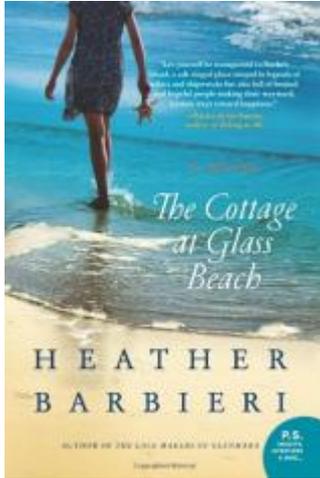


The Cottage at Glass Beach

by Heather Barbieri



About the Book

Forty-year-old Nora Cunningham has it all: a handsome husband, Malcolm --- the youngest attorney general in Massachusetts state history --- and two healthy, lively daughters, Annie, 7, and Ella, 11. That is, until she and the rest of the world learn of Malcolm's affair, and his refusal to give up his lover turns their lives upside down.

At the height of the scandal, Nora receives an invitation to visit her maternal aunt on Burke's Island, off the coast of Maine. To escape the growing political storm and gain perspective on her marriage, Nora packs up her daughters and heads to the remote community, originally settled by Irish immigrants. Nora hasn't been there since she was three, the summer her mother disappeared and she and her father moved to Boston, never to speak of those months again.

One night, while sitting alone on Glass Beach, below the cottage where she spent her childhood, Nora breaks down at last. Her tears flow into the sea, where, according to local legend, they might invoke a selkie --- a mythic creature --- to console her. Not long afterward, Owen Kavanagh, a fisherman with a mysterious past, is shipwrecked on the rocks.

As the weeks pass, Nora uncovers more questions about her relationships, her mother's fate, and her own identity. Then Ella undertakes a reckless journey, heading to Boston in a boat that once belonged to her grandmother, her younger sister in tow. Nearly drowning in a storm, the two girls wash up on Little Burke's, an islet across the channel that plays a recurring role in Nora's fragmented memories. As she frantically searches for her daughters, Nora finds the courage to chart her own course --- and the secrets surrounding that long ago summer --- finally come to light.

Discussion Guide

1. Shifting alliances between mothers and daughters are a powerful dynamic in many families. How do the alliances change between Nora and each of her daughters? Who feels alienated? When? Why?
2. What do you think about Nora's choice to informally separate from her husband and spend that summer on Burke's Island, some hours from their home in Boston? How does her decision affect the family?
3. How did Maeve's disappearance affect Nora and Maire? Who has been most damaged by the loss? Why? How does family history continue to affect them?

4. **The Cottage at Glass Beach** has a rich cast of minor characters. How does each contribute to the overall flavor of the novel?
5. Many small communities experience a tension between the modern world and traditional values. How does this dynamic affect Burke's Island?
6. What role does Nora's personal history play in terms of the choices she makes on Burke's Island?
7. Burke's Island is a character in its own right. What is the significance of the setting and how does this backdrop affect each character? Is the island a metaphor for the characters? What does it represent? How is the setting important to the themes of the book?
8. Why types of symbols do you find in the novel? How do the characters react to them? What are some of the recurrent themes?
9. What are the characters' attitudes toward faith and religion? How is religion, specifically Catholicism, treated in the novel?
10. How do the characters view their Irish history? What role does it play in their lives?
11. Small town life can be a curse for some people, a gift to others. How do Nora and her daughters' feelings about Burke's Island change over the course of the book?
12. What role does magical realism play in the novel? How are the characters shaped by their superstitions and beliefs?
13. Where could the story go after the book ends? What do you think lies in store for the major characters?

Author Bio

The author of **THE COTTAGE AT GLASS BEACH**, **THE LACEMAKERS OF GLENMARA** and **SNOW IN JULY**, Heather Barbieri has won international prizes for her short fiction. She lives in Seattle with her husband and three children.

Critical Praise

"Barbieri does such a wonderful job setting up the beauty and mystery of the island and its rich Gaelic roots that it is not a stretch to ask the reader to imagine that the place is also magical. A wonderful, subtle, transporting story."

— Susan Maguire, *Booklist* (starred review)

"In the enchanting world of Maine's Burke's Island, fanciful stories - of captured selkies becoming dutiful wives and tears cried in the sea beckoning lovers to shore - are gracefully woven into modern reality."

— *Publishers Weekly*

"Heather Barbieri's **The Cottage at Glass Beach** is a moving, heartfelt story told with vivid description. Open the book and listen --- you'll hear the waves crashing onto the shore."

— Sarah Jio, author of **The Bungalow** and **The Violets of March**

"Part seaside fairytale, part exploration of real-world tensions....Let yourself be transported to Burke's Island, a salt-tinged place steeped in legends of selkies and shipwrecks, but also full of bruised and hopeful people making their wayward, human ways toward happiness."

— Marisa de los Santos, author of **Falling Together** and **Belong to Me**

"**The Cottage at Glass Beach**, an enchanting novel about mothers and daughters on an isolated island, is a romantic, delicious read. Barbieri's beautiful writing and beguiling world view revel in the realities and the mysteries of the sea and of life itself."

— Nancy Thayer, *New York Times* bestselling author of **Heat Wave**

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