

## Prologue

I've been alive for 65 years, Dad. You've been dead for thirty. For the past few years, I've been writing about you, but today I realized that it's to you I should write. That's the answer, isn't it? It's you who needs to hear this story. You, I need to tell. You may be dead in this world, but you are alive in the next, and I would not be surprised if you are saying to yourself, "*Finally.*"

I started writing in the first place, because something happened that blew me back to the past. Meg's husband went missing. The people of Nantucket searched and prayed, and one prayer got answered—they found him. But he had ended his life. You probably knew all this before I did and I'm sure it broke your heart.

I prayed for Meg and their six children, and then I sat there wondering at the way life can keep such secrets from us. Keep them, then fling them at us years later, in ways we could never guess at years before.

From there my mind took off. It carried me back to the day I met Meg—a curly-haired girl in a pack of youngsters who appeared out of nowhere, calling you "Dad." Then further still, to the time before Meg, when we were happy, and you belonged to us and no one else.

I thought about how Meg grew up to stay with a suffering spouse, while others choose to leave. You, for instance, who chose to leave Mom. You, who chose to leave us.

When did we start to lose you? When you met Barbara, I suppose. Barbara, Meg's mother, with her red hair and freckles, and six

kids of her own. But was that after you gave up on my mother or before? Was Mom crazy like you claimed and drove you to drink? Or did your drinking drive her mad? For fifty years I've wondered. Who really wrecked our home?

So, I've turned to the past for answers. I'm sifting through memories—mapping Mom's moods, searching your face—seeking the moment you decided we could live without you.

Do you remember that I loved you with all my heart? I mean *my whole, complete heart*. And you loved me with all your heart, too, I know you did, because that's how you made me feel. That a day could ever come when that might end, a day when you'd rather go live with other children, was inconceivable to me. The way there are no words for certain concepts in certain cultures, my soul hadn't the capacity to imagine it.

But it happened, didn't it? And I hate that I'm still not over it.

There. I've said it. I never got over it. Not once in all these long-gone years have I let myself tell you how much it hurt. I only pretended to cope because I knew how badly you wanted me to.

When I started writing about you—about you and Mom and Brent and me and Audrey—I wrote from all directions. But then my mind sharpened and tilted. Because one night on the Internet, I read the professional profile of Barbara's youngest child. There towards the end was this sentence: *My father was a storyteller*.

*NO!* I yelled in my head. *MY father was a storyteller! Not yours! MINE!*

Oh, Dad. How can I ever explain how that one innocent statement slayed me?

It's true, Dad, you were a storyteller. You told us magical tales, dreamed them up on the spot. But those were our stories, Dad. Mine and Brent's and Audrey's. Our stories—and our father—you gave to them.

Now that I am this old, I see you better. I see you the way black ground becomes a thousand separate flowers in the sun. And I ask myself—*If I were dead, what would I hope?* I would hope my children

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could someday understand me. And if it can't happen while I'm here on earth, they'll be left with one choice—go back to the past. See me—see *us*—and remember our story. And try with all their might to get it right.

That's what I'm doing here, Dad. Now I'm the storyteller.