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—KIRKUS REVIEWS

THE HAPPINESS THIEF

a novel



NICOLE BOKAT

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HAPPINESS
THIEF

A Novel

NICOLE BOKAT



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prologue

Winter

I THINK I KILLED MY MOTHER.

Jeremy had asked Natalie what made her unique. That was the most straightforward answer. She didn't dare say it aloud, certainly not on a first date with someone she was beginning to like, someone she wasn't sure she deserved.

Instead, she told Jeremy about how she'd been in a car crash when she was young, and how it left her with a brain injury, which wiped out much of her memory of that time. When she admitted she felt guilty, he asked if she'd been driving and they laughed because, of course, she'd been thirteen, much too young. *He has no idea what I'm capable of*, she'd thought.

Hours after their date had ended, and Natalie was alone, unable to sleep, she felt the air in her room thin out. She switched on the lamp on her side of the bed, the comforter tangled in her feet. Panic was like a fistful of knuckles to the chest. She heard her breaths coming fast: *huh, huh, huh*. She rubbed the skin under the rim of her pajama pants where a rash was certain to flare. When she opened the drawer of her nightstand, she shuffled through the ear plugs and coins. She touched the small, silver flashlight she'd shoved to the back, a taunt, a reminder of who she was.

This wasn't the plastic purple flashlight that had been confiscated

by the police, slipped into a plastic bag. Or maybe they hadn't even bothered holding onto it as evidence. They'd noted it in their report but wouldn't have used something that looked like a toy against her, a girl who'd been reading in the passenger seat on a dark night. Supposedly, she'd confessed to her stepfamily that it was her fault, that she'd shone the light into her mother's eyes. She could only remember that she didn't want to go where they were headed. She'd sobbed in her hospital bed, concussed and in shock, willing herself to forget; and even now, so many years later, the details were out of reach long after the physical damage had healed. Had there been another vehicle behind them on the road? She couldn't be certain.

What she did recall was that flash piercing the bone black sky and her mother's scream, "The light's blinding me. For Christ's sake, what's going on?" She could smell the vinyl seats, the coffee with Sweet & Low, her mom's scent—lemon and flowers and mint. The Dunkin' Donuts mug shook in the holder.

Their station wagon had careened, and Natalie tried to brace herself, arms hurled everywhere, nothing to hold onto. Her head was thrown backward, then forward, a snap as if her neck was torn from its socket. She felt an awful thrust, then the whirling stopped. Blankness. She struggled to wake, stuck at the murky bottom, lungs bursting, until her eyes popped open. The windshield on the passenger's side had cracked to form a web. Yet the glass had stayed firmly in place. The silence was profound. The last thing she'd seen before she passed out was her mother's head smashed against the steering wheel, blood seeping down her hair like a red waterfall.

Natalie's hand found the container of pills. She untwisted the top and popped one into her palm. Pretty in pink, friendly as a child's teacup. The water glass was lukewarm; she only needed a sip. The tablet winked at her, as if promising all problems would be washed away. Down the hatch.

What kind of monster are you?

one

The Previous Fall

THE ANNUAL HAPPINESS CONFERENCE WAS PACKED TO CAPACITY, with almost five hundred therapists, spiritual leaders, life coaches, and guests—including Natalie, who had no idea what happiness was anymore. The room was dotted with small, linen-covered tables. Each held a slim silver vase with one white lily, the petals of the flowers draped around the pistils like elegant wrap dresses. The waitstaff zigzagged through the crowd with trays of hors d'oeuvres.

Natalie regarded her stepsister, Isabel, from across the room, *Oh, I wish I were you competing with I'm so proud* in her gut. Admirers swarmed around Isabel, touching her with wonder like children at a petting zoo. Even though Natalie was distracted, the woman next to her didn't seem to notice and crooned about the dharma of "self-actualization and intention," gesturing in her ankle-length cape, a giant bird with a sparkly purple wingspan. Not wanting to laugh, Natalie covered her mouth with a paper napkin.

One of the speakers approached her, emitting a strong patchouli and sandalwood aroma. "I'm a colleague of your sister's," she said, grasping Natalie's elbow so that multiple bracelets jangled together. "Danika Singh. Isabel pointed you out to me."

Natalie recognized the woman's tawny complexion with the beauty mark above her lip, the deep-set eyes, from posters at the conference. "Do you work with her?"

“I live in Sydney. I catch her at conferences a couple of times a year.”

“Sorry I missed your talk. What was it, again?”

“I’m the founder of The Mindfulness Museum in Melbourne. It was about our mission.”

What kind of exhibits you got: open spaces, nothing on the walls, very expensive air?

“Sounds intriguing,” Natalie said.

“I heard about your father’s death.” Danika’s grip on Natalie’s elbow grew tighter. “I’m so sorry.”

“Thanks. He wasn’t technically my father; he was married to my mother.”

Danika nodded. “I hadn’t expected Isabel to show. She’s a real trooper to honor her commitments.”

“That’s what she’s like.”

It was. Isabel was worried about finishing the second book on schedule and, now, with Garrick’s death, she was grieving in her hidden heart. Yet, in the lexicon of their cobbled together family, Isabel was the powerhouse and bulwark, while Natalie was the sensitive one, sadness coating her like oil. Over the years, she’d tried talk and behavioral therapy, peach pills and baby blue ones. And the ever-handly pink ones. This time, after Natalie’s husband deserted her, Isabel had insisted: *why don’t you let me help you?*

Danika gazed above Natalie’s head. “I’m sorry, I have to speak with someone before he leaves. I’ll circle back.”

She scurried away. The “self-actualizer” was gone, as well. Natalie listened to the air humming with whispers and coughs, murmurs and laughs, the scraping of chairs and clinking of glasses. Three days of being bombarded by positive thinkers, thrivers, meditators, and yogis, and this was the final event. When a server passed by, Natalie nabbed a coconut shrimp on a skewer and a glass of sparkling water.

A middle-aged man sidled up. “Are you a patient or practitioner?” He was bald, with a starfish-shaped rash on one cheek.

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Natalie shook her head. “Neither.”

“You’re not wearing your name tag. Very mysterious.”

“And you are?” She glimpsed at his label, then felt a cool hand on her bare skin and flinched.

“It’s just me,” Isabel said, rubbing the tight spot where Natalie’s neck met her shoulder. “Didn’t mean to scare you.”

“Dr. Walker,” the man exclaimed, thumping his hand to his chest. “I heard your lecture yesterday. You were wonderful, and *Get Happy Now*, I just devoured it in one sitting!”

“Thank you so much,” Isabel said. Natalie could see the weariness in her smile.

“I’d love to discuss in more detail.”

“Of course. I have a few minutes now and, if you’d like, we can exchange contact information.”

While they chatted, Natalie eavesdropped on another conversation nearby.

“I was brainstorming.” This was a female with an Irish accent. “Rolfing is okay, and acupuncture. But she’s not keen on Crystal Reiki.”

“Releasing energy blocks?” This accent was harder to place, maybe Dutch or German.

Natalie took out her phone and texted her teenage daughter, Hadley: *What is rolfing?*

“Ready to go?” Isabel whispered in her ear. “I’m tired.”

“You must be exhausted.”

“It’s been good for me.”

When they stepped out into the sapphire night, the lapping sound of the Caribbean Sea called out. Natalie asked, “A quick walk on the beach?”

“I’m too beat. Let’s go back to the resort.”

Natalie had offered to drive so that Isabel could celebrate with her flute of Blanc de Blanc, refilled more than once. But navigating on the left side in this British-ruled island was tricky, especially once she

hit the more desolate streets, the night sky a swatch of chalky black. She followed the crooked arrow, the sign for curve.

“Did you have fun?” Isabel asked. “Pick up any good tips from the lectures?”

“I can feel myself blooming with optimism.”

“C’mon, Nat! You have to give the ideas a chance.”

“I am, I am.”

In her rearview mirror, she saw another car, maybe thirty feet behind her. “I thought your talk was great, best one.”

“Well, thanks.”

Natalie had peered up while Isabel gave a lecture on the podium. Her beauty was a mixture of Nordic features and tiny bones, as if there were East Asian ancestors hiding in the corners of her European lineage. Her skin was so naturally light it was nearly translucent, the vein in her forehead slightly more prominent each year. Natalie had erased that imperfection in the book jacket photo, as well as the rosy tips of her ears. She’d been so pleased with herself: her one professional portrait. But, *Isabel!* Her words soared. Some attendees used their cameras or iPhones to record while she spoke. Others scribbled notes in the Moleskine journals sold in the wellness bookstore. Natalie caught it too, that frisson of excitement: *maybe this will work.*

Suddenly, her vision was filled with a blare of white light. As she slowed down, the car veered. There was a thunk against her bumper.

She slammed on the brakes causing the car to buck. “What the hell?”

“Shit!” Isabel cried out next to her.

Natalie fumbled with the seat belt cutting into her middle. Her hands felt big and clumsy as if they were swollen. Yet the door opened without resistance. “That idiot behind us was flashing his brights. I couldn’t see where I was going.”

“Of course not,” Isabel said.

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Standing on the pavement, Natalie's legs trembled. There was a slight breeze. The heat had relented after a day in which the sun had throbbled like an angry heart. She watched her stepsister reach over to switch on the high beams and then rush out, her tight blond pony-tail swinging.

There was nothing, no one there. Just a long slash of street and the moon, a silver rowboat tipped on its side. In a palm tree a few feet ahead of them, Natalie saw a hooded iguana crouching. Behind them, the other car idled, the headlights turned off.

"I was being careful," Natalie said. "What was that driver doing?"

"I'll find out," Isabel said. "You stay here."

"Oh, God."

"Take deep breaths," Isabel said. She counted, slowly, until they were both inhaling and exhaling in even segments. "Go sit down. Let me deal with this."

Natalie slid into the passenger seat this time. She felt as if she were a teenager again, nearly three decades ago now, her mom shouting.

Stop it. This isn't Mom's car. You're safe.

Her thumb pressed against her neck's pulse, charting its *rat-a-tat* like rainfall against the window. She placed one hand on her belly and the other on her breastbone, repeating a yoga technique to regulate her oxygen. She noted 11:06 p.m. on the dashboard and then shut her eyes.

VISUALIZE A SAFE PLACE! One of the speakers at a seminar she'd attended had given that command. Her mind offered up the lawn of her childhood home. She'd been four years old and Isabel seven when their parents married. After the ceremony, there'd been a small reception in the backyard. Natalie had watched Isabel cartwheeling between the rows of tables once the guests had left, her sleek body spinning through the air, backward, forward. Natalie had stared at this

lithe creature, with hair like a cream-colored pony's, who'd coached her to try as well. "I'll spot you," Isabel had said. "Nothing bad will happen to you."

Natalie reached both hands out to ground herself in the present. The glove compartment was warm from the Caribbean weather, and she anchored her weight against it. She looked at the clock. 11:12 p.m.

Had she lost track of time again?

She opened the door and leaned out. A tall man stood next to her stepsister.

Natalie said sharply, "What's going on? You had your brights on."

"I'm so sorry about that," he said in an English accent. "It was only for a moment. I couldn't see anything out here."

Natalie rose slowly and walked to the front of their rental. The man was holding a flashlight, which illuminated a few streaks of blood on the bumper and dark stains on the road. Her nerves sparked. "Jesus!"

Isabel rushed to her side, "Don't worry, Nat."

"Whatever it was ran away." The man gestured to the patch of greenery, a few trees among it. "I think it was a dog."

"*Think?* Could it have been a person?" Natalie's voice quivered.

The man shook his head. "It was on four legs and small."

"We have to help."

When she nearly stumbled forward, Isabel grabbed her. "Whoa. You're not going after anything, sweetie."

"Let me try."

"It's dark as hell in those bushes."

"I'll do it," the man said, holding the flashlight vertically so it shone on his face and upper body. His eyes were a surprising Delft blue. "This was my fault; it's the least I can do."

"Thank you," Isabel said.

Once he walked into the thickets of shrubs and the slender thatch palms, Natalie said, "I'll be okay."

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Isabel relinquished her grasp. “I didn’t want you running off on some goose chase now.”

“I wasn’t going to.”

Was I?

The man returned quickly. He shrugged. “Nothing there.”

“We can’t just leave,” Natalie said. “We can’t abandon it to suffer. We should keep searching.”

“Whatever it was will be all right. It can’t be too injured if it ran off,” Isabel said. “Let’s get back to the hotel.”

He asked, “You’re staying at the Grand Reef, aren’t you?”

Isabel clicked her middle finger with her thumb and asked, “How did you know?”

“I’ve seen you. I’m staying there, as well.”

“Ah, makes sense.” To Natalie, she said, “Let’s go, kiddo.”

“Okay, but we have to call someone, animal rescue, or the police, when we get back to our room.”

“Of course, I’ll do it.” Isabel sounded her usual self: composed, certain.

Suddenly, Natalie remembered that feeling of confidence, that assurance that the world would work in her favor. The hours in the darkroom with her mom, the time her mother gave her first camera and taught her how an image could lie—a wrinkle or blemish could be airbrushed away—but a good photographer captured the soul. The next day, Natalie had gazed at the ice rink after the Zamboni machine had smoothed it to a perfect gleam. It was like a camera, she thought, fixing the image. Every Saturday in winter she had glided onto that surface with her mother, steady on her feet. Not for a moment did she fear a fall.

two

NATALIE JOLTED AWAKE, UNSURE OF HER SURROUNDINGS. SHE blinked at the sight of the bright furniture, saffron yellow curtains and apple-green chair. This wasn't her bedroom.

She scurried to the window to push back the drapes. Outside the two-bedroom suite was the balcony and the first morning views of the Caribbean Sea that unfurled indefinitely. The sky was blanketed with pink and white clouds. The ocean glittered like rock candy.

The living space was a burst of colors: cobalt blue couch and gold and red rug. The curtains were open, as was Isabel's bedroom door. There wasn't a hush of noise; Natalie opened the door gently, so as not to wake her stepsister. Isabel had been going non-stop since arriving at the conference—a good distraction, everyone agreed, as her dad had died merely days before this long weekend. One heart attack had landed Garrick in the hospital, the second one had killed him as he lay in Intensive Care. *She must be exhausted*. Yet, inside, the sheets were turned down, and the puff of silk nightgown lay on the pillow. Isabel was gone.

A note on the kitchenette's counter read: "Work breakfast with Ole downstairs. He's staying at the Cove; has an early flight back to Denmark. Hope you're feeling better. XO, Belle."

The car key with its plastic THRIFTY tag lay next to the note, like a provocation. Natalie grabbed a mug out of the cabinet and opened the refrigerator door. Next to the half and half were a tub of butter, three water bottles, and a plastic container of sliced watermelons. She noticed now that the coffee pot was two-thirds full. Not a meal, but

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she was willing to wait. The digital clock above the microwave read 6:37; most likely there wouldn't be many people on the road, not at this more secluded end of the island so early in the day. No commuters here. She could check now if there were signs of an injured animal and be back before Isabel returned, sympathy in her eyes. *You were that worried? I shouldn't have gone with Ole.* Natalie would forgo a shower and rush down the back stairs with her camera.

Nerves humming, she was vigilant but not afraid, not yet. When she got to the car, the bumper was clean. She peered closer, as if the drops of blood were hiding from view. Nothing. She touched the plastic, already warm from the dawning sun.

She drove slowly, as she had no street name, no GPS to guide her. The trees stood steady and strong, like warriors in fancy headgear. The agaves' green tentacles waved above their trunks, shredded wood that resembled skirts. She made a turn, then another, noticing the curve sign, certain she'd found the correct place. She stopped near the shrubs on the right side and got out.

Natalie walked up and down the road, studying the ground, the dirt and pebbles, the grass leading into the bushes. She knew from experience behind the lens that what the naked eye saw wasn't always all that was there. She stopped when she discovered a patch of dried blood no bigger than a quarter. Then she lifted her Nikon and took a burst of shots. She imagined more proof elsewhere, a splattering, a trail through the bushes. She scoped out the foliage. In the leaves nearby, there were specks of reddish brown; Natalie tore off a leaf and held it to her nose, not sure what she expected to smell. She stumbled among the twigs and white flowers, looking for paw prints but found none.

After twenty minutes, she decided to buy a local paper, with a bag of nuts and raisins, at a grocery store on the way back to the hotel. She felt a whoosh of relief. Maybe she'd overreacted—which made sense given her history. There was no news of car accidents, much less injuries, in the *Cayman Tribune*.



ISABEL WAS STILL not back in their suite. Natalie decided to head for the beach, Nikon around her neck. She bypassed the empty pastel lounge chairs under the canopies, billowing lazily like sails. The warm water lapped over her toes as she snapped shot after shot. By midday, the sun would press down on her shoulders with an incessant grip that would leave a mark. But at this hour it was a balm.

Hand up in a salute to block the light, she turned to see a man a few feet down the beach. There was something so glossy and richly colored about his appearance, as if he were shot through a gold filter. She had to lift her head up to recognize that he was the man they'd encountered on the road the previous night.

Natalie walked towards him. Up close, his face was slightly lined around the eyes and mouth, his sandy hair streaked with blond. He was dressed in cotton slacks that fanned up at his calves, a starched shirt with the sleeves rolled to the elbows. He was holding polished loafers in one hand.

"Hi," she said. "Remember me, the animal lover?"

He smiled. "Of course. I'm Simon Drouin. Feeling better?"

"Yes, thanks."

"Good. You look lovely this morning."

"Thanks," she said, glancing down at the white sand. She knew the compliment was a lie, that she had thumbprint smudges under her eyes, that the angles of her cheeks and collarbones were sharpened to a point from weight loss. "Funny meeting you here, I mean . . . the same beach."

"I'm staying at the hotel."

"Right," she nodded. "You mentioned that."

"And your charming companion, sleeping in?"

It was like a line out of a Victorian novel. Natalie wanted to blurt out, "She's married to a wonderful guy. Don't bother."

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“Having breakfast with a colleague,” she said, “about a TED Talk on Flourishing.”

“Oh, dear. That last bit eludes me.”

“I thought you were here for the conference.”

“Lord, no. Are you part of this whole . . . production?”

“Along for the ride. I’m here with my stepsister, Isabel. The ‘charming companion.’” He laughed. “She’s a speaker.”

Simon pointed to the camera. “You’re not the official photographer?”

She shook her head. *If only*. . . But she’d long ago given up on the flow and movement, the animation of human life.

When he bent towards her, Natalie felt a flush of excitement. The last time she and her almost-ex-husband, Marc, had made love was a year ago in April, the magnolias in full bloom. Her entire adult life she’d been yoked to one man. She’d been married for seventeen years, had just turned forty-one.

Natalie said, “I *am* a professional photographer, actually. But not for this event.”

“The Happiness industry seems to be booming. And for good reason, the world being what it is. I confess, I did sneak a peak of a brochure at the front desk. The hotel has a pile of them. Your sister is prominently featured.”

Of course, he’d noticed *that*.

“She’s a leader in the field.”

“Impressive, I suppose. Just can’t imagine this whole business works on Brits. We’re lacking in your natural optimism.”

“Don’t be fooled by our reputation. Anyway, there are people from all over the world for this. What about you? Do you live in London?”

“New York now.”

“So, you must have picked up our ‘can-do spirit,’” she said. “I’m from Boston. Natalie, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you, Natalie. I travel up to Boston sometimes for work. I wonder where I might have seen your pictures.”

“There’s a platter of truffles in October’s *Boston Magazine*.”

His eyebrows rose. “Mushrooms?”

“Chocolate. But I’ve shot those too. I specialize in food.”

“Really?” He patted his stomach. “If it were me, I’d put on twenty pounds.”

She nodded. “Common misconception. I’m more like a food mortician. I know what it takes to get my subject looking good. It’s not pretty.”

The spray bottle filled with water and corn syrup, the browning agents to enhance color, the glycerin to make the food shimmer, the brushes to create an artificial luster: the presentation of nourishment rendered inedible.

Simon laughed. “I like that: *mortician*. It’s rather perverse.”

“That’s me,” she said.

Not the way you mean.

“Good to know,” he grinned. “Do you sell to private clients?”

“I have a nice mutton you might like to hang over your bed.”

“Ah, dear, no. Do you ever take other things, landscapes or portraits?”

She had a few of Marc and Hadley. That was all. When she was first learning, she loved shooting people, but after her mother died, she stopped, as if she couldn’t really see them anymore.

“Not professionally. You can check my website if you’re interested. It’s my name, Natalie Greene with an ‘e,’ then dot com.”

“I *am* interested. A little perversion never hurt anyone. Would you like to have dinner tonight? Alas, I don’t think we’ll find any mutton here.”

“I would,” she said.

It had been a year, two months, and three days since Marc had moved in with Elizabeth, a colleague he’d met in a team building event. When Isabel nudged her to start dating, Natalie had found the

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suggestion ludicrous. “How can I trust anyone again?” she’d asked. But one meal with sexy Simon, with his rakish boasts—so different from her Holier-Than-Thou turned cheater ex—might lift her mood. “Only we’re leaving later this afternoon.”

“Ah, that’s right. My loss.”

They exchanged a look, his eyes holding hers.

“It was nice meeting you, Simon.”

He extended his hand. “Until we meet again.”

Meet again? Was that a line or a promise?

“In case, you’re ever in New York, my personal email is easy to remember,” he said. “SDrouin@hotmail.com.”

Hotmail indeed.

Natalie climbed the steep back steps, raising her camera to her eye. From the palm tree craning towards the second floor, the bearded, bejeweled Iguana stared out at her. Its skin was wrinkled and ill-fitting, like the wrong-sized coat. As she zoomed in on the creature in the tree, she felt a shot of pleasure as if it was she who was being observed.

Her suite was the first one on the right, and she imagined Simon watching her enter it. It was cool, and the central room was alight with color. Natalie placed her Nikon and sunglasses on the dining table, then stepped onto the balcony. The day was a quilt of blues, the patchwork of ocean stitched to the sky.

She felt alive, the world before her.

Natalie surveyed the guests on the patio below. A young mother walked behind her toddling child to the shallow end of the pool. She observed another whose cadence—the lightness of her walk, the swing of her sarong at the back of her calves—reminded her of someone. The woman’s hair was long and whispery. Thin but curvy, she had a small waist and long legs.

Natalie could smell her mom’s citrus and mint perfume. She saw the woman turn towards her and mouth the words: *What did you do to me?*

Natalie grasped the balcony's railing, bending her knees to ground her. Once she reached the glass doors, she squatted on the carpet, waiting for the spell to pass. Her throat wasn't working correctly, wasn't swallowing. She crept to the kitchen where her pocket-book lay on the counter and spilled the contents of her bag: wallet, small tub of concealer, and bottle of Xanax. With the tranquilizer floating on her tongue, she slunk to the fridge for a water bottle. It took several gulps for the pill to slide down. Once on the couch, she charted the neon numbers on the hotel clock. Five minutes passed. Then ten. She heard her first psychiatrist say:

"Survivor's guilt."

She'd seen Dr. Davidson for a year after the symptoms from her concussion had abated. He'd begun each session with, "Anything new to report?" He had a lazy eye that made him appear to be both asleep and awake at the same time.

Only once did he ask her to elaborate on what she recalled about the accident.

"My mom got spooked, and she shouted at me. I did something wrong. Not sure what . . . but I know it's true."

He'd leaned forward in his chair, his one good eye, under a crepey lid, focused on her. "You survived."

Natalie had stared at her yellow sneakers. She was just a kid in a batik blouse and ripped jeans, but she'd felt that wasn't the right explanation. Something was amiss, literally missing, a gap in time in which answers were trapped.

Natalie unclenched her jaw, unlocked the muscles in her shoulders. The tranquilizer had kicked in. A few minutes later, she pulled out her cell phone from her canvas pocketbook and texted Isabel: *Lunch? The Wild Orchid.*

Her sister's words glowed green: *Yep! See you at noon!*



About the Author



Credit: Jay Lindell

NICOLE BOKAT is the author of the novels *Redeeming Eve* and *What Matters Most*. *Redeeming Eve* was nominated for both the Hemingway Foundation/PEN award and the Janet Heindinger Kafka Prize for Fiction. She's also published *The Novels of Margaret Drabble: This Freudian Family Nexus*. She received her PhD from New York University and has taught at NYU, Hunter College, and The New School. Her essays and articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Parents* magazine, *The Forward*, and at More.com. She lives with her husband in New Jersey and has two grown sons.

HAPPINESS IS RELATIVE. For single mother Natalie Greene, that relative is her stepsister, Isabel Walker, known as The Happiness Guru. But even with Isabel's guidance, Natalie can't control her recently retriggered PTSD over the car crash that caused her mother's death years ago. The old dread. The nightmares. And that all-consuming, terrifying thought: *I think I killed my mother.*

But did she? And if not, who did?

* * *

"So, so smart, and as downright dangerous a read as the edge of a razor, Bokats book is a masterful study of memory, family, and the lies that derail us. Don't even dare to think you'll get any sleep once you start reading."

—CAROLINE LEAVITT, *New York Times* best-selling author
of *Pictures of You* and *With or Without You*

"Nicole Bokats has the rare and precious gift of being both a master storyteller and an elegant poet. Each and every sentence dazzles in this intelligent and fiery tale about family, loss, and what it means to feel happy, whole."

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