

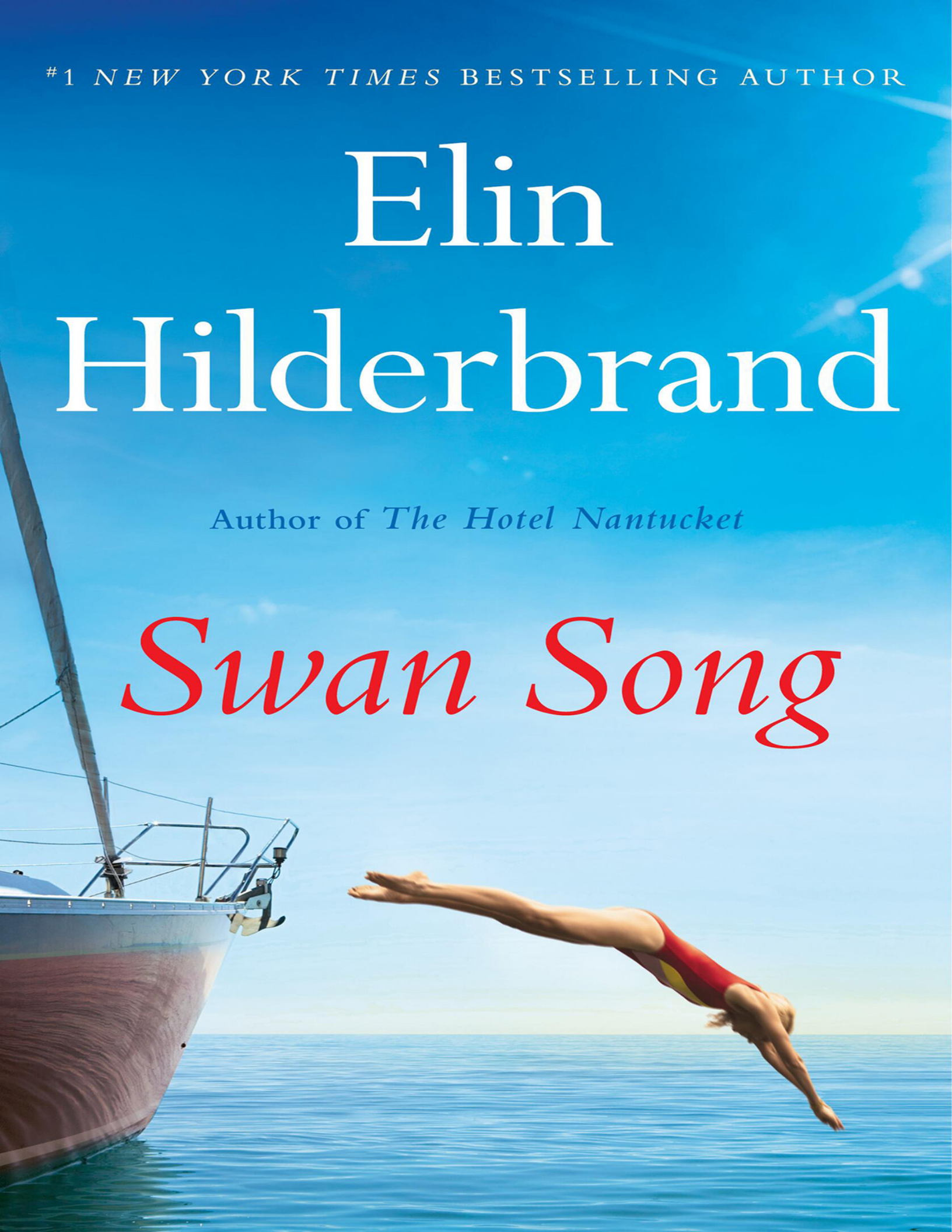
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Swan Song



Swan Song



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Little, Brown and Company
New York Boston London

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Little, Brown and Company

Hachette Book Group

1290 Avenue of the Americas,

New York, NY 10104

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First ebook edition: June 2024

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ISBN 9780316259705

E3-20240420-JV-NF-ORI

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*I will end where I began: This book is for
Chip Cunningham—with friendship and
profound gratitude.*

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LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY

Prologue

Thursday, August 22, 6:00 p.m.

Rumors about Nantucket Police chief Ed Kapenash's retirement have been swirling around for the past two years, though when asked directly, the Chief said, "I'm far too busy to contemplate retirement." However, three days after the Big Scare in February, Ed told his wife, Andrea (from his hospital bed at Mass General), "That's it, I'm finished, I'll just stay on through the summer while we find someone to replace me."

"Another *summer*, Ed?" Andrea cried out. She was shaken—and for good reason.

Ed had been giving a safety talk in the gymnasium of Nantucket Elementary when his left arm started to tingle. He felt short of breath, his vision splotched—and the next thing he knew, he was being loaded onto a medevac chopper and flown to MGH for emergency bypass surgery.

"You had the kind of heart attack we call the widow-maker," Dr. Very Important said. "A full blockage of your LAD artery. You were lucky the paramedics were right there. Otherwise this could have ended differently."

Yes, the fire chief—Stu Vick—and EMTs from his department had been in the school gym as well, waiting for their turn to speak, when Ed hit the floor.

As Dr. Big Shot gave Ed a lecture about exercise, diet, and, above all, *stress*, Ed gauged Andrea's reaction to the term *widow-maker*.

Not good.

"You should retire *now*," Andrea said. "You might not survive another summer." She looked at Dr. Master of the Universe because she needed him to hear the backstory. "Ed has been admitted to the Nantucket hospital three times in the past two years for chest pain.

They wanted to send him up here for testing but he *refused*."

Ed sighed. He'd married a tattletale. But also, Ed felt guilty. Had he played fast and loose with his health? Yes. Could he just give two weeks' notice and leave the public safety of the island up for grabs? He could not.

He would retire in the fall.

Now here it is, August 22, and the Chief is celebrating: His last official day of duty is Monday, August 26. His replacement, Zara Washington, was the deputy chief in Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, so she understands island life as well as Ed does. Zara has moved into her housing, and after two weeks of shadowing Ed, she is eager to take over. Andrea has planned a big retirement party for Ed at the Oystercatcher in a couple of weeks and there will be some official hoopla arranged by Governor Healey.

But for now, the Chief is enjoying a night out with his people: Andrea; his son, Eric, and Eric's girlfriend, Avalon; his best friends, Addison and Phoebe Wheeler and Jeffrey and Delilah Drake; and his daughter, Kacy, a NICU nurse who moved back from California this summer.

Kacy had intended to bring her friend Coco as her plus-one but... Coco works as the "personal concierge" for the Richardsons, a couple whom Ed and Andrea (and the Wheelers and the Drakes) became acquainted with this summer, and when Ed opted not to include the Richardsons in tonight's dinner, the Richardsons turned around and threw a sunset sail on their yacht, *Hedonism*—and so Coco has to work.

"I guess everyone has abandoned the Richardsons," Kacy said. "Coco didn't recognize the names on the guest list—they're mostly strangers."

Strangers who evidently hadn't been warned about the Richardsons, Ed thought. Some weird things had happened this summer.

Back in June, the Richardsons were a hot commodity; they'd nearly become part of "the Castaways," which is what the

Kapenashes and the Wheelers and the Drakes call their friend group (because they all “washed ashore” on Nantucket decades earlier). Part of the appeal of the Richardsons was that they were younger, still in their forties. The Castaways, Ed in particular, had been feeling their middle age.

For tonight’s dinner, Ed chose Ventuno, a restaurant housed in one of the historic residences downtown, and Andrea reserved the entire upstairs for them.

They ascend a narrow wooden staircase and find their table draped with white linen and lit by candles near the windows that overlook the charming brick sidewalks of Federal Street. All their guests have already arrived.

Ed takes his seat at the oval table and reminds himself to appreciate the things that Andrea accuses him of missing: the crystal wineglasses, the low centerpiece of dahlias and roses, the fact that Eric has worn a tie without being asked. The air smells of garlic and herbs; Tony Bennett croons in the background. This is exactly the evening Ed wanted—and yet he can’t help but feel melancholy. The summer is ending, and so is his career.

After Addison assesses the wine list—it’s long been his job to serve as their sommelier—he catches Ed’s eye over the top of the menu.

“There’s no time to get in your feelings, Ed,” he says. “A bold yet subtle Barolo awaits.”

The wine, Ed has to admit, tastes divine even to his unsophisticated palate (left to his own devices, he’s a beer drinker), though he holds himself to half a glass. What he’s really interested in tonight is food. Andrea is seated next to him but she’s whispering with Phoebe and Delilah about the Richardsons. *They couldn’t leave it alone; they had to one-up us!*

The Chief is going to use his wife’s obsession with the Richardsons to his advantage. He does some ordering for the table—two fritto mistos, the farfalle with crab and local corn (sourced from Jeffrey and Delilah’s farm), the strozzapreti with sausage and broccoli rabe, the ricotta crostini, the stuffed clams.

“Ed,” Andrea says in a warning tone. Andrea is the police chief

now, at least where Ed's diet is concerned.

Ed throws in an order of the giardiniera and a Caesar salad. He waits until Andrea turns away, then says to the server, "For the main course, the Fiorentina." This is the finest steak on the island; Ed dreams about it the way some men dream about Margot Robbie. It's a thirty-three-ounce porterhouse served with roasted rosemary potatoes. Ed pushes away thoughts of the salt, the fat, his heart. At home, it's been chicken, fish, and vegetables for the past six months.

When the steak arrives sizzling on the platter—the scent is enough to bring Ed to his knees—he helps himself to two rosy-pink pieces. This might be what kills him, but what a way to go.

Andrea notices the fried shrimp and squid, the helpings of pasta, and the rare steak, but she zips her lip. She's proud of Ed—he's lost thirty-five pounds, started jogging three mornings a week, switched to decaf coffee, stopped going to the Nickel four times a week for lunch (the shrimp po'boy is his kryptonite), and he's at least pretending to meditate ten minutes each day. Andrea is also relieved that they made it to the end of the summer without any major incidents. That's not to say the summer was boring—au contraire! The moment Phoebe introduced them to Addison's new clients the Richardsons, their summer became a blur of lunches at the Field and Oar Club, pickleball, sailing excursions, and parties, parties, parties. Andrea hasn't had a summer like this since before her kids were born. For most of the summer, the Richardsons seemed like a gift sent from the heavens to remind them that they weren't too old to have fun.

But when Andrea thinks about the Richardsons now, she... no, she won't let them live rent-free in her head. She'll just feel happy that Ed is enjoying his steak.

Addison makes a toast. "To our fearless leader!" Everyone raises a glass; Ed is honored but also a little embarrassed. He drinks his red wine—he thinks Addison might have refilled his glass without his noticing—and suddenly he grows reflective.

He moved to Nantucket from Swampscott thirty-five years earlier when the chief of police position opened. People had warned him that policing on an island would be different than on the mainland. It was like a small town except that it was thirty miles out to sea, so there was no getting away. This has been tricky enough to navigate even in the off-season, and during Ed's tenure, the year-round population has doubled. But come June, the island explodes with summer residents, short-term renters, and day-trippers, some of whom feel inclined to rent mopeds despite not having a clue how to operate them. There's traffic to deal with, scores of parking tickets on the daily, kids from the cities and fancy suburbs with their designer drugs and entitled attitudes giving his officers lip.

Beyond that, there's real trouble—domestics, vandalism, drunk driving, overdoses, accidental deaths. Ed worked a case out in Monomoy half a dozen years earlier that he still believes was murder, though they never quite figured it out.

Their server shows up with a dessert sampler for the table—an apple crostata with cinnamon gelato, baba au rum, and cannoli.

Phoebe takes a bite of the crostata and says, "This tastes like fall."

"Blasphemy," Delilah says. "There's still an entire month of summer left."

Ed is considering a cannoli, but he's afraid he's pushed the limits of his diet far enough. Andrea is the one who places a cannoli on his plate, her cheeks flushed from the wine. She leans over and kisses him on the lips, a good kiss, one that promises more later. "It's your special night."

Ed gazes around the table, and his eyes land on Kacy. She looks wistful, maybe even lonesome; she keeps checking her phone. *It's funny*, the Chief thinks. *No matter how old your kids get, you still worry about them.* Kacy and Coco were close all summer, a Millennial Laverne and Shirley, but things between them seem to have cooled. When the Chief asked Andrea if Kacy and Coco had a falling-out, Andrea said, "They're grown women, Ed." Whatever *that* meant.

After coffee is served, there's another surprise. Their server turns

up the music—Harry Connick Jr. singing “It Had to Be You”—and moves the other tables so they have room to dance. Andrea takes Ed’s hand. “Come on, Chief, let’s show them how it’s done.”

Phoebe and Addison join them on the improvised dance floor, then Jeffrey and Delilah. In that moment, the word *retirement*, a term that previously evoked only dread for the Chief, seems filled with promise. The weight of the island’s problems will be lifted from his shoulders. He and Andrea can travel; he’ll be able to go out fishing on Eric’s charter boat whenever he wants—maybe he’ll even take a job as Eric’s first mate. They’ll enjoy other nights like this when the Chief can have more than half a glass of wine.

He’ll be free.

“Are you sure you won’t get sick of me hanging around all the time?” he asks Andrea. Before she can answer, Ed’s phone buzzes in his pocket.

Andrea groans. “Please just let it go.”

He checks the screen. It’s the station, line four, which means it’s an emergency.

“I’m sorry,” Ed says. “I have to—”

He steps off the dance floor, lifts the phone to one ear, and plugs his other ear with two fingers. It’s his dispatcher, the aptly named Jennifer Speed, whom they just call Speed. The woman defines *efficiency*. “Do you want the bad news or the bad news?” she asks.

The Chief doesn’t want any news and Speed knows it. He has one hundred hours left as Nantucket’s police chief. “What is it?”

“There’s a fire out in Pocomo,” Speed says. “The NFD is on the scene. I talked to Stu, who says it’s a total loss. Burned to the ground.”

“Pocomo?” the Chief says. “It’s not...”

“The Richardsons’ house, yes, it is,” Speed says. She pauses. “Was.”

The Chief closes his eyes. He feels Andrea’s hand on his back.

“What else?” he says.

“Their assistant, woman by the name of Colleen Coyle?”

“Coco, yes,” the Chief says. “I know her. She’s a friend of Kacy’s.”

“Apparently the Richardsons were having a party on their yacht

when someone called them about the smoke at their house, and they hightailed it back. The girl, Coco, was on the boat, but when they got back to the mooring, she was gone. As in, no longer on the boat."

"No longer on the boat?" the Chief says. "Where did she go?"

"Nobody knows," Speed says. "She's missing."

"Is she the only one?"

"As far as I know, everyone else on the boat is accounted for, and Captain..."

"Lamont?" the Chief says.

"Yes, Lamont Oakley called the harbormaster. The harbormaster called us."

The Chief turns back to the table. Kacy's face is bathed in blue light from her phone; she gasps and looks up at him. The *Nantucket Current* must have just broken the story.

"Thank you, Speed," he says. The Richardsons' house burned down, and Coco is missing? The Chief wants to believe this is a prank, a gotcha for his final days. But he knows it's real. If he's honest, he would admit he feared something awful like this would happen with the Richardsons. "Tell them I'm on my way."