

A woman with long dark hair, seen from the back, is looking out at a sunset over the ocean. She is holding a large, flowing red and orange fabric that frames the top and left sides of the image. The sky is a vibrant mix of red, orange, and yellow, with the sun low on the horizon. The ocean is a deep blue with white waves breaking on a sandy beach.

The Land of Mango Sunsets

Dorothea
Benton
Frank

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE LAND OF MANGO SUNSETS

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**Doubleday Large Print
Home Library Edition**

A stylized, handwritten-style logo for William Morrow, consisting of the letters 'w' and 'm' joined together.

WILLIAM MORROW

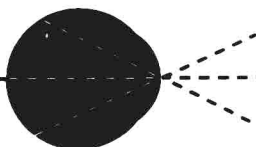
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**This Large Print Book carries the
Seal of Approval of N.A.V.H.**

In the Dream of the Sea

I call you from the open water
surrounding us, speaking
across divided lives.

I call you
from the waves
that always have direction.

Where strings of morning glory
hold the dunes in place,
I call. In winter,

when wind pours
through cracks in the walls.
Inside, I call

although my voice
has been silent
and dissolving.
In sand
pulled back

into the body

of the sea,
from the blue
house build on sand

balanced at the edge
of the world
I call you.

Drowning stars,
shipwrecks, and broken voices
move beneath the waves.

Here, at the open
center
of my ordinary heart

filling with sounds
of the resurrected,
in the dream

of the sea,
I call you
home.

—Marjory Wentworth

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to book signings, and for being so great in every way. Your generous words of support keep me going in the tough moments and I mean that from the bottom of my heart.

THE LAND OF
MANGO SUNSETS

PROLOGUE

We called it the Land of Mango Sunsets. None of the old islanders knew what we meant by that, as they had only ever heard of mangoes. Bottled chutney perhaps, but that was about the sum total of their experience with a food that was so foreign. But I knew all about the romance of them from my earliest memories of anything at all. My parents had honeymooned in the South Pacific, which in those days was considered a little reckless, certainly titillating, and above all, highly exotic. Every morning they left their beds, still half dreaming, to find a tray outside the door.

of their bungalow. They would bring it behind the curtains of mosquito netting and into their bed. Still in their nightclothes, my mother's hair cascading in tendrils and my father's young beard stubble scratching her young complexion, they would burn away the sour paste of morning breath with a plate of sliced mangoes, dripping with fleshy sweetness, a pot of strong tea, and a rack of toast. From then on, mangoes were equated with love, tenderness, and hopeful beginnings, and we spent our lives looking everywhere for other examples of them.

On the island where my family had kept the same cottage for over one hundred years, there was a sliver of time late in the day when the sun hung in the western sky, after it stopped burning white and before it dropped into the horizon. For just a few minutes it would transform itself into a red orange orb. Wherever we were on the island, we would all stop to face it and my father would say to my mother, Look, Josephine, the mango sunset. We would wonder aloud about the majesty of the hand that shaped it. About heaven. About where our ancestors were and could they see us looking for them in the twilight. I believed that they could.

As if in a postscript, great streaks of red and purple would appear on some evenings and on others streams of light, burning through clouds, dividing the horizon into triangles of opalescent colors for which there are no words. The Land of Mango Sunsets was a force all on its own. And whether you understood mango sunsets or not, the ending of most days in the Lowcountry of South Carolina was so beautiful it would wrench your heart.

On Sullivans Island there was of a chorus of bird whistles and song to begin and end each day. On the turning of the tide there were endless rustling fronds brushing the air in a windy dance only they understood. And perhaps most important, there were the leathered but loving hands and peppermint breath of old people, always there to help. The pungent smells of salt and wet earth haunt me to this day because you see, before I could speak, I could smell rain coming, sense a storm, and knew enough to be afraid of fast water that would spin you away from life in an instant.

It was there on that island that I learned about the power of deep love and came to believe in magic, only to forget it all later on.

But years later, the struggle came to remember, a struggle worth the salt in every tear shed and the blood of every bruise to my spirit.

I was a very young girl then with an empty head, who knew little more than a nearly idyllic reality. I did not know yet about heartbreak and I was not old enough to have the sense to plan for a future or even to think of one. Wasn't that day enough? Yes, it was. When we were on Sullivans Island we lived from day to day without a care in the world, or so it seemed to me.

The story, this story I want to tell you, is all true. It may not always be pleasant to hear and I know that much of the time you won't agree with me and the things I have done. I was not always nice. But if you will indulge me just a bit, in the end I think you will see things a little more from my perspective. That's a large part of the point of this. Recognizing yourself mirrored in my mistakes won't be pretty, but perhaps it will keep both of us from making the same mistakes again.

I am on the porch now, rocking back and forth in Miss Josephine's rocking chair. In my ear, I can hear the lilt of her honeyed voice and feel the touch of her hand on my shoul-

der. She's telling me the same thing I am going to show you.

Things happen for a reason. You'll see what I mean. Think of all the times you have told yourself, Well, I wish someone had given me a clue. Or, Why didn't I see that coming? How could I have been so stupid? Or what's the point of trying? Those thoughts always occurred when you were about to learn a lesson in life.

I am older now and it doesn't matter anymore if someone thinks I am a fool. It makes me laugh because I have been a fool so often that if you could stack the occasions one upon another, they would reach the top of the sky and then spiral away into their own orbit. But I hope I am a fool no longer. If I catch myself falling back into my old ways, I would like to think I would just forgive myself, pick up, and carry on. I know now what matters.

Think of a heavy key chain and this story is one of the keys. Use it on the quest toward the happiness there is to be found in life on this wretched but beautiful earth. It's not the answer to everything, but it might help. Let's start at the height of my stupidity.