



Heat Wave: A Novel

By Nancy Thayer

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Lyrical, emotional, dramatic, and packed with Nancy Thayer's trademark warmth and wisdom, *Heat Wave* tells the moving story of a woman who, after her seemingly perfect life unravels, must find the strength to live and love again.

After her husband's sudden death, Carley Winsted is determined to keep her two daughters in their beloved home on Nantucket. To ease the family's financial strain, she decides to transform their grand, historic house into a bed-and-breakfast. Not everyone, however, thinks this plan prudent or quite respectable—especially not Carley's mother-in-law. Further complicating a myriad of challenges, a friend forces Carley to keep a secret that, if revealed, will undo families and friendships. And her late husband's former law partner is making Carley confront an array of mixed feelings. Then, during a late-summer heat wave, the lives of Carley and her friends and family will be forever changed in entirely unexpected ways.

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Editorial Review

Review

Selected by *Good Morning America* as one of its “Blazing Hot Summer Reads”!

“Nancy Thayer has a deep and masterly understanding of love and friendship, of where the two complement and where they collide.”—Elin Hilderbrand

“Vintage Nancy Thayer . . . Enjoy *Heat Wave* along with a cool drink . . . and plenty of sunblock.”—*Huntington News*

“Thayer’s unique understanding of the range of human emotions is a rare find in light-hearted beach reads, yet she expertly manages to craft a heart-warming novel that will take readers on an emotional roller coaster full of family connections, hysterical summer guests and the drama of everyday life.”—*Nantucket Today*

“A wonderful story set in the beautiful scenery of Nantucket . . . While there is a love story here, there’s so much more.”—Bookreporter

About the Author

Nancy Thayer is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Beachcombers*, *Summer House*, *Moon Shell Beach*, *The Hot Flash Club*, *The Hot Flash Club Strikes Again*, *Hot Flash Holidays*, and *The Hot Flash Club Chills Out*. She lives on Nantucket.

From the Hardcover edition.

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1

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Some days recently, Carley Winsted had experienced moments of actual happiness, when her heart gave her a break. She'd forget Gus's death and focus on the sight of her daughters or the sparkle of sunlight on the ocean—and lightning-fast, guilt zapped her. How could she be happy even for a moment?

She had to be happy, because she needed to be a role model for her daughters. She wanted to show them how to get through the dark times, to relish the good in each and every day.

Today she just needed not to be a coward.

It was the end of December, the end of the year. The end of the worst year in Carley's life. High on a cliff overlooking the deep blue waters of Nantucket Sound, Carley stood in her bedroom, her heart racing with anxiety.

Thank heavens her girls were with friends this morning. She couldn't let them see her like this. They had

enough to deal with. Their beloved father, Carley's dear Gus, had died a month ago. His death had been unexpected, unpredictable, wrong, caused by an undiagnosed heart defect that had been lying stealthily in wait for years. Gus had been only thirty-seven. Carley was only thirty-two.

Cisco was twelve.

Margaret was five.

It was unbearable. Yet it had to be borne.

She'd been doing pretty well, she thought, but this morning her grief was overridden by a gripping panic, which was ridiculous, really.

After all, it wasn't as if she were a peasant being thrown into the lion's den. She was only going to her father-in-law's office to discuss finances with him. Okay, fine, finances had never been her strong suit. She'd gotten married at twenty, she'd never had a real job, Gus had handled the money, she had taken care of the house, the children, food and clothing, their lives. But she was not a financial idiot, and Gus knew that. Gus had left this house entirely to her. It had no mortgage. It was completely, legally, hers.

So why had Russell asked her to come to the law office to meet with him? Such a cold, businesslike place-why hadn't he come to her house to talk with her in the living room as he always had? True, Carley had not always been on the same page as Annabel and Russell. They were different in so many ways, and the truth was, her in-laws were difficult to please. But they shared a mutual love for their son, her husband, Gus, and for his and Carley's daughters, Cisco and Margaret.

Carley gave herself a careful, critical once-over in the mirror. Her tailored gray suit was loose on her, but that was to be expected. She'd lost weight since Gus's death. So had Russell and Annabel, even Gus's best friend, Wyatt. Carley was tall and lanky, and now whip thin. In this suit, she looked elegant, even haughty, although anyone who knew Carley knew elegant and haughty were so not her. Russell had to know that after being around her for thirteen years.

But since Gus's death, both Russell and Annabel had been??.??.?

different. More openly judgmental. Carley's only defense was to be prepared. She slipped her feet into her highest heeled boots.

Her appointment with Russell was set for eleven o'clock. Her appointment! Gus wouldn't have put up with this formal crap. "Come on, Dad, just tell us what you have to say, and we'll work it out." That's what Gus would have said.

2

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Carley met Gus on Nantucket one summer night when she was nineteen. The air was hot and muggy and she was whipped from waiting tables.

She'd just finished her second year at Syracuse with less than sterling grades. She wasn't upset about the grades. No one was upset about the grades-her parents were engrossed with their work and all her life Carley

had been advised not to compare herself to her older sister, Sarah, who was brilliant at science and a jock as well, so no one was pressuring Carley to perform.

It was just that now, approaching her junior year, Carley felt a little lost. Sarah had always yearned to be a nurse when she grew up, an emergency room nurse. Her father was a much-respected and eternally busy dentist. Her mother and her best friend ran a day care center.

Carley had no idea what she wanted to be.

She thought she should want to be something. Rosie, her best childhood friend, wanted to go into the Peace Corps and become an immigration lawyer. Another friend wanted to teach in elementary school. Carley had believed she'd be inspired by some teacher or subject once she got to college, but that hadn't yet happened. She was listlessly declaring education her major.

One thing was crystal clear to her: she loved being on Nantucket. It was her third summer working here, and it seemed she was always happy here, no matter what her job was. Of course, it was always summer, when the days were drenched with sunshine and the air smelled of salt and roses and she was surrounded by friends. She kind of even liked her wait job. Some of the customers were jerks, but most of them were on vacation, tanned, relaxed, happy, and ready to give a big fat tip.

Still, she couldn't make a career out of waiting tables. First of all, her restaurant closed for the winter, but more important, island life was staggeringly expensive. She shared an attic room and tiny shower-stall bath with four other women and rent still took up a large chunk of her paycheck.

She wasn't worried about it, though. Not worried about a thing. Tonight some girlfriends had heard rumors of a party out on Cisco Beach and Carley decided to ride out with them. She smelled like the curried fish stew she'd been serving all evening, so she stripped down to almost nothing-shorts and a halter top, bare feet, her hair skinned back into a ponytail to keep it off her neck. The minute she arrived at the party, she nabbed a bottle of beer and chugged it down.

She was in a restless, devil-may-care kind of mood that summer. She was an accident waiting to happen, and subconsciously, that was probably what she wanted to be.

That night at the beach, she was light and supple, riding the tide of life wherever it would take her, and loving the motion. Bonfires were illegal on the beach, but someone had set up some grills and hibachis that gave off flickering golden lights and filled the air with the rich aroma of roasting hamburgers and hot dogs. Tables sunk into the sand held plastic cups and gallons of wine. Trash barrels stuffed with ice and beer leaned crookedly in the sand. Friends screamed with glee when they saw each other, as if they were reunited after years apart, and as darkness fell, people seemed mysterious, exotic. Music from a CD player had people dancing at the water's edge, with partners or alone.

Carley talked with friends, drank a couple of beers, and then she and Rhonda, one of her roomies, started dancing with their shadows. Oh, that night-the heat of the air, the cold shock of waves lapping over her feet, the sounds of laughter, and the beat of music-she was a primitive thing for a while that night, dancing in and out of the waves that surged up the shore. It wasn't just the alcohol, it was the essence of the night, the sheer joy of being young, and she felt sassy, free, eternal, somehow part of the world and still very particularly herself.

Late at night, a man came over, took her hand, and led her up to a log someone had left on the beach as a

seat.

"You need a hamburger," he said.

Carley threw her head back and laughed. "I need a hamburger?"

"I've been watching you. You've been dancing for a long time. You're about to fall down. I think you need a hamburger and some water and if you sit here, I'll bring them to you."

As she dropped down on the log, her head spun and her legs suddenly gave way. She landed hard on her bum. "Oops." She grinned up at the man. "I think you may be right."

Carley never had been able to drink much. She went straight from sober to pass out on three glasses of wine, seldom enjoying any kind of high. That night she'd only had two beers, or maybe three. She wasn't exactly drunk. Perhaps she was just a bit tired. And she couldn't remember when she'd last eaten.

The man returned, bearing a paper plate in one hand and a bottle of Perrier in the other.

"Thanks." She chugged the sparkling water. "That tastes sublime! I had no idea I was so thirsty." She held the hamburger with both hands. "Yum."

"I'm Gus," he said.

"I'm Carley," she told him.

They didn't go to bed with each other that night, although around three a.m., when most of the others were dragging themselves away for a few hours of necessary sleep before their workday began, they did begin to kiss. The log was not a comfortable site for romance. Twice they clumsily tumbled into the sand, laughing through their kisses. Rhonda straggled up to Carley, saying she was driving back to town now, if Carley wanted a ride. Gus asked Carley if he could see her the next night, and Carley had chuckled, feeling warm and dreamy and tired and sexy.

"Yeah, and somewhere with lights might be good," she told him. "So we can see what we look like."

The next night, sober, she had liked the way Gus looked. Anyone would. He was striking, with unusual black eyes and thick black hair. He was older than Carley, already a lawyer, working at the family firm on the island. He loved the island, he had grown up here. He knew who he was and what he was, and that impressed the hell out of Carley.

That night, they had slept together. He took her out to dinner at a posh restaurant, then brought her to his apartment. The sex hadn't been amazing, at least not for Carley, but it had been friendly, and that was very nice. Afterward, Carley joked, "Ah. Seduced by a hamburger."

Then Gus took her home to meet his parents, and she did fall in love.

Gus was a Winsted, whose family had helped settle Nantucket in the 1600s. His mother Annabel was a Greenwood, and her family had deep island roots as well. Gus's father, Russell, had grown up on the island in the Winsted family's enormous brick house on Main Street, gone off to Harvard, and returned as a lawyer. Annabel was the only child in her family, and when her parents died, she inherited the Greenwood house,

another historic Nantucket mansion, this one set at the end of a road on a cliff overlooking the Sound. Gus was an only child, too. "It had just worked out that way," was as much as elegant Annabel ever offered in explanation.

Russell and Annabel were both striking to look at. Tall and slender, Russell clad his storklike body in elegant pin-striped suits and handmade monogrammed cotton shirts that had belonged to his father and his grandfather. At home, he poured his daily scotch from an antique crystal decanter embossed with silver leaves. And he had that glossy ebony hair, those piercing dark eyes that gave Gus such intensity.

Annabel, Gus's mother, was a lean beauty with honey-colored hair worn in a careless twist and soft brown eyes. She was Carley's mother's age-forty-nine-but she went around in jeans and turtlenecks and Docksiders.

Carley knew her own mother would consider Annabel a lightweight, a frivolous and even selfish woman. But it was hard to measure up to Carley's mother's standards.

Marilyn Smith and her friend Bernice ran a day care center in East Laurence, New York. Marilyn was a passionate reformer, trying to bring comfort and affection to as many small children as she could-as long as they were other people's children. She had been a dutiful mother to Sarah and Carley until they turned ten, then Marilyn considered them old enough to take care of themselves. More than that, she considered them lucky, too lucky, and had no interest in any of their problems, which were, after all, only the problems of spoiled middle-class children. Carley's father, a dentist, worked hard as well, and came home late and tired. The family seldom ate dinner together but made sandwiches or heated up frozen dinners in the microwave.

But Russ and Annabel relished daily life-that was the mesmerizing, seductive quality the Winsteds had. Everything was centered around the home. Life was about family and friends.

Annabel and Russ both loved cooking. They grew some vegetables and herbs and experimented with sauces. They both had brown rubber waders that they wore when they pushed their way over the sand and through the water to pick mussels off the jetties; one of their favorite meals was mussels steamed with garlic, a warm loaf of homemade bread, a fresh salad, and wine. In the summer, Annabel roamed the moors to pick wild blueberries for pies and jellies; in the fall, she picked beach plums and made jam. Because Annabel and Russ were great sailors, Russ was always taking off from his law firm-it was his family's firm, he could take off whenever he wanted-to go sailing for the day with Annabel on their catboat, often returning with fish for dinner. They were both gregarious and loved entertaining, filling the house with people who gathered in the kitchen drinking wine and talking while Annabel and Russ put together some of their spontaneous catch-as-catch-can pizzas.

Not that they were obsessive about cooking. Sometimes Carley would drop by to find Annabel curled up on a sofa, reading. "I can't put this book down!" she'd say. "We'll have to order takeout tonight." Annabel and Russ were voracious readers. They attended all the lectures the library and museums gave. They loved art, too, and covered the walls of their house with works by island artists. They were involved in politics, and attended town meetings faithfully. The high school plays brought them out for at least one performance and often more. They were right there in their lives. They were not trying to get anywhere else; they weren't competitive or envious; they were that rarest of human creatures: genuinely happy people.

Of course, they had started off with more than many people ever had. They had each inherited an old Nantucket mansion. Their lives grew out of the island history like a flower from a new dawn rose, climbing, blossoming, part of a thick twisting stem deeply planted in the island's sandy soil, and proud to be in that sandy soil.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pamela Pinkham:

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Michael Herndon:

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