

ebookbig.com

or scan the QR code to access the digital study portal.

ALSO BY ANNABEL MONAGHAN

It's a Love Story

Summer Romance

Same Time Next Summer

Nora Goes Off Script

Dolly ALL THE TIME

ANNABEL MONAGHAN



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
New York

PUTNAM
— EST. 1838 —
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
Publishers Since 1838
An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019
penguinrandomhouse.com



Copyright © 2026 by Annabel Monaghan
Excerpt from *It's a Love Story* copyright © 2025 by Annabel Monaghan
Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

Cover design and illustration: Sandra Chiu
Book design by Ashley Tucker, adapted for ebook

Title page art by Enkaart / Shutterstock

Trade Paperback ISBN 9780593853979
Ebook ISBN 9780593853986
Hardcover ISBN 9798217185054

The authorized representative in the EU for product safety and compliance is Penguin Random House Ireland, Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68, Ireland, https://eu-contact.penguin.ie.

ep_prh_7.3a_156328612_c0_r0

CONTENTS

Dedication

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21

Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25
Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30
Chapter 31
Chapter 32
Chapter 33
Chapter 34
Chapter 35
Chapter 36
Chapter 37
Chapter 38
Chapter 39
Chapter 40
Chapter 41

Acknowledgments
Discussion Guide
Excerpt from It's a Love Story
About the Author

For the caretakers. I wish I could bring you each a cup of tea
just the way you like it.

CHAPTER 1



"GOOD SPORTS. THIS IS A recorded line. How can I help you?" I tuck my phone between my shoulder and my ear, scoop a handful of shrimp off the bed of crushed ice onto the scale, and nod to Gus to let him know I'm going to need a sec. I step out from behind the counter and smile apologetically at the line of waiting customers. It's the three-o'clock rush and no one, including me, is thrilled that one of the only two people working behind the counter needs to step out to take a call. The brass bell tinkles as I swing the door open to Main Street, the briny ocean air mingling with the salt-sweet smell of the scallops we just unloaded on the dock.

I sit on the little cedar bench outside the store, and it feels great to be off my feet. "Yes, the weighted vest. Our best seller. Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. No, it will only improve your bone density if you put the weights in the vest. Otherwise, it's just a vest." I wince because this is a recorded line and they don't like sarcasm. "I'd suggest starting with the lowest level and working your way up." I wrap it up with my standard "Is there anything else we can do to be of assistance?" I stumble over the "we" every time. I am not in a big office building with a team of trained fitness enthusiasts. It's just me out here, taking all the calls.

I take one more gulp of the fresh air before heading back into the fish house. "Dolly, you're home!" says Mrs. Holbrook, catching the door behind me and taking a spot at the end of the line. "I heard there was a fire." She's a good-natured busybody who lives at the top of Goose Lane. Ours is the kind of street where you can hear your neighbor's TV if you turn yours off; she wouldn't have missed the firetrucks.

“Yes,” I say, looking up from the worn wooden floors, still damp from my midday mop. “I haven’t seen it, but my dad says the damage wasn’t too bad. Mrs. Goldberg called it in right away.”

I was sound asleep in Boston this morning when the call came in that there had been a fire at my dad’s house. It seems like a lifetime ago. The fire alarm hadn’t sounded, which is on me. This is something I should have checked when I was here last month. It was on my list, but there was a problem with the kitchen faucet and there were flying squirrels in the attic. Precautions against problems he didn’t yet have took a backseat, so I let the alarm battery slide. Thankfully, Mrs. Goldberg had her windows open to the June night air and smelled the smoke coming from the sleeping porch out back. She got my dad and my brother, Christopher, out of the house to safety and called to assure me that everything was fine. She was kind enough not to give me any more details about the rescue. In addition to his meds, Christopher has to be specifically reminded to wear pants.

The hours since that call have been a bit of a blur. Biking across town to get my car and then packing a summer’s worth of clothing for Gus and me. Normally our monthly trips to Rhode Island are just for the weekend. We leave Dad and Christopher with a clean house and empty laundry baskets and return in time to make sure nothing’s at a tipping point. We usually stay two weeks in the summer, but this time I decided to pack for longer. I’ll need time to repair whatever the fire has done and assess their overall living situation. I don’t see any way to get that done in a couple of weeks.

I sent a rambling message to the Bad Teachers group text before we left. It’s just my friends Kim and Layla from work, and none of us are actually bad teachers, though we do use that particular thread to unleash on our tyrant principal and make inappropriate comments about the hot new janitor. Between them they’ll be managing my mail and my beast of a fern. I’ll miss Kim’s thirty-fifth birthday in July and Layla’s daughter’s dance recital. I’d planned to surprise my landlord by re-staining both front doors on our two-family house. The good thing about a surprise is that no one’s let down if it doesn’t happen.

Gus and I came directly to the store because my dad is short-staffed today. His one full-time employee has gone to Florida indefinitely to care for her mother. And Rikki Clark, his best bet for summer help, was a no-show. For today, we're all hands on deck. Gus is behind the counter, stacking salmon fillets onto butcher paper. He smiles a crooked smile at something a customer has said and, as lucky as I feel to be his mother, I can't help but think of how lucky she is to be a stranger. I haven't gotten a smile from Gus all day. He catches my eye and nods to the cash register in a *Mom, get back here and help me* kind of way.

I take my place next to him as he puts a credit card receipt under the cash tray in the register and slams it shut with that familiar metallic snap. For a second, time folds in on itself until this regular day is like an origami bird. Gus at thirteen, me at thirteen, my dad, his dad. Four generations of Bricks in BRICK FISH HOUSE T-shirts pitching in for the summer rush. Daily rock-paper-scissors to divvy up chores. Loser goes into the back room to gut the cod.

My great-grandfather opened Brick Fish House in the fifties with an eye toward cornering the summer lobster roll and shrimp market and kicking back the rest of the year. We have a prime spot on Main Street with the back door opening up to the wharf. There's a single counter inside containing seafood brought in daily through the dock outside. We're basically a fish store, but we serve lobster rolls and crabcakes in the summertime. Don't ask for a salad or, God forbid, any kind of baked goods, or my dad will give you a stern "It's not that kind of place." I've stopped suggesting that it wouldn't kill him to serve a nice chopped salad or a homemade sourdough loaf because he looks at me like any act of expansion might actually kill him. He has been anti-progress since he tried and failed to open a second store farther down the coast when I was a kid. Expanding was my mom's dream, not his; he went for it to keep her believing he'd one day give her the kind of life she wanted. She ended up leaving, but he got to keep the debt on the failed new store. One thing I learned early—love is fickle, debt sticks around.