



*“Sandwich is joy in book form. I laughed continuously, except for the parts that made me cry. Catherine Newman does a miraculous job reminding us of all the wonder there is to be found in life.”*

—ANN PATCHETT

# SANDWICH

A NOVEL BY

CATHERINE NEWMAN

AUTHOR OF *We All Want Impossible Things*



# SANDWICH

A Novel

CATHERINE NEWMAN



HARPER

*An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers*



# **Dedication**

*This one is for my parents, whom I love so immoderately.*

## Contents

1. [Cover](#)
2. [Title Page](#)
3. [Dedication](#)
  
4. [Prologue](#)
  
5. [Saturday](#)
  1. [1](#)
  2. [2](#)
  3. [3](#)
  
6. [Sunday](#)
  1. [4](#)
  2. [5](#)
  3. [6](#)
  4. [7](#)
  
7. [Monday](#)
  1. [8](#)
  2. [9](#)
  3. [10](#)
  
8. [Tuesday](#)
  1. [11](#)
  2. [12](#)
  3. [13](#)
  
9. [Wednesday](#)
  1. [14](#)

2. [15](#)
3. [16](#)
4. [17](#)
5. [18](#)
6. [19](#)

10. [Thursday](#)

1. [20](#)
2. [21](#)
3. [22](#)
4. [23](#)
5. [24](#)
6. [25](#)
7. [26](#)
8. [27](#)
9. [28](#)
10. [29](#)
11. [30](#)
12. [31](#)
13. [32](#)
14. [33](#)
15. [34](#)
16. [35](#)

11. [Friday](#)

1. [36](#)
2. [37](#)
3. [38](#)
4. [39](#)
5. [40](#)
6. [41](#)
7. [42](#)
8. [43](#)

12. [After](#)

13. [Acknowledgments](#)

14. [\*About the Author\*](#)
15. [\*Also by Catherine Newman\*](#)
16. [\*Copyright\*](#)
17. [\*About the Publisher\*](#)



## Prologue

**P**icture this: a shorelined peninsula jutting into the Atlantic Ocean. Zoom in a little closer. It's a Cape Cod beach town. It's midsummer. The narrow highway is thick with lobster dinners and mini-golf windmills and inflatable bagel pool floats. But turn off the main drag in either direction and find yourself quickly at the sea: sandy cliffs and windswept grasses; tumbling pink roses and vast blue skies and a tideline hemmed with stones and mussels and bright green ruffles of seaweed. Beneath the waves: shivers of great white sharks, stuffed to the gills—or so one imagines—with surfers.

In the passenger seat of one slightly rusting silver Subaru station wagon: a woman in her fifties. She is halfway in age between her young adult children and her elderly parents. She is long married to a beautiful man who understands between twenty and sixty-five percent of everything she says. Her body is a wonderland. Or maybe her body is a satchel full of scars and secrets and menopause. They've been coming here for so many years that there's a watercolor wash over all of it now: Everything hard has been smeared out into pleasant, pastel memories of taffy, clam strips, and beachcombing. Sunglasses and sunscreen and sandy feet pressed against her thighs and stomach. Little children running across the sand with their little pails. Her own parents laughing in their beach chairs, shrinking inside their clothes as the years pass. Grief bright in the periphery, like a light flashing just out of view.

The woman and her husband have fetched the grown children from the train station. They're headed to the small house they rent for this one week

every year. She's so happy to have the kids with her that she doesn't know what to do with herself besides crane around to look at them and smile. It's the one moment of the trip when she won't complain about the traffic.

"And we are put on earth a little space, that we may learn to bear the beams of love," she says, unprompted.

"Is that a poem?" her twenty-year-old daughter asks. It is.

"Who?" the daughter asks.

"William Blake."

"What's it called?"

The woman grimaces. "I think it might be called 'The Little Black Boy.'"

"Ugh, Mom!"

"I know, I know. But I think it's okay?"

"I seriously doubt it."

"I think he was an abolitionist?"

"One of the abolitionists who enslaved people?"

"Good question," the mother says.

"Is it beams like wood?" the daughter asks. "Or beams like light in your eyes?"

"I don't know." She has always pictured it both ways: squinting against the unbearable lightness of loving while simultaneously crouched under the heavy cross of it. "It's so crushingly beautiful, being human," the mother sighs, and the daughter rolls her eyes and says, "But also so terrible and ridiculous."

And maybe it's all three.

*This one week.*

**Saturday**

# 1

“Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god!” I’m laughing. I’m screaming and also crying. The water is rising, rising, rising up to the rim of the toilet. “Nick! Nick! Nicky!” Yelling is my only contribution to this situation, it seems. My husband has the plunger in his hands but he’s watching the water as if in a trance. In a cartoon, the swirl in the bowl would be mirrored in his hypnotized eyes. “Nicky! Nick!”

Nick appears to come to. He bends over the toilet, twists something near the floor, and there’s a clanking sound, a gasp from the pipes. The water stills. “Jesus,” I say. “Phew.”

Then something appears in the toilet. Something like a large silver jellyfish. What even is that? An air bubble? A giant air bubble! It pushes the contents of the toilet bowl up and over, all of it sloshing onto the floor like a waterfall. A waterfall, if a waterfall were inside the house and had disintegrating toilet paper in it and worse. I leap up onto the edge of the tub, the better to hear myself screaming, it would seem.

“How bad is it in there?” Our daughter is yelling through the closed door. “Oh my god, you guys, ew! Tell me how bad it is! I can smell it! It stinks! It smells like used radishes out here.”

“Honey, it’s fine! We’ve got it,” Nick yells. He’s bent over the toilet with the plunger again, working it like he’s churning some kind of debased butter.

“Your dad is lying!” I call out to Willa. “We’re, like, knee-deep in sewage.”

Nick looks up at me and smiles. “Are we *knee-deep in sewage*, Rocky?”  
We are not.

“We are,” I say. “I like how that T-shirt fits you, actually,” I add. “Just as a side note.” He laughs, flexes his sexy biceps. There’s a sudden sucking sound, and the rest of the water swirls away. Nick bends over again calmly and twists the valve to refill the bowl.

We’re at the cottage—the same one we’ve been renting every summer for twenty years. It’s late afternoon on Saturday. We’ve been here for approximately one hour. Less, maybe. We know better than to overwhelm this ancient septic system—there’s even a framed calligraphy admonition hanging over the toilet that says, DO NOT OVERWHELM THE ANCIENT SEPTIC SYSTEM!—but, well, here we are.

“Do you need help?” Willa calls in. “Say no, though. I actually really don’t want to help. Jamie needs to know the Wi-Fi password.”

“I think it’s still *chowder123*, all lowercase,” I say.

“Thanks,” she says. We hear her call it out to her brother. “Sorry, also, do you guys know where the bag is with the swimsuits in it?”

“Fuck,” Nick says. He straightens up. “Did you already look in the car?” he calls out to Willa, and she says, “Yeah.”

“Fuck,” Nick says again. “I’m worried I may have left it in the hallway at home. I can kind of picture it there.”

“Are you kidding me?” I say. I’m still standing on the edge of the tub, balancing myself with a hand on the shower-curtain rod. “I specifically said, ‘Did you get all the bags out of the hallway?’ And you were like, ‘Yeah, yeah, I got all the bags.’”

“Right,” he says. “I know. I guess I didn’t.” He doesn’t look at me when he says this. “It’s not, like, a massive crisis. We can get new swimsuits in town.”

“Okay,” I say. “But you totally minimized my concern about *whether we had all the fucking bags*.” Ugh, my voice! You can actually hear the estrogen plummeting inside my larynx.

“Jesus, Rocky.” He’s dragging a bath towel around the floor with his foot now. “It’s not a big deal.”

“I didn’t say it was a big deal,” I say quietly, but my veins are flooded with the lava that’s spewing out of my bad-mood volcano. If menopause were an actual substance, it would be spraying from my eyeballs, searing the word *ugh* across Nick’s cute face. “Just acknowledge that you never really listen to me when I ask you something.”

“Never,” he says flatly. “Wow. Good to know.”

“Are you guys standing around in shit water and fighting?” Willa calls in. “Are you having a meta fight about the way you’re fighting? Don’t. Dad, did you apologize for whatever it is that Mama’s mad about? You should probably just apologize and get on with your life.”

“I did,” he says, and I roll my eyes. “Did you, though?” I say, and he shrugs, says, “Close enough.”

“Willa,” I call out. “We’re good. We’ve got this. Go do something else for a few minutes.”

“Okay—but ew, something’s seeping out from under the door. Oh, okay, Jamie’s saying it’s *chowder* with a capital C. Ew, you guys! Clean up in there and then come out,” Willa calls. “I want to figure out the swimsuit situation.”

“Yes,” I say. “We will.” And then there’s a popping sound, which, it turns out, is the sound of the curtain rod unsuctioning itself from the wall. I lose my balance, grab at the slippery starfish-printed fabric that is no longer attached to anything, and splat onto the floor, banging my head on the edge of the sink and thwacking Nick in the face with the rod. I’m on my back, the shower curtain twisted over my body like a shroud.

Nick looks down at me, not overly alarmed. “How’s your vacation going so far?” he says, and smiles. Then he reaches down with both hands to help me up.