50 Harbor Street

Debbie Macomber

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Extract

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One

Corrie McAfee was worried. And she knew that her husband, Roy, was too.

Who wouldn't be? Starting in July, Roy—a private investigator—had received a series of anonymous postcards, and while the messages weren't overtly threatening, they were certainly distressing.

The first communication, which had been mailed to the office, spoke of regrets. During the intervening weeks, there'd been several others. Corrie had read each postcard so often she'd memorized them all. The first one stated: EVERYONE HAS REGRETS. IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'VE DONE YOU WISH YOU COULD DO OVER? THINK ABOUT IT. There hadn't been a signature then, or on any of the other cards. They'd arrived at infrequent intervals and been mailed from different locations. The cryptic messages kept playing in her mind. The passing of time hadn't helped; she was as much in the dark now, in October, as when she'd seen that first postcard.

There was a final gasping, gurgling sound as the coffee drained into the glass pot. The noise distracted Corrie from

her worries for a moment—long enough to glance out the wide office window that overlooked downtown Cedar Cove, Washington. Serving as Roy's secretary and assistant had its advantages, and in this instance, disadvantages. Sometimes ignorance truly was bliss; the current situation was definitely one of those cases. She'd sleep better if she'd never learned about the mysterious postcards.

And yet…even if Roy had managed to keep them hidden from her, she would still have known—because the last message had been hand-delivered, at night, to their front door. Not to the office like the others, but to their home. Late one evening, someone had walked up the sidewalk and onto the porch of their house. As it happened, Roy and Corrie were entertaining dinner guests that night—and had opened the door to discover that an unknown person had left a fruit basket and an accompanying note. Chills raced up Corrie's spine at the thought that this person knew their home address.

"Is that coffee ready yet?" Roy called from inside his office. Apparently she hadn't delivered it fast enough.

"Hold your horses—it's coming." Corrie didn't mean to snap at her husband. Normally she wasn't short-tempered. This uncharacteristic outburst revealed how upset she was by everything that was happening to them. Sighing, she filled a clean mug for Roy and carried it, steam rising, into his office.

"Okay, that does it," she said, putting the coffee on the corner of his desk. "We have to talk."

As if he didn't have a care in the world, Roy leaned back in his chair and locked his fingers behind his head. They'd been married for twenty-seven years, and Corrie found him as attractive now as she had in college. Roy had played football for the University of Washington and been a "big man on campus," as they used to say. He was tall and broad-shoul-

dered, still muscular, his posture as straight as ever. He stayed in good shape without apparent effort, and Corrie envied, just a bit, the fact that he'd never gained any weight. His dark hair had thinned and was streaked with gray, which only added a look of dignity to his appearance.

Of all the women he dated during college, he'd fallen in love with *her.* Theirs hadn't been an easy courtship, though. They'd broken up for more than a year, and then reunited. Once they were back together, they realized how much they loved each other; there'd been no uncertainty about their feelings. They were married shortly after graduation and their love had endured through trials and tribulations, through good years and bad. They'd had plenty of both.

"Talk about what?" Roy asked casually.

His nonchalance didn't fool Corrie. Her husband knew exactly what was on her mind. "Does THE PAST HAS A WAY OF CATCHING UP WITH THE PRESENT tell you anything?" she murmured, sitting down in the chair normally reserved for clients. She wanted Roy to understand that she wouldn't be put off easily. She was afraid he knew more about these postcards than he'd let on. It would be just like him to try to protect her.

Roy frowned. "Those messages don't have anything to do with you, so don't worry about it."

His answer infuriated her. "How can you say that? Everything that happens to you affects me."

He seemed about to argue, but after all these years, he recognized that she wasn't going to be satisfied with glib reassurances. "I'm not sure what to tell you. I've made enemies and, yes, I have regrets, but who doesn't?"

Roy had reached the rank of detective for the Seattle Police Department and been forced into early retirement because of a back injury. In the beginning, Corrie had been excited to

have her husband at home. She'd hoped they'd be able to travel and do some of the things they'd always planned, but it hadn't worked out that way. Roy had the time now, but their finances had been adversely affected when he'd had to take early retirement. Their income was less than it had been by at least twenty percent. In a money-saving effort, they'd moved from Seattle and across Puget Sound to the community of Cedar Cove. The cost of property was much more reasonable in Kitsap County, which also offered a slower pace of life. When the real estate agent showed them the house at 50 Harbor Street, with its wide front porch and sweeping view of the cove and lighthouse, Corrie knew immediately that this house and this town would become their home.

They'd moved from the big city, and it hadn't been as much of an adjustment as Corrie had feared. Folks in town were pleasant, and Roy and Corrie had made a few good friends—notably the Beldons—but kept mostly to themselves. They knew their neighbors' names and exchanged greetings, but that was about it.

To Corrie's disappointment, Roy had grown restless with retirement. His moods had reflected his boredom, and he was frequently cantankerous. Everything changed when he decided to rent office space and hang out his shingle as a private investigator. It was a decision Corrie had encouraged. Soon her husband was busy and looking forward to each day. He took on the cases that suited him and turned down those that didn't. Corrie was proud of Roy's skills, proud of his success and the way he cared about his clients. Never did it occur to her, or apparently to Roy, that one day he'd be solving his own mystery.

"You could be in danger," Corrie murmured, letting her anxiety show. She refused to hide her feelings, refused to pretend all was well when it wasn't.

Roy shrugged. "I doubt I'm in jeopardy. If anyone wanted to do me harm, they would've done so before now."

"How can you say that?" she asked irritably. "Bob was followed, and we both know it wasn't Bob they were interested in. He was driving your car. They thought they were following *you.*"

Bob Beldon, together with his wife, Peggy, was the owner of the local Bed-and-Breakfast, Thyme and Tide. Bob had borrowed Roy's car and phoned in a near panic, sure he was being followed. Roy had advised him to drive immediately to the sheriff's office. As soon as Bob had pulled in to the station, the tail had left him. Only later did Roy and Corrie figure it out. Whoever had shadowed Bob had assumed it was Roy driving.

"The letter said we're in no danger," her husband reminded her.

"Of course! That's what they *want* us to think," Corrie argued. "Whoever's doing this wants us to lower our guard."

"Now, Corrie—"

She cut him off, rejecting any further attempts to pacify her. "That basket was delivered to our front porch. This… stranger walked right up to our home and left it, and now you're telling me we have nothing to worry about?" Her voice quavered, and she realized how close she was to losing control of her emotions. She was tired of being afraid, tired of waiting for the next message—or worse. Tired of waking up with her eyes burning from lack of sleep. Her first conscious thought every morning was fear of what might happen that day.

"The basket came over a week ago, and we've heard nothing since." Roy said this as if this was supposed to comfort her. It didn't.

"There was no postcard in the mail today, was there?"

he asked, and she heard an unmistakable hint of tension in his voice.

"No." Corrie had collected the mail, flipped through it and tossed the bundle of bills and circulars on her desk.

Roy nodded, as if to say *Well, then?*

"Roy," she said with deceptive calm, "I can't remember the last time I slept a night straight through. You're not sleeping well, either."

He didn't agree or disagree.

"We can't go on pretending everything's all right."

Roy's handsome features tightened. "I'm doing everything I can," he told her curtly.

"I know, but it isn't enough."

"It has to be."

Corrie wasn't an expert in the area of investigations, but she knew when it was time to seek help, and they were well past that point. "You need to talk to somebody."

"Who?" he asked.

The only person she could suggest was the local sheriff. "Troy Davis…"

"Not a good idea," Roy said. "Whatever this is about happened long before we moved to Cedar Cove."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Regrets. Every postcard mentions regrets. There isn't a cop who *doesn't* have regrets—about things we've done or haven't done or should've done differently."

She thought—but didn't say—that every human being had regrets. It wasn't restricted to cops.

"The last message said I JUST WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU DID. DON'T YOU HAVE A SINGLE REGRET? To me, that implies I did something—arrested someone, testified against someone—when I was a detective for Seattle."

Her voice fell to a whisper. "You were on the force a lot of years. Surely there's a case or two that stands out in your mind."

Roy shook his head. "Do you think I haven't thought about that? You've seen me read through my files and notes, going all the way back to my first year on the force, and there's nothing."

"I don't know… You haven't talked to me. You block me out."

"I'm protecting you."

"Don't!" she cried with barely controlled anger. "I *need* to know—I have to know. Don't you see what this is doing to me?"

Roy leaned forward then, bracing his elbows against the desk. "I'm sorry," he whispered. "I've wracked my brain and I can't think of anyone who'd come after me like this."

"But there must be some case… One you might've forgotten."

Obviously at a loss, Roy shook his head again. "Clearly I have. I've put murderers away and received my share of threats over the years, but I can't think of anyone who'd do this. Yet who else could it be?" he said, almost to himself.

"What do you mean?" She was more in control now. Clutching a wadded tissue in her hand, she inhaled a calming breath.

"The type of people I dealt with weren't subtle. If they wanted revenge, they wouldn't bother with postcards."

"A relative of some criminal you sent to jail? Or…a victim?" That was a possibility she'd entertained more than once.

He raised his shoulders in a slight shrug. "Could be."

"What are we supposed to do now?" It was this constantly being on guard, not knowing what to expect, that had driven Corrie to such an emotional extreme.

"We do nothing."

"Nothing?" This wasn't what she wanted to hear. "How can we?"

"We have to, for now, until they make a mistake. That'll happen, sweetheart, I promise you, and once it does, this nightmare will be over."

"You promise?" she repeated.

Roy's expression softened and he nodded. Offering her further reassurance, he extended his arm across the desk. Corrie reached for his hand and laced her fingers through his. Her husband gazed deep into her eyes. She felt his love, his comfort, and for now it was enough. For today, for this morning at least, she would be fine. Her problem, Corrie decided, was that she was just so tired. Everything would seem less frightening if she could get even one decent night's sleep.

The front door to the office opened, and Roy abruptly released her and stood. From his years of police work he was always on the alert, never more so than now.

"Mom, Dad?" Their daughter's voice rang from the outer office where Corrie's desk was situated.

"Linnette," Corrie cried eagerly, although her enthusiasm might have seemed a little strained. "We're in here."

Their daughter came into the room, then paused, an uncertain expression on her face. She was petite like Corrie, with dark hair and eyes. Also like Corrie, Linnette had excelled in school, and because she was the daughter of a policeman, she'd always been sheltered. Her studies had kept her from pursuing much of a social life, but Corrie hoped that would change now. Linnette had never had a serious boyfriend.

"I'm not interrupting anything, am I?" Linnette glanced suspiciously from Corrie to Roy and back again. "Is everything all right?"

"It's fine," Corrie assured her in a rush. "Why shouldn't it be?"

Their daughter was far too intuitive to be easily fooled, but thankfully she let it pass. "I've found an apartment," Linnette announced and did a small jig around the office.

"Where?" Corrie asked, hoping it was in town. Linnette had been hired by the new Cedar Cove Medical Clinic as a physician assistant, and Corrie was thrilled to have her closer.

"It's on the cove, just down from the Waterfront Park," Linnette explained. "The complex next to the Holiday Inn Express."

Corrie knew the apartment building, since she passed it nearly every day when she went for her afternoon walk. The building was close to the marina and a short distance from the library. The two-story complex had a fabulous water view of the cove and lighthouse, with the Bremerton shipyard in the distance. As far as Corrie was concerned, this was perfect.

"I hope they aren't charging you an arm and a leg," Roy cautioned, but Corrie could tell he was pleased.

"The rent, compared to what I was paying in Seattle, is a bargain."

"Good."

Roy was still protective of his little girl. Unfortunately, he had a difficult time expressing his feelings for his children—especially their son. Mack and his father were constantly at odds. In Corrie's opinion, they were too much alike. Mack seemed to know exactly what to say to irritate Roy. And Roy wasn't blameless, either; he seemed to go out of his way to find fault with their son. Because of the tension between them, they generally avoided each other. Corrie didn't like it. Most of the time, she felt trapped in the middle. Thankfully

that wasn't the case with Linnette, who was two years older than her brother.

Linnette was talking about the apartment and the move-in date and her job at the clinic. Corrie nodded at the appropriate moments but only listened with half an ear. Roy returned to his work while Corrie walked back to her desk, Linnette following her.

"Mom," Linnette said as soon as they were in the other room. She lowered her voice, and her face was thoughtful. Concerned. "Are you *sure* everything's all right between you and Dad?"

"Of course! What makes you ask?"

Her daughter hesitated. "Just now, when I came into the office, it looked like you were ready to cry, and Dad… he—his eyes were so…hard. I've never seen him that intense. I didn't know what to think."

"You're imagining things," Corrie insisted.

"No, I'm not."

"It's nothing. We'll talk about it later." Her daughter could be obstinate, definitely a trait she'd inherited from Roy. The last person Corrie intended to share her worries with was Linnette. Eventually, perhaps, once this was all settled, they could laugh about it over lunch. But for now, these postcards were no laughing matter.

"You dropped a piece of mail," Linnette said, gesturing toward the desk.

Corrie froze. "I did?"

"Yes, there was a postcard on the floor when I came in. I put it on your desk."

Roy must have heard because he came out of the other office. His eyes met Corrie's. "Give it to me," he instructed.

A small protest rose from her throat as she walked over to retrieve the card. Carefully she turned it over and read the message before handing it to Roy.

It said in large block letters: ARE YOU THINKING YET?

"Mom," Linnette demanded. "You'd better tell me what's going on."

Make time for friends. Make time for ***Debbie Macomber****.*

CEDAR COVE
16 LIGHTHOUSE ROAD
204 ROSEWOOD AVENUE
311 PELICAN COURT
44 CRANBERRY POINT
50 HARBOR STREET
6 RAINIER DRIVE

BLOSSOM STREET
THE SHOP ON BLOSSOM STREET
A GOOD YARN
OLD BOYFRIENDS
WEDNESDAYS AT FOUR
TWENTY WISHES
SUMMER ON BLOSSOM STREET
HANNAH'S LIST

THURSDAYS AT EIGHT

CHRISTMAS IN SEATTLE

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