



## **SEASIDE**

By Terri Blackstock

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### **Chapter One**

Maggie Downing didn't like endings or beginnings.

She preferred to keep things somewhere in the middle, where she could build her momentum—no jolting starts or screeching halts. Momentum was critical, she'd always told her daughters. Useful people didn't veer off course, and they never slowed at the hurdles.

But she had been wrong.

Why had it taken her fifty-five years to learn it?

She sat on the deck of her split-level condo, looking out at the faint, foggy outline of the Rockies. She had photographed them many times, and collected the prints in a book that adorned thousands of coffee tables now. The Tourist Bureau of Colorado used one of her pictures for their advertisements, complete with her signature in the corner.

But that was just one of the many successes she'd had. She had the gift of turning beauty into bucks, a friend had once facetiously told her. Nothing was wasted.

The brisk wind made her shiver, and she pulled her sweater tighter. She longed for the warm air, the smell of salt on the wind, the sound of foamy waves whooshing onto the sand. She had moved to Colorado to escape the heat and humidity of the South, but by March, she was always weary of winter.

She knew her girls were weary, too, in their own corners of the world. But their fatigue had little to do with the cold.

She thought she heard the phone ringing, so she sprang up and went in. By the time she reached it, she realized that she had only imagined it. Probably, neither Sarah nor Corinne had gotten her messages yet. She had left one message with an unreliable machine, and the other with a less reliable grandchild. She hoped they would call back.

The Tiffany lamp across the little parlor cast a warm glow on the antique table on which it sat. She needed to pack away the pictures and memorabilia she had spread across it. Sarah and Corinne could help her decide what to do with all of them. The two girls might even enjoy seeing the pictures of themselves frozen in time, laughing and crying and staring and dancing and growing over the years. She had documented all of the awards, all the accolades, all the accomplishments . . . All the usefulness.

She wished just once she had spent quiet time with them, walking along abandoned beaches, sailing on quiet waters, fishing on a lonely pier. If she had her child-rearing to do over, she would take them outside at night and lie on a blanket, staring at the stars. She would teach them to breathe the breeze that caressed their faces, to savor the scent of jasmine, to walk for pleasure and not for exercise.

But, until lately, those joys had somehow escaped her. Life had been a series of ventures, one deadline piled upon another. She had rushed through her life, building her momentum and chalking up her feats, and had taught her daughters to do the same.

She picked the phone back up; listened to make sure it had a dial tone. They would call back soon. Any minute now, one of them would get home and return her call.

She went into the kitchen. The scent of vanilla and cinnamon lingered from the rolls she'd baked for a friend yesterday.

She had never baked much before, and had found in the last few weeks that it was one of those slow, simple pleasures she'd neglected in the past. She planned to do a lot more of it.

She walked to the coffeepot, an archaic percolator, and filled it with coffee grounds. She added the water and set it to brew, then took the water pot from her windowsill and began to water the ferns spilling over their hanging baskets.

As she did, she practiced the speech she had prepared for Sarah and Corinne. She had to be persuasive without being overbearing. Talking them into dropping everything and spending a week with her in Florida was not going to be easy.

She had taught them well. Sarah's husband and two children had not shaken her free of the lessons Maggie had so carefully programmed into her. And Corinne's three businesses were testimony that the family way worked.

When the coffee finished brewing, she poured a cup and went back into the little parlor, accented with antiques and eclectic art pieces she'd picked up in her travels. Her hard work had bought her each valuable piece, from the polished secretary against the wall to the acrylic resin sculpture on a pedestal in the corner. But things held little meaning for her now.

She wanted to be with her daughters. The three of them needed a time for mending fences, for healing relationships, for explanations and exhortations.

She picked up the phone and called the airline. She would buy their tickets, and perhaps that would force their hands.

She was willing to do whatever it took to get them there.

She hoped it wasn't too late to show them that time wasted is not always a waste of time.

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