

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 introduces Phoebe Stone, who arrives at the Cornwall Inn, an elegant hotel perched high on a cliff, overlooking the expansive ocean. The scene is painted with nostalgia and an overwhelming sense of both excitement and uncertainty. As she steps out of the cab wearing a striking emerald silk dress—the only possession she truly values after her recent divorce—Phoebe finds herself at a crossroads. She leaves behind her old life in St. Louis, including her marriage and possessions, entering an unfamiliar world amidst the global lockdowns. The weight of her past life lingers, but there is also a feeling of liberation, as she begins to forge a new path, even though the sense of disorientation persists.

As Phoebe reflects on her life before the divorce, memories of the mundane routines she followed as a professor flood her thoughts. Life during the pandemic had been predictable, comfortable in its simplicity, yet it now feels distant from the person she is becoming. She acknowledges the discomfort of no longer fitting into that previous mold of predictability. This realization propels her journey to Newport, a place she hopes will offer a fresh perspective. The emerald dress she chose before leaving for Newport is a symbol of this transformation. It is a bold departure from the conservative, predictable attire of her past life, and it marks her desire to reclaim herself in a world that has shifted beyond recognition.

Upon entering the Cornwall Inn, Phoebe's emotional state fluctuates between anticipation and confusion. The hotel is bustling with activity, and the check-in line is unexpectedly long, filled with couples preparing for weddings, a stark contrast to Phoebe's lonely, solitary presence. As she observes the wedding guests, she feels detached from their joy and companionship, as if she is standing on the outside looking in. The bride, with all her attention and affection focused on her, symbolizes everything Phoebe wishes she could possess—connection, happiness, and certainty.

about her place in the world. The disparity between the life Phoebe once knew and the one she is trying to embrace only deepens her sense of disconnection.

Finally checking in, Phoebe finds herself caught in a brief conversation with the front desk attendant, which offers little more than pleasantries. However, this exchange serves as a catalyst for Phoebe's internal reflection. She had imagined the Cornwall Inn as her "happy place," a retreat she had dreamed of visiting for years after seeing it in a travel magazine. But as the conversation unfolds, she is confronted with the realization that her emotional baggage is far from left behind. Her name, "Phoebe Stone," which once represented her past life, now feels foreign to her. It is a symbol of the identity she is struggling to leave behind, as if she cannot fully shake off the remnants of her former self.

In the quiet moments that follow, Phoebe reflects on the isolation she feels, not only from others but from herself. She is acutely aware of the sadness that lingers within her, no matter where she goes. The weight of her past life, her divorce, and her identity struggle are carried with her like a shadow that refuses to let go. Phoebe's journey is not just physical but deeply emotional, as she contemplates the path ahead. The chapter concludes with a poignant realization that a "happy place" is not defined solely by location but by the emotional state one brings with them. Despite the grandeur of the Cornwall Inn, Phoebe understands that true peace will not be found until she addresses the emotional turmoil she carries inside. The inner sadness, no matter the place or circumstances, remains an integral part of her journey.