

## Falling

By Jane Green

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### Falling By Jane Green

**The *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Beach House*, *Jemima J*, and *Summer Secrets* presents a novel about the pleasure and meaning of finding a home—and family—where you least expect them...**

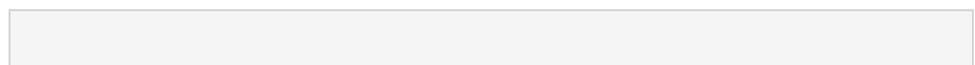
When Emma Montague left the strict confines of upper-crust British life for New York, she felt sure it would make her happy. Away from her parents and expectations, she felt liberated, throwing herself into Manhattan life replete with a high-paying job, a gorgeous apartment, and a string of successful boyfriends. But the cutthroat world of finance and relentless pursuit of more began to take its toll. This wasn't the life she wanted either.

On the move again, Emma settles in the picturesque waterfront town of Westport, Connecticut, a world apart from both England and Manhattan. It is here that she begins to confront what it is she really wants from her life. With no job, and knowing only one person in town, she channels her passion for creating beautiful spaces into remaking the dilapidated cottage she rents from Dominic, a local handyman who lives next door with his six-year-old son.

Unlike any man Emma has ever known, Dominic is confident, grounded, and committed to being present for his son whose mother fled shortly after he was born. They become friends, and slowly much more, as Emma finds herself feeling at home in a way she never has before.

But just as they start to imagine a life together as a family, fate intervenes in the most shocking of ways. For the first time, Emma has to stay and fight for what she loves, for the truth she has discovered about herself, or risk losing it all.

In a novel of changing seasons, shifting lives, and selfless love, a story unfolds—of one woman's far-reaching journey to discover who she is truly meant to be...



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### Editorial Review

Review

**“Readers of Emily Giffin’s novels or those who enjoy a love story with heart will adore this tale of homecoming and transformation.”—*Library Journal***

**“The perfect summer read.”—ABCNews.com**

Praise for the novels of Jane Green

“Gripping and powerful.”—Emily Giffin, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“The perfect summer read.”?Kristin Hannah, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“A warm bath of a novel that draws you in...Green’s sympathetic portrayals...resonate.”—*USA Today*

“Warm, witty, sharp and insightful. Jane Green writes with such honesty and zing.”?Sophie Kinsella, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Her compelling tale reflects an understanding of contemporary women that’s acute and compassionate, served up with style.”? *People*

“The kind of novel you’ll gobble up at a single sitting.”—*Cosmopolitan*

“A smart, complex, character-driven read.”—*The Washington Post*

“[Green’s novels] consistently deliver believable, accessible, heartfelt, often heartwarming stories about real people, problems, and feelings.”—*Redbook*

About the Author

A former journalist in the U.K. and a graduate of the International Culinary Center in New York, **Jane Green** has written many novels (including *Jemima J*, *The Beach House*, and, most recently, *Falling*), most of which have been *New York Times* bestsellers, and one cookbook, *Good Taste*. Her novels are published in more than twenty-five languages, and she has over ten million books in print worldwide. She lives in Westport, Connecticut, with her husband and a small army of children and animals.

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CHAPTER 1

It's lovely," she lies, in her most gracious of voices, looking around at the tired wood paneling lining the walls of the living room, floor to ceiling. As she looks down, her gaze lands on well-worn salmon-pink shag carpeting and quickly conceals her horror.

Emma wonders if this house might not even be beyond her capabilities to transform. Perhaps the landlord would let her paint it? Surely he would let her paint it—who wouldn't want to lighten up this room, so dark it feels more like a cave? She would paint it for free, *and* pull up that carpet. Maybe she would be lucky and find a hardwood floor underneath; even if it was merely concrete, surely it wouldn't cost anything to stick down some inexpensive sisal.

This room could be transformed, she determined. Lipstick on a pig was her specialty.

Her landlord, or potential landlord, smiles. "Hey, I know it's not everyone's taste today," he says. "Why do people want everything to be gray and modern?"

Emma is surprised by his comment, surprised frankly by his interest in making small talk. "I hate that look," Emma offers. It happens that she does agree, quite passionately, in fact. "None of those decorated houses feel like real homes."

"Exactly!" he says in delight. "This is a home."

Struck by his words, by the obvious sincerity with which they are spoken, she turns to look at her potential landlord for the first time. She can't help but feel struck by the sight of him. He is not tall, only a couple

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of inches taller than her, with skin tanned by the sun and an easy smile that seems to put her at ease. It isn't so much that she finds him attractive, but that there is something familiar about him, a recognition, a sense of having somehow met him before.

Perhaps because she has remained silent, he goes on to add, "At least, it was a home. My grandparents lived

here for forty years.”

*Yes, thinks Emma, it looks like it. It smells like it, too.* The air is fusty. Of course old people had lived here. That explains the wood paneling and the floral wallpaper in the family room; it also explains the salmon? pink carpet and avocado?green bathroom suite with matching tile.

“How would you feel about me putting . . .” Emma pauses, wondering how to say this diplomatically. She doesn’t want to jump in and tell him she’d like to tear everything out and start again. He probably doesn’t want to change anything; his voice had softened when he mentioned his grandparents. She has an odd reluctance to offend him, and she senses she’ll need to take this slowly if she wants this house. “. . . a woman’s touch on the house?”

“A woman’s touch!” The landlord smiles and nods approvingly. “That’s exactly what I’ve been saying this house needs for years. A woman’s touch.”

She follows him into the kitchen at the back of the house and her heart sinks slightly. It hasn’t been touched since the fifties, rough wood cabinets bumpy with layers of white paint, although pretty black iron hardware. Formica countertops with large cracks, and linoleum floors. A stove that is so ancient as to be fashionable again, and, surprisingly, a large modern stainless?steel fridge.

Emma looks at the fridge and raises an eyebrow as she looks over at the landlord.

Damn, she thinks. What was his name again? Donald? Derek? Something like that.

“The old fridge gave up last year,” he explains. “The tenants picked out this one. And I paid for it,” he adds quickly, as if to reassure her that he is a good landlord, on top of everything, ready to jump in and deal with problems.

“Great,” says Emma, wandering over to the back door and peering out through the glass onto a fenced?in garden, or what could be a garden if the weeds were cleared. “Can I go outside?” she asks, already out the door.

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He follows her out, apologizing for the weeds. They both stand there as Emma looks around, her imagination already firing. There are two filthy peeling rattan chairs stacked off to the side, surrounded by boxes and baskets: in other words, trash.

The landlord turns to look and immediately apologizes. “I haven’t been out here,” he explains. “Obviously all of that will be gone. I can replace those chairs with new ones.”

Emma is again struck by him. His eagerness to please doesn’t seem solely mercenary. He wants her to know that he cares about the house and yard. “Do I get to choose what kinds of chairs the new ones are? Like the fridge?” Emma says.

“As long as they’re not too expensive.”

“I am the expert at renovating on a shoestring.” She smiles.

“You’re my kind of woman.” He laughs, as Emma flushes slightly and turns away. A flirtatious landlord is the last thing she wants right now. “Sorry.” He apologizes immediately, realizing his mistake. “I was kidding. But I’m happy for you to choose things as long as they’re within the budget.”

Emma looks up at the sky, noting the sun, looking at the shadows to try and figure out which way the garden faces. “Southwest,” she guesses, and he turns to her with a smile.

“You’re a sun worshipper?”

“With this pale English skin?” She laughs and shakes her head. “I turn into one giant freckle in the sun. But I am a gardener. At least, a frustrated one. For years and years, I lived in flats in London dreaming of having a garden of my own. Then for the last five years I’ve been on the top of a high-rise in Battery Park.” Good lord. Why is she suddenly giving him her life story?

“Ah, so you’re a city girl.” “Not by choice.”

“You’re ready to be out here?”

“Ready to be steps from the beach, in a gorgeous town where the pace of life is relaxed and the pressure is off? No. Definitely not.”

He laughs. “I’ve lived here my whole life, and wouldn’t move any?

where else. How did you find Westport?”

“I have a friend who lives here, who I used to work with. She moved out three years ago after she had a baby, and she loves it. I’ve been out

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to visit her quite a few times, and something about this place feels right. I never thought I’d be able to move out here permanently, but . . . I needed to make some big changes in my life. Moving somewhere like this, with a quieter pace of life, seemed like a good first step.”

“I saw on your application you’re a banker. That’s quite a commute.” “Actually,” Emma says. “I took a package. I’m now officially unemployed, albeit with a very nice severance. I hope that won’t be a problem?”

“As long as you pay your rent, nothing’s a problem. What are you going to do here in town?”

Emma is struck again by the sincerity of his interest. He is not just making small talk, she is sure of it. He’s looking at her, making her feel like he cares about what she’ll say next. She shakes her head. “Thankfully, I have enough to have a little bit of breathing space. I don’t really know. I’ve always had a dream about doing something with the home. Interior design, gardening, that sort of thing. I’ve been doing an online course to

get the official qualification. Now all I need are clients.”

“And a house to do up.”

“And a garden to transform. Preferably one that faces southwest.” She grins as she looks around the garden.

He grins, too. “Then you’ve found it. It seems that you and this house were meant to be. Although, you couldn’t do anything major to it without consulting with me.”

“Of course.” Emma laughs politely. She couldn’t move in *unless* she did something major with the house. As it is, it’s completely awful, but stepping back to take it in, even with all its flaws, she thinks she could turn this into a charming beach cottage.

The landlord seems like a nice guy. He may be resistant to her changes at first, but she surmised that she could ask forgiveness rather than permission for most things. If he walked into this room and found the wood painted a lovely chalky white, the floors covered with sisal, the single lightbulb replaced with a pretty glass pendant light, surely he would be thrilled. Who *wouldn’t* be thrilled at someone transforming

their house for nothing? He would undoubtedly get more money for it next time he decides to rent it out.

The truth is that Emma Montague isn’t looking for somewhere perma-

nent just yet. She’s just looking for a place to call home for the next year

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or so. A year to try to recover from the last five years of working in finance in New York. A year to try to figure out what kind of life she wants to live. For five years she has lived a life that wasn’t hers. Five years of utter exhaustion; five years of keeping her head down and working like the devil, putting away enough money to be able to afford to do what she is doing now, leaving the rat race and pursuing her dream. Her goal is to figure out what her dream is. Right now she only knows that the beginning step is to find a world and a life that feels like her own; a life in which she finally feels she belongs.

It starts with a house. She is itching to buy, but it is more sensible to rent, making sure this is where she wants to live. Still, the rentals down by the beach, here in Westport, Connecticut, are mostly prohibitive for a single girl with a budget, even an ex-banker. The last thing she wants to do is blow all her savings on rent.

This house, this dated, fusty house, is entirely within her budget, precisely because it *is* so dated and fusty. It is the perfect size—two bedrooms with a living room, kitchen, and family room that would make a perfect office.

And best of all there is a garden, or rather more than enough space for one. She can finally plant vegetables. She can put a gravel path down the middle, can grow tomatoes, cucumbers, and lettuce, plant roses and clematis over the fence at the back. She imagines a long, rustic table, a small group of friends sitting around, bottles of rosé and candles interspersed with galvanized steel pots of lavender running down the center. Laughter. Happy faces. Everyone lit by the glow of summer and love.

Emma shakes her head to bring herself back to earth. She knows only one person—her friend Sophie Munster—here in Westport. She has no other local friends she can invite to sit around the table, and since she's something of an introvert, it may take a little while to find them. But she will find them.

Although a bit of a loner, she is loyal, and fun, when she finds people with whom she is comfortable. She is thinking of taking up yoga, and maybe knitting. There are evening classes at the local yarn store, Sophie says. They should both go. Sophie grew up here, although she went away to boarding school. She has friends from grade school, though, seems to know almost everyone in town. Surely it's only a matter of time before Emma's fantasy of summer evenings comes true.

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*For as long as she can remember, Emma Montague has had a fascination with America. Growing up in her upper-crust family in Somerset, England, sent off to boarding school, then moving to London after university to enter the world of banking, she had the persistent belief that this was not supposed to be her life.*

As a little girl, she had never quite felt she fitted in. She was loved and treasured, but her boisterous, overbearing mother and loving but somewhat beleaguered and introverted father didn't quite know how to connect with their quiet, studious child. The place she felt happiest, the place she found her solace and joy, was in the pages of books.

She read all the time. It was so much easier than dealing with the chaos of her playmates during recess. She was close to one or two of her classmates, but she only liked seeing them one at a time. Otherwise, she was happier with her books. She was the child with the flashlight under the duvet late into every night. She would breeze through a book in a day and a half, then read it six more times.

She fell in love with America through the pages of these books. Her dull, patrician life in Gloucestershire felt very staid compared to the lives of Jo and her sisters in *Little Women*, and Katy in the *What Katy Did* series. She devoured the stories of Laura Ingalls Wilder and dreamed of having a farm out in the middle of nowhere, growing all her own vegetables, raising her own animals.

Life then got in the way, sweeping her up into the cutthroat world of London finance, not because she had a passion for finance, but because it was what all the girls were doing at that time. First London, then New York. Finally, now that she has extricated herself, it looks like she has a shot at the kind of life she might actually want to live.

Westport, Connecticut, may not be Walton's Mountain, but there are enough trees for her to pretend, and the beauty of the beach on the doorstep is something she now realizes she has always wanted.

When she was living in Manhattan she would go running along the river every morning before work. The sunlight glinting off the water

brought a calm and peace to every morning. She hadn't known how much she wanted to be by the water until Sophie drove her to Compo Beach for a walk one weekend. That was the moment she knew this was where she wanted to be.

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There had been a tremendous expectation for the life Emma was supposed to have led, at least from her parents. And she had tried to fit into the life they had designed for her. Namely, to work at a pretend job for a few years to enable her to meet the right kind of husband, before quickly getting pregnant, giving up work, and going on to raise three or four beautiful children in a lovely stone manse in Gloucestershire. Preferably near her parents. Have a couple of dogs, Gordon setters or pointers, possibly golden retrievers; have lots of local women friends who come for coffee. Get involved in the village fair and perhaps, given her love of books, institute a reading mentoring program in the less well-off town twenty minutes away.

Emma knew the path well, as it was the path so many of her childhood friends had taken. At thirty-seven, she is the only one still unmarried, apart from Imogen Cutcliffe, who is one of the leading lights of British screen and stage and about to star as the lead in a film starring Bradley Cooper. Emma is the only one who continued to work and rise up the corporate ladder, putting all her focus on making money. It wasn't that she cared about money for the sake of money, but that it was the only path out: making enough money to retire from banking in her thirties, and the freedom to pursue her dream. If she could figure out what her dream was.

She hadn't known her life was going to turn out like this. For a long time she imagined she would indeed follow the path her parents expected of her. She dated Rufus Fairfax for years throughout her twenties, not because she loved him, but because her parents loved him and he seemed to check all the right boxes. He was a banker in the firm where she worked, he was handsome (although he had not an ounce of sex appeal, as far as she was concerned), and he was of the right stock. Clever, but not very funny; in fact, he was achingly dull. But they looked so good together! They seemed to fit so perfectly together that everyone assumed they would get married from the moment they started going out. And Emma had presumed everyone was right, that everyone knew something she did not, and she was the one who must have been wrong.

She determined to make it work. She and Rufus spent their weekdays in London, both of them burning the candle at both ends, and their weekends in the country, usually staying with friends in crumbling old piles that were impossibly drafty, with terrible food and lots

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of drink to distract from the fact that everyone was freezing cold and permanently starving.

Rufus had a huge group of friends from boarding school that Emma always found rather awful. They were shockingly loud, and arrogant, fueled by absurdly expensive bottles of wine that they ordered in restaurants

to prove they could afford them. They shouted inside jokes from when they were all thirteen, their wives and girlfriends sitting with smiles plastered on their faces, pretending to be amused.

Emma started leaving these evenings early, claiming headaches and making her way up to bed during those country weekends, earplugs tucked into her overnight bag to help her sleep through the inevitable banging and shouting in the early hours of the morning when the party eventually broke up.

None of this fazed Rufus, who proposed to her four times. The first time he did so after a romantic dinner at Hakkasan, gazing at her over the course of the evening with a hopeful kind of love that Emma found slightly discomfiting. Each time, Emma said she just wasn't quite ready. Eventually, five years ago, Rufus issued an ultimatum: If she wouldn't marry him, he would find someone else who would, and with a great dramatic flounce, he packed up his things and left their Kensington flat. Emma knew he thought she would beg him to come back within a week or so, but from the minute he was gone, she felt nothing other than tremendous relief.

She had been playing the part of adoring girlfriend, probably— hopefully—soon-to-be-wife, for so long that she had forgotten how liberating it was to simply be herself. She saw girlfriends from university she hadn't seen for ages because Rufus disapproved of their drinking ("Darling, there's nothing quite so ghastly as a woman publicly drunk"). She got into bed at seven thirty p.m. with hummus and chips for dinner, and spent hours watching terrible reality television that Rufus would never have condoned.

She was happy, and happier still when she was called in to her superior's

office and asked if she would consider taking up a position with the bank in New York. They were starting a new private wealth management operation, specifically for English expatriates living on the East Coast of the United States, and they needed someone to head client relations.

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They would put together a package, they said. All moving expenses would be paid. She would be set up in an apartment, and there would be a healthy relocation allowance. They offered all of this as if to sweeten the deal, as if Emma weren't using everything she had, sitting in her office in her so-staid black Givenchy skirt and Manolo Blahnik d'Orsay heels (the perfect combination of elegant and sexy), not to break out in a scream of joy and twirl around the room, punching the air and whooping in a mad happy dance.

It was the fresh start she had been longing for, and better yet, in New York! The place she had always imagined living! Well, perhaps not quite New York City. She preferred to see herself in rural Vermont, or Maine, but at least it was across the pond, and she would get a green card, and at some point surely, surely, she'd make it out of the city and into the farmhouse of her dreams.

This is not the farmhouse of her dreams. This isn't even the beach cottage of her dreams. But it could be. With just a little bit of work, if her oddly welcoming landlord acquiesced, she could transform this into something, if not quite magnificent, at least beachy, and airy, and filled with charm.

They walk back through the house, Emma trying to see through the wallpaper, the linoleum, the salmon-pink

flat shag?pile carpet, as the landlord shows her out.

“It was great to meet you, Emma,” he says, meeting her gaze with a friendly smile and shaking her hand with a grip so firm she crumples slightly before flexing her fingers.

“Ouch!” she says, laughing.

“I’m so sorry!” he says, clearly mortified.

“It’s fine.” She smiles. What an unexpectedly friendly man he is. “I wasn’t expecting that, is all.”

“I’m Italian,” he says, by way of explanation, which makes no sense to

Emma whatsoever. “My family is known for its handshakes.” “Really?” She peers at him.

“No. I’ll work on it. Do you want to think about the house and let me know when you’ve made a decision?”

“That sounds great,” she says, wishing she could remember his name.

“Dominic,” he says, as if reading her mind.

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“Dominic,” she says confidently, as if she had remembered all the time. “Thank you so much. I’ll be in touch.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t invite me!” Sophie walks back into the kitchen, having put her soon-to-be-two-year-old down for a nap. “I would have loved to see it. Which house is it again?”

“The gray one with the overgrown garden?” says Emma, scooping up a handful of Goldfish crackers from the bowl Sophie’s son, Jackson, hadn’t touched. “On Compo. About four in. Maybe six. I don’t know. Close to the end of the road.”

“But it was awful?”

“It wasn’t *awful*. It’s just that it wasn’t great. But I’ve looked at every? thing online, and if I want something great it’s going to cost me at least twice as much. It seems ridiculous to pay so much money on rent, especially since I don’t know what I’m going to be doing or where I’m going to land. I’d much rather be frugal, or at least moderately frugal, and rent something I can turn into my own.” She sighs. “If he doesn’t let me change the inside I’ll just do it and say I’m sorry afterward. At least we’ve established that he’s definitely fine with me putting a garden in. And I could put a gorgeous garden in.”

“That won’t help you much in winter.”

“No, but it will give me something to look forward to. And can we not talk about winter yet? It’s June, for heaven’s sake. The last thing I want to think about is snow.”

Sophie shakes her head. “I can’t believe you’re actually going to be moving out here!” She grins suddenly. “This is the most exciting thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Apart from marrying Rob and having Jackson, you mean?”

“Well, yes. Apart from that. But it will be just like old times when we worked together. We can hang out every day. Imagine if we could get Hilary Trader to come and live here, too. God, we’d have fun. We’re going to have fun anyway, even if it’s just you and me. Do you need a second opinion about the house? Because I’m really happy to go see it if you need me to.”

“Oh, you’re sweet,” says Emma, blanching in horror at the thought of her friend, in her immaculate, brand-new, pseudo-modern farmhouse, every wall horizontally planked with perfect high-gloss

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white wood, her kitchen a panorama of white marble and gray cabinets, every chandelier hanging from the ten-foot ceilings a perfect cluster of crystal globes hanging from polished nickel fixtures, walking into the grimy little cottage by the beach.

“You would hate it,” Emma says. “You would think it the most disgusting house you have ever seen.”

Sophie looks offended. “Why would you say that? Just because I live in a new house doesn’t mean I can’t appreciate older homes.”

“Darling, this house isn’t just old, it’s dead. I have huge plans for it if I decide to take it, and I’m not even sure about that. But I honestly don’t think, even you, with your glorious taste, would be able to see through the brown flowery wallpaper and threadbare salmon carpet.”

Sophie wrinkles her pretty little nose. “That sounds gross.”

Emma laughs. “It is. But all that can be changed. I’m going to see a couple more rentals later this afternoon and hopefully, by the end of the day, I will have made a decision.”

## CHAPTER 2

Her phone rings just as Emma has put the last box down in the living room of her new home. She sighs looking at the screen, ready to divert it to voice mail. But she can't actually divert it, for her mother knows that if she gets voice mail after less than about seven rings, it is because Emma is choosing not to answer the phone. She silences the ringer instead.

The last person Emma wants to talk to is her mother. The last person Emma *ever* wants to talk to is her mother. But it's been a while, and better to get it out of the way, do her good deed for the day.

She thinks about Sophie, whose mother, Teddy (short for Theodora), lives in Westport and is as close to Sophie as a sister. Sophie always says she doesn't need a lot of friends, although she does in fact have tons of friends, most of whom she has known her entire life. She says this because her mother is her best friend, and Emma always smiles and says how lucky she is, not understanding how such a thing is possible.

The thought of *her* mother, Georgina Montague (born Georgia but changed to Georgina shortly after realizing her newly embarked relationship with Simon Montague was serious), being her best friend is nothing short of hilarious.

Emma has never felt particularly comfortable around her mother. In fact, she finds herself shrinking into corners to allow her mother to take center stage. She has always been aware that with her quieter personality and her occasional need for solitude, she is a source of both bewilderment and irritation to her mother. Her mother wants to be closer, too, she

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knows, wishing for the kind of daughter who goes shopping with her, accompanies her to fund?raisers, and provides her with the grandchildren she so desperately wants.

In many ways, moving across the Atlantic was the best thing for Emma and her mother. They don't have much in common, and their different personalities often result in Georgina unwittingly belittling Emma. Her barbs seem to be couched in tremendous good humor, or so it appears, unless you are paying the closest of attention.

Their relationship was better while Emma was with Rufus. Emma's parents adored Rufus, naturally, and still haven't quite gotten over the fact that Emma broke up the relationship. Rufus married the next little blond thing to come along, eight months after he and Emma broke up. Emma was stunned when her parents were invited to the wedding.

She presumed they wouldn't go, but they did, declaring it a high old time, with excellent grub and a darling bride who couldn't wait to start making babies with good old Rufus, who seemed over the moon.

Emma did what she always did when her parents unknowingly offended or upset her. She said good?bye as if nothing was wrong, then took a break from them. In the past, those breaks had sometimes lasted for six months or more. But they didn't notice. Her mother left numer?ous messages, not seeming to realize that anything was wrong, or per?haps hoping that if she pretended nothing was wrong it might entice her daughter back.

The hurt would heal—it always did—and Emma would eventually get back in touch, and there would be no mention of her going AWOL for six months, or however long it took to nurse her wounded feelings. Her mother cheerfully blundered through life, never noticing the bombs she threw around her (for Emma was not the only one to find her overbearing and insensitive), cheerfully carrying on as if life was peachy.

“Hi, Mum.”

“Hello, darling!” booms her mother's voice over the phone. “Just checking in with you. Isn't the big moving day coming up? Daddy and I were wondering if you needed help. It's a bit busy over here with all the summer festivals coming up, and you know how Daddy likes to enter his vegetables in the village fete, but we could absolutely jump on a plane if you need us. It's very hard moving on your own, though I

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know you've done it before, darling. But you were in your twenties then, and I don't want you to put your back out. Plus I'm terribly good at organizing, as you know, and I'm worried that you have no one to help you.”

In the room filled with nothing but empty boxes, Emma shakes her head. Her mother will take any opportunity to point out her single status. It used to upset her, but she has learned to let the comments wash over her head.

“It’s fine, Mum,” says Emma, knowing how much her mother hates being called Mum, infinitely preferring what she sees as the far more palatable Mummy.

“I changed the date of the move, so I’m already in my new place, actually,” she says, looking around the room defeatedly at the number of boxes. It’s not as if she were downsizing. She had lived relatively anonymously in her apartment in Battery Park, a small one-bedroom that she had always thought of as pleasantly minimalist.

She’d had no idea that her books would take up so many boxes. Nor her artwork, now stacked in three piles against the wall. Where did all this stuff come from?

Dominic had had the dreadful salmon carpet professionally cleaned, and had regouted the bathroom. The new bright-white grouting did little to help the avocado-green tile, but at least Emma thought she could bear to step into the shower.

After looking at other far more lovely, but far pricier options in neighboring towns, her only choice if she wanted to stay both solvent and by the beach was this one. She had phoned Dominic the next day to confirm. He sounded delighted, that unusual sincerity in his voice again—but on the other hand who wouldn’t be delighted with one quiet tenant with lots of books and no dogs. Two weeks later, she was preparing to head out, having given up her sparkling New York City apartment for . . . this.

“Darling! You should have said! How is the new place? Is it gor?

geous? Do you love it?”

Emma suppresses a snort. “Not exactly. I think the best way to describe it is that it has a tremendous amount of potential.”

“That sounds like a perfect project for you,” says Georgina. “What can we send you for a housewarming present? What about a lovely

## **FALLING**

teapot? Or a set of bowls? Actually, I have those lovely green bowls from Grandmere”—when had Grandma become Grandmere, Emma thinks wryly—“which would be perfect for a young, well . . . youngish girl on her own. Why don’t I send those?”

Emma instantly pictures the bowls, a faded green milk glass, pos?

sibly pretty once, now scratched and stained after years of use.

“It’s okay, Mum,” she says. “I don’t need a housewarming present. At least, not yet. Let me get settled, then I’ll let you know what I need.”

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