Maddie bristled at being called a shrink, and her clients were not customers, but she was grateful for Peg’s local savvy. The ways of locals were still new to her despite living on the island this past year. She doubted she’d ever truly understand them, but she hoped

she could shed light on the problems in their lives. Problems, she understood.

She flipped on the light and smiled. On her desk was a bouquet of a dozen red roses, her favorite, and a little card.

Good luck today. Love, Cam and Cooper, Blaine, and Dad

This was Dad's doing. He was over-the-moon pleased that she'd completed the hours required to be fully licensed. He really needn't have worried about her. Maddie finished what she started, even if it took a little longer than expected. Blaine was the daughter he should save his worry for.

She opened a casement window to let in fresh air, for the May morning was unseasonably warm. Her gaze swept the room, looking for any pillow that needed puffing or wall frames of her diplomas that were slightly askew, but she couldn't see anything to improve. In fact, it couldn't be more perfect. It wasn't large, but she didn't need much space. Just privacy.

Cam had helped her decorate the basement and turn it into a professional office. For once, her older sister hadn't overridden Maddie's preferences. Instead of the couch and desk that Cam had picked out, as well as an accent wall of a boldly patterned wallpaper, she deferred to Maddie's choices. Comfortable upholstered swiveling armchairs instead of a couch. A palette of subdued colors for paint and fabrics—cool tones with warm pops—that invited one to relax, to linger. Not too feminine, not too masculine. Against the back wall was a tiny service kitchen with an expensive coffee machine that made single coffees. Customized coffee. Maddie wanted everything here to tell a client she respected their individuality.

She heard the stomping sounds of someone up above, someone

on the portly side, and assumed they belonged to Tillie, the church secretary, who took her volunteer job very seriously.

The spacious house had been rented to the tiny little church on Three Sisters Island, a small fellowship that had finally found a pastor who was willing to move to an island on the edge of the world for a pittance of a salary. The house would serve as his living quarters, plus his office, and it was near the building they could use on Sunday mornings—a huge upgrade from meeting in the Baggett and Taggett shop down the street. It was hard to sing worship songs about creation when a moose head on the wall was staring down at you. Accusingly.

She tried to remember what Seth had said when he recruited the new pastor. Richard Something-or-other. She squeezed her eyes shut. He was freshly out of the military. He loved Jesus and extreme sports, in that order. Oh, and he had tattoos. That's all she could remember. She'd been so distracted with starting her practice that she hadn't paid much attention. She had a lot of faith in Seth Walker's judgment. He had started the little church a few years ago when he became the island's schoolteacher, so he knew what kind of a pastor would best fit the role.

Maddie took out a blank notepad and a periwinkle blue Flair pen, then applied fresh lipstick, straightened her skirt, said a little prayer, and waited for her clients to arrive. And waited.

Outside the open casement window, she heard a commotion of excited shouts and footsteps pound down the street. Curious, she left her office and went to the street to see what was causing the fuss. She stood at the top of Main Street and shielded her eyes from the bright morning sun. Behind her came the *stomp-stomp* of Tillie's Bean boots, which stopped abruptly as she stood right beside Maddie. "Oh my word," she said. "He said he was going to parachute in today, but I didn't think he meant literally."

There, floating down from the sky, right in front of Boon Dock, was a brightly colored parachute with a man dangling underneath. “Tillie, is that our new pastor?”

“Indeed it is.”

“What’s his name again?”

“Richard O’Shea.”

What? “Did you say O’Shea?” No! *Oh no*. She jerked her head down. “Not . . . no, it couldn’t be . . .” Her mind raced back to the meeting. She’d come in late from a class and all she’d heard was the church had unanimously voted in a pastor named Richard. “Does he happen to go by the name of Ricky?”

“No.”

Maddie blew out a puff of air. *Phew*. It couldn’t be the same guy. No way. It couldn’t possibly be the same Ricky with whom she grew up. Not a chance.

“Rick, he calls himself.”

A queasy roll started up in Maddie’s stomach. *No, no, no, no, no*. How could this world be so big and yet so small?

Tillie patted her on her shoulder. “I’d better get down to the dock to greet our new pastor. And you’d better see to your customers. They got confused and came upstairs to the church office. I sent them down to wait in the basement.”

Maddie gasped. No! This wasn’t the way the morning was supposed to go. She should be in her office, waiting to welcome her clients. And Ricky O’Shea should remain far, far away—a distant, unpleasant, suppressed-if-not-forgotten memory. Like a root canal.



After dropping her eight-year-old son, Cooper, off at school, Camden Grayson stopped at the Lunch Counter to exchange hellos

with Peg Legg, the diner's owner. Peg's round, merry face lit up when she spotted Cam coming in through the door, and she enveloped her in a bear hug before hurrying to fetch her a mug of hot coffee. No matter how busy the diner was, Peg would stop and give Cam a warm welcome.

Cam not only enjoyed Peg, she admired her. Peg was the one who, last August, when the last member of the Unitarian Church at the top of Main Street passed away and the church building was donated to the town, came up with the idea of using the empty church building for the school, moving it off Camp Kicking Moose's property and into town where it belonged. That one swift action brought great relief to her dad, as a school bus full of children arriving each morning wasn't mixing well with late-season vacationing campers.

Cam sat on a red stool at the counter, sipped a mug of very mediocre coffee, and reviewed details about a new government grant she'd found, making notes in the margins. All winter and spring, she'd been toiling away on lengthy grant applications—with the hope of making Three Sisters Island run entirely by renewable energy, thereby eliminating dependency on the extremely unreliable public utility grid.

If Cam's plan worked, Three Sisters Island would become completely self-sufficient with an off-the-grid electrical system powered by water, wind, and sun. It would be an economic boost to this little island that suffered from disruptive, inconvenient brownouts and blackouts throughout the year. Summer as well as winter, with windy storms that knocked out power and canceled the Never Late Ferry—its lifeline to Mount Desert Island, and then to the mainland.

Each grant took an enormous amount of time to complete, scads of paperwork. So far, she'd had ten rejections. She needed

at least three grants to cover the scope of the project she had in mind. Even three might not be enough. The rejections worried her, but Cam turned worry into action: pursuing more grants. She was determined. Partly to help the island, partly to help her dad.

Camp Kicking Moose, her dad's passion, could be a year-round destination, but that would remain a distant dream if stable energy continued to be elusive. The winters in Maine were long and dark, bitter cold, and if the island was cut off from the mainland for more than a few weeks like it had been this past winter, it became nearly unbearable. It wasn't just the lack of supplies that started to wear thin, it was the isolation that everyone felt. Peg mentioned recently that the Alcoholics Anonymous group that met early in the mornings at the Lunch Counter doubled in size during the winters.

"Cam, come on out! You gotta see this."

Cam's head popped up when she heard Peg call to her. She hadn't noticed that the Lunch Counter had emptied out. A crowd had gathered on Main Street, staring up at the sky. Cam hesitated a few seconds, reluctant to be interrupted from her work, then set her pen on the notepad and hurried outside to see what everyone was looking at. There, high above them, floating down from the sky, was a man attached to a billowing parachute.

Standing next to Cam, Peg shook her head in disbelief, fists planted on her generous hips. "I thought I'd seen everything around here. This is a new one."

Cam tented her eyes to peer at the man who dangled underneath the colorful canopy. She thought it was a man, anyway. "Who do you think it is?"

Tillie marched past them. "He's our new pastor," she said over her shoulder, as if it were the most normal thing in the world for a person to drop out of the sky.

“How about that?” Peg said, clapping with delight. “Sent to us from Above!”



As the Never Late Ferry chugged toward Boon Dock at Three Sisters Island, Blaine Grayson watched a skydiver come in for a landing on the small ribbon of soft sand that bordered the harbor. Whoever was under that umbrella of bright colors seemed to know what he was doing—it was a pinpoint landing. She smiled as the man gracefully bounced feet first on the sand and immediately bolted forward to run up the beach, in such a practiced way that the parachute drifted down to the ground behind him, as gently as a leaf in the wind. He seemed oblivious to the many eyes watching him. Calmly, he unbuckled the harness around his chest and set about methodically folding up the canopy.

What must it be like to skydive out of an airplane? To stand at the open door and look down? That was exactly how Blaine felt with the announcement she needed to make to her family as she finished up her first year of culinary school. She knew she would have to be prudent about the time to tell them. There was no hurry, not until Cam and Seth’s wedding date was set in stone. It was her father’s reaction she dreaded in particular.

As she watched the skydiver trudge up the beach toward the gathered crowd on Main Street, she thought that she could actually imagine how it would feel to jump from the plane, trusting the parachute pack to unfold at just the right moment. Everything, all of her trust, rested on that one hope. A tiny little cord of hope. Of understanding.