

Summer on Blossom Street

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Extract

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C H A P T E R

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In knitting, as in life, we grow when we challenge ourselves. The concentration required to learn a new stitch or technique is good for both our hands and our brains.

—Bev Galeskas, Fiber Trends Patterns and U.S.
distributor of Naturally New Zealand Yarns.
www.fibertrends.com

Lydia Goetz

Wednesday morning, a not-so-perfect June day, I turned over the Open sign at my yarn store on Blossom Street. Standing in the doorway I breathed in the sweet scent of day lilies, gladiolas, roses and lavender from Susannah's Garden, the flower shop next door.

It was the beginning of summer, and although the sky was overcast and rain threatened to fall at any moment, the sun shone brightly in my heart. (My husband, Brad, always laughs when I say things like that. But I don't care. As a woman who's survived

cancer not once but twice, I feel entitled to the occasional sentimental remark. Especially today...)

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, enjoying the early-morning peace. I just don't think there's anyplace more beautiful than Seattle in the summer. All the flowers spilling out of Susannah's Garden are one of the benefits. The array of colors, as well as the heady perfume drifting in my direction, makes me so glad A Good Yarn is located where it is.

Whiskers, my shop cat, as Brad calls him, ambled across the hardwood floor and leaped into the window display, nestling among the skeins of pastel yarns. He takes up residence there most days and has long been a neighborhood favorite. The apartment upstairs is an extra storeroom for yarn at the moment; perhaps one day I'll rent it out again but that isn't in the plans yet.

The French Café across the street was already busy, as it is every morning. The windows were filled with pastries, breads and croissants warm from the oven, and their delectable aroma added to the scents I associate with summer on Blossom Street. Alix Turner is usually there by five to bake many of these wonderful temptations. She's one of my dearest friends—and was among my first customers. I'm so proud of everything she's accomplished in the past few years. It's fair to say she reinvented her life—with a little help from her friends. She has an education and a career now, and she's married to a man who seems completely right for her.

Blossom Street Books down the street was ready for business, too. Anne Marie Roche and her staff often leave the front door open as a welcoming gesture, inviting those who wander past to come inside and browse. She and her daughter, Ellen, would be coming home from Paris later today.

Nearly every afternoon Ellen walks their Yorkie past the

window so Whiskers and Baxter can stare fiercely at each other. Ellen insists it's all for show, that the cat and dog are actually good friends but don't want any of us to know that.

I grinned at Whiskers because I couldn't resist sharing my joy and excitement—even with the cat. In fact, I wanted to tell the whole world my news. Yesterday, we found out that we'd been approved for adoption. I hadn't yet shared this information with anyone, including my sister, Margaret. We've been through the interviews, the home test and fingerprinting. And last night we heard.

We're going to adopt a baby.

Because of my cancer, pregnancy is out of the question. While the ability to conceive has been taken from me, the desire for a baby hasn't. It's like an ache that never quite goes away. As much as possible I've tried to hide this from Brad. Whenever thoughts of what cancer has stolen from me enter my head, I try hard to counter them by remembering all the blessings I've received in my life. I want to celebrate every day, savor every minute, without resentment or regret.

I have so much for which to be grateful. I'm alive and cancer-free. I'm married to a man I adore. His son, Cody, now nine years old, has become my son, too. And I have a successful business, one that brings me great pleasure and satisfaction. When I first opened A Good Yarn, it was my way of shouting to the world that I refused to let cancer rob me of anything else. I was going to *live* and I was going to do it without the constant threat of illness and death. I was determined to bask in the sunshine. I still am.

So A Good Yarn was the start of my new life. Within a year of opening the store, I met Brad Goetz and we were married the following spring. Because of what I'd been through in my teens and again in my twenties, I didn't have a lot of experience with men or relationships. At first, Brad's love terrified me. Then I learned

not to reject something good just because I was afraid of its loss. I learned that I could trust this man—and myself.

How blessed I am to be loved by him and Cody. Each and every day I thank God for the two men in my life.

Even with all I have, my arms ached to hold a baby. *Our* baby. Brad, who knows me so well, understood my need. After discussing the subject for weeks on end, after vacillating, weighing the pros and cons, we'd reached our decision.

Yes, we were going to adopt.

The catalyst for all this happened when Anne Marie Roche adopted eight-year-old Ellen.

I realized the wait for a newborn might be lengthy but we were both prepared for that. Although we'd be thrilled with an infant of either sex, I secretly longed for a little girl.

I heard the back door close and turned to see my sister, Margaret. She's worked with me almost from the first day I opened the shop. Although we're as different as any two sisters could be, we've become close. Margaret is a good balance for me, ever practical and pragmatic, and I think I balance her, too, since I'm much more optimistic and given to occasional whimsy.

"Good morning!" I greeted her cheerfully, unable to disguise my happiness.

"It's going to pour," she muttered, taking off her raincoat and hanging it in the back storeroom.

My sister tends to see the negative. The glass would always be half-empty to Margaret. Or completely empty—if not shattered on the floor. Over the years I've grown accustomed to her attitude and simply ignore it.

When she'd finished removing her coat, Margaret stared at me, then frowned. "Why are *you* so happy?" she demanded. "Anybody can see we're about to have a downpour."

“Me? Happy?” There wasn’t much point in trying to hold back my news, even though I knew Margaret was the one person who wouldn’t understand my pleasure. She’d disapprove and would have no qualms about imparting her opinion. It’s her pessimistic nature, I suppose, and the fact that she worries about me, although she’d never admit that.

Margaret continued to glare. “You’re grinning from ear to ear.”

I made busy work at the cash register in order to avoid eye contact. I might as well tell her, although I dreaded her response. “Brad and I have applied for adoption,” I blurted out, unable to stop myself. “And our application’s been accepted.”

A startled silence followed.

“I know you think we’re making a mistake,” I rushed to add.

“I didn’t say that.” Margaret walked slowly toward me.

“You didn’t need to *say* anything,” I told her. Just once I wanted Margaret to be happy for me, without doubts and objections and concerns. “Your silence said it all.”

Margaret joined me at the counter next to the cash register. She seemed to sense that her reaction had hurt me. “I’m only wondering if adoption’s a wise choice for you.”

“Margaret,” I began, sighing as I spoke. “Brad and I know what we’re doing.” Although Margaret hadn’t said it openly, I could guess what concerned her most. She was afraid the cancer would return. I’m well aware of the possibility and have been ever since its recurrence ten years ago. It was a serious consideration and one that neither Brad nor I took lightly.

“Brad agrees?” My sister sounded skeptical.

“Of course he agrees! I’d never go against his wishes.”

Margaret still didn’t look convinced. “You’re *sure* this is what you want?”

“Yes.” I was adamant. Sometimes that’s the only way to reach

her. “Brad knows the risks as well as I do. You don’t need to spell it out, Margaret. I understand why you’re afraid for me, but I’m through with living in fear.”

Margaret’s eyes revealed her apprehensions. She studied me and after a moment asked, “What if the adoption agency doesn’t find you a child?”

This was something Brad and I had discussed and it could certainly happen. I shrugged. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained. We’ll take the chance.”

“You want an infant?”

“Yes.” I pictured a newborn, wrapped in a soft pink blanket, gently placed in my waiting arms. I held on to the image, allowing it to bring me comfort, to fill me with hope.

To my surprise Margaret didn’t immediately voice another objection. After a thoughtful minute or two, she said in low tones, “You’d be a good mother...you already are.”

I’m sure my jaw fell open. The shock of Margaret’s endorsement was almost more than I could take in. This was as close as Margaret had ever come to bestowing her approval on anything regarding my personal life. No, that wasn’t fair. She’d been partially responsible for Brad and me getting back together when I’d pushed him away—a reconciliation that led directly to our marriage.

“Thank you,” I whispered and touched her arm.

Margaret made some gruff, unintelligible reply and moved to the table at the back of the store. She pulled out a chair, sat down and took out her crocheting.

“I put up the poster you made for our new class,” I told her, doing my best to conceal the emotion that crept into my voice. The last thing I’d expected from Margaret had been her blessing, and I was deeply touched by her words.

She acknowledged my comment with a nod.

The idea for our new knitting class had been Margaret's. "Knit to Quit," she called it, and I loved her suggestion. Since opening the yarn store five years earlier, I'd noticed how many different reasons my customers—mostly women but also a few men—had for learning to knit. Some came looking for a distraction or an escape, a focus to take their minds off some habit or preoccupation. Others were there because of a passion for the craft and still others hoped to express their love or creativity—or both—with something handmade.

Four years ago, Courtney Pulanski, a high school girl, had signed up for my sock-knitting class, which contributed to her successful attempt to lose weight. Hard to believe Courtney was a college senior now and still a knitter. More importantly, she'd kept off the weight she lost that summer.

"I hope Alix takes the hint," Margaret said, cutting into my thoughts.

I missed the connection. "I beg your pardon?"

"Alix is smoking again."

It wasn't as if I'd missed that. She smelled of cigarettes every time she walked into the store. There was no disguising the way smoke clung to her clothes and her hair. And yet Alix seemed to think no one noticed, although of course everyone did.

"My guess is she'd like to quit."

"Then she should sign up for the class," Margaret said emphatically. "She could use it."

How typical of Margaret to feel she knew what was best for everyone. Currently, though, I was more amused than annoyed by her take-charge attitude.

My first customer of the morning—a woman I'd never met before—stepped into the shop and fifteen minutes later, I rang up a hundred-dollar yarn sale. A promising start to the day.

As soon as the door closed, Margaret set aside her project, an afghan for our mother who resides at a nearby assisted-living complex. “You know what’s going to happen, don’t you?”

“Happen with what?” I asked.

“This adoption thing.”

I froze. I should’ve known Margaret wouldn’t leave the subject alone. At least not until she’d cast a net of dire predictions. I understood that this impulse was one she couldn’t resist, just as I understood that it was motivated by her protectiveness toward me. But I didn’t need to hear it right now.

“What’s that?” I asked, hoping my irritation didn’t show.

“Have you talked to a social worker yet?”

“Well, of course.” I’d spoken to Anne Marie, and she’d recommended Evelyn Boyle, the social worker who’d been assigned to Ellen and had handled her adoption. Anne Marie and Ellen fit so perfectly together that their story had inspired me to look beyond my fears. So Brad and I had approached Evelyn.

Margaret shook her head, which annoyed me even more.

“Anne Marie gave me the phone number of the woman who helped her adopt Ellen,” I said.

Margaret’s brows came together in consternation and she tightened her lips.

“What now?” I asked, trying to remain calm.

“I wouldn’t recommend that.”

“Why not? It’s too late anyway.”

“This social worker deals with foster kids, right?”

“I guess so.” I knew so, but didn’t see how that was relevant.

“Why should it matter?”

My sister rolled her eyes, as though it should be obvious. “Because she’s got children in her case files,” Margaret said with exaggerated patience. “She probably has lots of kids and nowhere

to place them. Mark my words, she'll find a reason to leave some needy child with you. And not a baby, either."

"Margaret," I said pointedly, "Brad and I are going to adopt an infant. This social worker, Evelyn, is helping us through the process, nothing more."

Margaret didn't respond for several minutes. Just when it seemed she was prepared to drop the subject, she added, "Finding an infant might not be that easy."

"Perhaps not," I agreed, unwilling to argue. "We'll have to wait and see what the adoption agency has to say."

"It might be expensive, what with lawyers and everything."

"Brad and I will cross that bridge when we come to it."

Margaret looked away, frowning slightly, as if she needed to consider every negative aspect of this process. "There are private adoption agencies, too, you know."

I did know about them, but it made better financial sense to approach the state agency first.

"What about adopting from outside the country?"

Margaret was apparently trying to be helpful, but I wasn't convinced I should let down my guard.

"We're holding that in reserve," I said.

"I hear it's even more expensive than private adoptions."

"Yes, well, it's another option to investigate...."

Margaret's shoulders rose in a deep sigh. "Are you going to tell Mom?"

With our mother's fragile health and declining mental condition it wasn't something I'd considered doing. "Probably not..."

Margaret nodded, her mouth a tight line.

"Mom has a hard enough time remembering that Cody's my stepson," I reminded her. On our last visit she'd asked copious questions about the "young man" I'd brought with me.

My sister swallowed visibly. “Mom didn’t recognize Julia when we went to see her a few days ago.”

I felt a jolt of pain—for Margaret, for her daughter, Julia, for Mom. This was the first time Margaret had mentioned it. Our mother’s mental state had declined rapidly over the past two years and I suspected that in a little while she wouldn’t recognize me anymore, either. Margaret and I shared responsibility for checking in on her and making sure she was well and contented. These days my sister and I had taken over the parental role, looking after our mother.

I could pinpoint exactly when that role reversal had taken place. It’d been the day Mom’s neighbor found her unconscious in the garden. She’d collapsed while watering her flowers. Everything had changed from that moment on.

Our mother had ceased to be the woman we’d always known. Living in a care facility now, she was increasingly confused and uncertain. It broke my heart to see Mom struggling so hard to hide her bewilderment at what was happening to her.

“Mom will be happy for you,” Margaret mumbled. “At some point her mind will clear and she’ll realize you have an infant.”

I smiled and hoped this was true, although I had my doubts... and I knew Margaret did, too.

The bell above the door chimed before we could discuss it further, and I glanced up at an attractive young woman who’d entered the shop. I hadn’t seen her before.

“Hello,” I said, welcoming her with an encouraging smile. “Can I help you?”

The woman nodded and toyed nervously with the cell phone in her hand. “Yes...I saw the notice in the window for the Knit to Quit class.”

“Do you know how to knit?”

She shook her head. “No...well, some. I learned years ago but I’ve forgotten. Would this class be too advanced for someone like me?”

“Not at all. I’m sure you’ll pick it up in no time. I’ll be happy to help you refresh your skills.” I went on to explain that there’d be seven sessions and told her the price of the class.

She nodded again. “You can sign up for the class no matter what you want to quit?” She stared down at the floor as she spoke.

“Of course,” I assured her.

“Good.” She set her bag and cell phone on the counter. “I’d like to pay now.” She handed me a credit card and I read her name—Phoebe Rylander.

“You’re our very first class member,” I told her.

“So the class starts next week?”

“Yes.”

“The sign said Wednesdays from six to eight?”

“Yes. I’m keeping the store open late. It’ll be my first night class.”

I processed her payment and wrote her name on the sign-up sheet. “What are you trying to quit?” I asked in a friendly voice.

“Not what, who,” she whispered.

“Oh...” Her answer took me by surprise.

“There’s a man I need to get over,” she said with tears in her eyes. “A man I...once loved.”

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