

LAST SUMMER

by

[Holly Chamberlin](#)

*Life appears to me too short to be spent in
nursing animosity or registering wrong.*

--Charlotte Bronte

CHAPTER 1

Fourteen-year-old Rosie Patterson stood at the window in the living room of her family's house on Pond View Road in the town of Yorktide, Maine. She didn't know why the town was called Pond View, as there was no pond anywhere in sight. She guessed there must have been one years and years ago. And maybe a developer had filled it in to build a house or even two houses. It seemed that every year more land that had been beautiful, wild woodland was being bulldozed or blown apart so that someone from away could build a huge house with big white columns out front (like anyone would really think it was historical!), a four-car garage, and an in-ground pool.

The Patterson house had been built sometime in the 1930s. At least, that's what Rosie's dad had told her. It wasn't a tiny house, in fact, it was the second biggest house on the road, but Mrs. Patterson had decorated it so that it felt cozy and welcoming, even on the coldest day of the year. And in Maine, even pretty far south where the

Pattersons lived, close to the New Hampshire border, that could easily mean temperatures below freezing.

On the first floor were the living room and a small den. In the living room there was a big fireplace with a wide stone mantel on which Mrs. Patterson displayed portraits of the family, including members long gone, and her small but good collection of milk glass. Generally, the living room was reserved for when guests came to visit, not that that was often, especially not now. The den was the room where the Pattersons watched television or read in the evenings, after the dinner dishes were cleaned and homework was finished. It was probably the most snug room in the house with a thick, colorful rug, a bookcase that covered almost an entire wall, and three big armchairs, one really big, another sort of big, and the third, Rosie's, smallish. Just like the chairs for the three bears from the Goldilocks fairy tale, Rosie had noted when she was little. The comparison had often made her smile.

The kitchen, also on the first floor, was Rosie's mother's pride and joy. She loved to cook and had bought the best pots and pans and knives she could afford. Jane Patterson kept the kitchen spotless and the cupboards perfectly organized. Rosie had long ago memorized where every serving fork and can of tomatoes and jar of wild rice belonged. Behind the kitchen and leading out to the small patio and large backyard there was a small screened-in room where the Pattersons stored some of the spring gardening tools, as well as shovels and bags of rock salt for winter use. (The snowblower lived in the toolshed.) On the patio sat a wrought iron table and chair set, Mike Patterson's charcoal-fueled grill, and some of Mrs. Patterson's potted plants. In good weather, the Pattersons often ate dinner on the patio, though so far this summer no one had made the suggestion that they emerge from the security of the kitchen. That wasn't surprising.

A staircase off the living room led to the second floor, on which there were Rosie's bedroom, a bathroom in the hallway, and her parents' bedroom and private bath. Her mother had decorated both bedrooms with good faux-antique furniture and a few small genuine

pieces. The chairs were upholstered in a cabbage rose print, and over each bed hung a ruffled canopy in the same print. Rosie had added her own small personal touches to her room, like a framed print of one of her favorite paintings. It was a portrait of the Princesse Albert de Broglie (whoever she was) painted by a French painter names Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres. Rosie thought the shimmering blue of the princess's dress was magical. Rosie had no talent for art, she could hardly draw a straight line, but she loved to study the paintings in her mom's art and design books and thought she might be developing what her mom had called "a pretty good eye."

The basement of the Patterson home housed Jane Patterson's sewing room and a dressing room for her clients (Rosie's mom had a small tailoring business), Mike Patterson's at-home office, where the family's computer was kept, and the washing machine and dryer. The basement was also where the boiler and all those other kinds of frightening "Dad machines" lived. Rosie had little if any idea of how any of them worked or what, exactly, they did, and that was fine by her. She was like her mother in that way. Stuff to do with gas and electricity and plumbing was stuff that men dealt with. Maybe that was a little old-fashioned, but that's the way it was in the Patterson house.

Rosie touched the glass of the living room window with one slender finger, as if that touch would bring her closer to the beautiful June morning just outside. The strengthening sun was drying what remained of the crystal-like dew. Two robins were hopping around on the front lawn, and she could hear the scolding cry of a blue jay somewhere not far off. The crows were silent at the moment and Rosie was glad for that. When she was little, their absurdly loud cawing had terrorized her. She had been convinced the birds were screaming in pain, not just going about the noisy business of bring crows. But then, she had been an ultrasensitive child. Her mother often reminded her of that. And the past few months had further proved that her mother's opinion was correct. She was now an ultrasensitive young woman.

Though at this time of the day she couldn't see her reflection in the window in front of her, Rosie imagined that she could. (Imagining came easy to Rosie.) At times she wondered if there was some real connection between how you looked and your personality or character. It was a silly notion, and one that probably only found its truth in plays and novels where the villains were all short, dark, and ugly and the tragic heroines were all tall, pale, and beautiful. But what if it wasn't a silly notion? In that case, Rosie thought, seeing herself in her mind's eye, her own appearance kind of proved her ultrasensitive personality and, as her mother often said her "specialness."

First, there was her long, light blond hair that she usually wore in a single braid down her back. When her hair was loose, like when she had dried it after a shower, her father said she looked like Rapunzel. Then there were her big eyes, an unusual vibrant green surrounded by dark lashes. Since she was little, people had been telling her how beautiful she was. It had always made Rosie uncomfortable, strangers coming up to her mother on the street and saying things like, "Oh, my God, your daughter could be a model!" Why did people feel the need to comment on other people's appearance? Rosie thought it seemed kind of rude but was too polite to say anything like, "'Could you please keep your comments about my body and my face to yourself? It embarrasses me.'" Plus, her mother had not asked anyone not to talk about her daughter's appearance—in fact, Rosie thought her mom kind of enjoyed hearing those comments—and Rosie wasn't the sort of girl to protest a parent's decisions. She just wasn't.

She was tall, too, and that was another thing that people often commented on. At her last checkup the doctor had estimated that she would grow to be about five feet nine inches, which was a little taller than her mother but not as tall as her father. And she was really slim, which lots of girls at school had told her they envied. But Rosie had no interest in their obsession with thinness. She was thin because she was thin. So was her mother. It was no big deal, no better or worse than having red hair or brown eyes. Sometimes, in fact, Rosie wished she were totally average-looking or maybe even ugly so that people

would see only what mattered about her, like the fact she was smart and tried always to be good and polite and kind.

Rosie's attention was pulled back from the land of imagination and into the moment at hand as one of the neighbors, a nice older woman named Mrs. Riillo, came walking down the narrow sidewalk. Rosie began to raise her hand, intending to wave, but quickly dropped it. She didn't want to call attention to herself, standing alone at the window. Lately, she had begun to feel too much like the heroine of a novel she had read back in eighth grade. She had found the slim volume on a shelf in the den, stuck in between two of her father's fat mystery novels, almost as if it were hiding. In the story, a young woman not much older than Rosie was trapped in her home by her fears and inhibitions. Her bedroom window provided her some small access to the outside world, while at the same time, with its heavy drapery that she could pull securely shut, the window represented the extreme isolation in which she chose to live.

It was a powerful story with no real ending, happy or otherwise, and it still haunted Rosie. She had chosen to write about it for an extra-credit assignment. Her English teacher had been more than a bit surprised at her choice—most of the other students had chosen to write about action and adventure stories—but she had given Rosie an A. Rosie almost always got an A on her tests and assignments.

Mrs. Riillo was gone now, out of Rosie's sight. A neighborhood cat, an enormous shaggy tom named Harvey, was slinking across the front yard, his eyes riveted on the two robins. Rosie shut her eyes and hunched her shoulders as he leapt forward, intent on a kill. When she opened her eyes, slowly and just a bit, she sighed with relief. The birds had flown to safety and the cat was washing his face as if nothing had gone awry. She knew that cats were predators and that Mother Nature was not always pretty. Still, any kind of violence made Rosie feel queasy.

Satisfied that he was clean and presentable once more after his failed attempt at breakfast, the cat trotted off. Rosie sighed and for a moment felt a wave of restlessness overcome her. The day ahead

stretched out for what seemed like an impossibly long way, offering far too much time to fill. The last term paper had been submitted and graded, and the last test had been taken. Now what?

The final weeks of ninth grade had been packed with activity, from writing those term papers to cleaning out lockers that had accumulated all sorts of interesting and sometimes slightly yucky tidbits. There had been the homeroom party on the very last day of class, complete with cupcakes and potato chips, and the trip up to Portland a few days before to visit the museum and have lunch at Flatbread, the awesome organic pizza place with the huge brick oven. Judy Smith, a pretty, smart girl who everyone liked, had had a party in her backyard for most of the other freshman girls and a few of the boys. Mr. Smith had grilled red hot dogs and Mrs. Smith had made killer potato salad and brownies, and thought it was still too cold for swimming, a few kids had thought to bring their bathing suits just in case. In the end, Judy's aboveground swimming pool remained empty of all but a bobbing beach ball.

Well, Rosie had imagined all these details about the homeroom party and the class trip to Portland and Judy's party, because she hadn't gone to any of them. She could have participated in all three events. But she hadn't.

Here came Trudy Loren, a woman from the next road, walking her yellow Lab. Rosie stepped back a bit from the window, again reluctant to be seen watching the world go by. But Trudy was chatting on her phone, oblivious to the tall, thin girl behind the glass. In a moment, she was gone, heading in the direction of the park.

Rosie stepped forward and once again touched the glass with her finger. If this summer was going to be at all like the last summer and the summer before that and even the one before that, she would have a lot of fun to look forward to. Sure, there was some reading to be done for school. Mr. Arcidiacono, who was going to be their tenth-grade English teacher, had given them a list of novels and nonfiction and instructed everyone to choose two books from each category, read the books through, and write a report on each one. For someone like

Rosie who loved to read and write, the assignment would be enjoyable. And she would read way more books than the four suggested by Mr. Arcidiacono, anyway. She had always been a big reader, just like her parents.

But other than the reading assignment, the only responsibility facing Rosie this summer was to enjoy the warm and sunny weather. It had been a particularly long winter; by mid-May temperatures had barely reached fifty degrees. Everyone, even kids, not just grumpy, arthritic adults like their neighbor Mr. Newman, had been complaining about the cold and gray for so long it really had seemed as if this would be the year that spring never came.

Yes, if this summer was going to be like every other summer past, there would be trips to the beach, and lazy afternoons spent lying under the ginkgo tree in the backyard, daydreaming and planning an exciting, exotic future. There would be the annual trip to Chauncey Creek where they would get lobster rolls, and there would be a blueberry-picking excursion, after which they would make muffins and pancakes and pies with all the berries they had collected. And there would be trips to the green market and long bike rides and movies at the Leavitt Theatre in Ogunquit and...

Rosie pressed her lips together tightly and reminded herself that this summer would not be like last summer or like any of the summers before it. This summer would be a summer without Meg Giroux, Rosie's former best friend turned traitor. It was a strong word, "traitor," but Rosie thought it was the right one. Not that she would speak the word aloud, not even to herself, not even to Dr. Lowe, her therapist. Dr. Lowe wasn't supposed to judge her patient, but still, Rosie was afraid to appear vindictive.

Rosie consciously fingered the few thin, lingering scars on her left arm and then pulled the sleeve of her pink cotton shirt down over her hand. At that moment, as if summoned by Rosie's troubled thoughts, Meg, carrying a watering can, came though the front door of her home next door. Rosie quickly backed away from the window and turned toward the sanctuary that was her own home.

CHAPTER 2

Jane rubbed the sponge in widening circles across the counter she had already cleaned that morning. In the past few weeks she had caught herself acting mindlessly, straightening pillows that had already been straightened, adding to the grocery list items she had already bought, even forgetting the day of the week. This was unusual behavior for Jane Ella Patterson. One of the things she prided herself on was her highly developed sense of purpose and organization.

The counter beyond clean, Jane rinsed the sponge and squeezed it until it was close to one dry. The physical effort caused a dull ache in her right hand. She sighed and flexed her fingers. She wondered if she was developing arthritis. It would seem likely, given all the years of working with her hands. Her mother had developed severe arthritis in her fifties. Jane thought it might be an inherited condition.

Jane Patterson was about five feet seven inches on a good day, which was getting harder to find; she often caught herself slumping, and a muscle under her right shoulder seemed to have permanently clenched itself into a throbbing ball. Just after her forty-second birthday last summer, her normally perfect eyesight had begun to fail and she now wore prescription glasses for close work and reading. Wearing glasses didn't bother her; it was the cost of the prescription that was problematic. Both she and her husband were self-employed and that meant outrageous insurance costs. They weren't poor, but they weren't rich either, at least not by local standards. All you had to do was drive through certain parts of York County or the town of Ogunquit and you would find massive mansions overlooking the ocean and estates that went on for miles. But Jane loved her house on Pond View Road and enjoyed making it a home. Some women might

balk at the term “homemaker,” seeing it as old-fashioned and somehow demeaning. But Jane thought otherwise.

And her husband took pride in their home, too, and in the life they had made together. Mike was an accountant with his own small firm. He rented an office on the first floor of a large house on Riverton Road; a family practitioner worked from an office across the hall. On slow days Mike was able to come home for lunch, and when the roads were impassable due to severe weather, which happened several times each winter, he worked from his office in the basement. During tax season, when he regularly worked late into the night, the basement office became something of a bedroom as well. An acquaintance back in Boston had called Mike a workaholic. Jane thought he was just a very conscientious man.

Counter cleaned, lunch dishes long ago put away, laundry folded... What next? What could she do to distract herself from the nagging sense of failure that loomed over her like a thundercloud?

Jane went over to the fridge and straightened one of the photographs attached to the door by a magnet. Over the years the fridge had become the family portrait gallery. Jane ran her eye over the current display. Rosie’s latest school picture, taken last September; a picture of the three of them at a Sea Dogs game up in Portland; Rosie at the age of four on Santa’s lap. That was one of Mike’s favorites. And then there was a photo that had been taken just about a year ago—one of Jane’s favorites. The three of them had gone to Kennebunk one afternoon to visit the galleries and shops. Totally by chance she and Rosie had come down to breakfast that morning wearing almost identical outfits: pink blouses, tan chinos, and white sneakers. The only thing that set them apart was Jane’s wedding band and earrings and her shorter hair. In the picture, they were sitting side by side at a restaurant where they had stopped for a late lunch. Mike had called them his “beautiful twin girls.” Now the smiling faces of their former, innocent selves mocked Jane.

She turned away from the photograph. Since Rosie was a toddler, people (Jane’s mother Rosemary, for one, for whom Rosie was

named) had been describing Rosie as her mother's Mini-Me. In Jane's opinion, her daughter was much prettier than she had even been. Of course, she was prejudiced in Rosie's favor, but she really believed her daughter had a quality she had never had, what Jane had liked to call a "specialness."

Rosemary Alice, her special little girl. Rosie was in the living room now, at the piano. Jane had coaxed her to practice. She had hoped that playing would bring her daughter some pleasure. But from the lackluster sounds reaching Jane's ear, it was clear that her heart was not at all into the music. In fact, Jane had noticed that for the past several months Rosie's interest in the piano had been waning. How much that had to do with what had happened to her daughter at the hands of those bullying girls, Jane didn't know.

A car horn sounded from the street out front and Jane flinched. *I should go back to work*, she thought, *at least for an hour*. She had accomplished her goals for the day but there was always something else that could be done, even if it was just re-ordering her collection of antique buttons or reviewing her schedule for the coming weeks.

And it would be a busy few weeks, what with it being wedding season. Jane had started her small tailoring business when Rosie was about four and finally in preschool. (The preschool had been at Mike's insistence. He was afraid Rosie wasn't learning to socialize with other kids her own age. Except for Meg, of course.) Her sewing room was in a sectioned-off part of the finished basement and contained two sewing machines, one of which she'd had since college, and a large worktable. Shelves along two walls contained neat rows of thread, bolts of fabric, and a collection of interesting and useful items Jane found at the better thrift stores, things like bits of old lace and lengths of brocaded trim. A dress form stood in one corner. Next to the sewing room was a changing room for clients. Mike had installed full-length mirrors in such a way that the client could see herself from every angle.

Much of Jane's business was taken up with minor projects, like alterations to dresses for special occasions or to suits for the office.

Sometimes, though rarely, a woman would come by with a request for a jacket or a skirt or a pair of pants made from a pattern. Jane enjoyed those challenges; there wasn't a lot of thrill in hemming a skirt. As a child she had taught herself to sew on her grandmother's old machine, and she had been making most of her own clothes since she was in high school. Unlike her mother, Rosie had very little interest in clothes and absolutely none in sewing. Still, Jane liked to daydream about Rosie's far-off wedding. She imagined the two of them working together to design the dress and the veil and the handbag. She imagined—

The piano had gone silent. Jane's entire body tensed. She fought the urge to rush into the living room. Rosie was probably just stretching her fingers or taking a bathroom break. *There's no need to panic*, she told herself. *Rosie is not necessarily in trouble*. And then the piano sounded again and Jane sighed audibly.

That was the best thing about working from home, she thought now. She was almost always available for her daughter. When Rosie got home from school, Jane was there to ask about her day and put out a snack. When Rosie was sick enough to stay home from school, Jane was there to bring her homemade chicken soup and flat ginger ale. The situation had seemed ideal. She had considered their lives to be very close to perfect. Absolute perfection would have been another daughter or even a son, but no one achieved absolute perfection, Jane thought, no matter how hard she tried.

And Jane had tried.

Jane glanced again at the photograph of her and her daughter in their matching outfits. She knew that human beings were biologically wired to be fearful. It was a basic survival tool, but for Jane, especially after two failed pregnancies, fear had become her default mode. Not that she hadn't always been a somewhat high-strung person, prone to nerves and to what some (Mike, for one) would say were groundless terrors. That was the reason she had forced herself to become an exceptionally organized person. Organization was a way of staving off chaos. At least, you could tell yourself that it was.

But no amount of organized and disciplined behavior could entirely mask her basic fearful cautious nature, and Jane was afraid she had passed that fearful and cautious nature on to her daughter. Clearly, Rosie was not tough and resilient in ways that perhaps she should be. If she had been tough and resilient, then...

For a moment Jane thought she was going to cry. She willed away the impulse, reluctant to have Rosie find her in tears. She wondered if the heavy sense of guilt she labored under would ever go away.

Sure, she worked from home and was almost always available to her daughter. Then how had she not known at the very start that something was seriously wrong? When she had begun to suspect that Rosie was unhappy, why hadn't she pushed harder for answers? She had attributed Rosie's unusual moodiness to mere adolescence, hormones wreaking havoc with her once generally sunny nature. It was normal for a fourteen-year-old to beg off activities in which she used to take pleasure. Though when Rosie had stopped going to the library each Saturday morning, her absolute favorite activity, Jane should have known that something more than hostile hormones was going on. She should have known.

It was only back in May—just last month!—when Rosie's best friend Meg told Mackenzie Egan and her awful cohorts about Rosie's youthful trouble with bed-wetting that Jane had finally seen the truth. And then she had learned about the bullying her daughter had endured, and about the harm Rosie had been inflicting on her body. The traces of those ugly wounds broke Jane's heart. They were a vivid and ugly reminder of her failure as a mother to protect her child. Even if the scars on Rosie's arm completely healed someday, they would never be forgotten.

Just like the memory of that fateful morning when Rosie refused to get out of bed to go to school. It was entirely out of the norm. Jane had asked her if she felt sick and Rosie just shook her head and said nothing. When after fifteen minutes Rosie still hadn't budged, Jane

had actually raised her voice, demanding that Rosie stop fooling around.

And then, in a completely uncharacteristic action, Jane had yanked the covers off her daughter and been confronted with the brutal reality. Rosie's skinny arms, hugged around her skinny body. And the left arm scored with nasty red scars from her elbow to her wrist. Jane stood there, hands clutching the sheet and lightweight comforter, her head filling with an awful buzz. She was sure she was going to be sick all over the bed. Rosie lay still, her eyes wide open but staring at nothing, almost as if she were dead. And then Jane had dropped the covers and run from the bedroom.

Why had it taken so long for her to realize that something was terribly, terribly wrong, and that her well-behaved, hard-working, always polite little girl was truly suffering? Why had it taken so long for her to realize that her only child was seriously ill and not playing an adolescent game?

Memories of that morning still made Jane feel sick to her stomach, but she couldn't chase the images away. In a way, she didn't want to forget. She remembered now with vivid recall the frantic call she had made to Mike at his office. He had raced home and, after looking in on Rosie, had called the school to tell them that she wasn't well and wouldn't be coming in that day. And then Jane and Mike had painfully learned the truth, at first in bits and pieces and then in a torrent of words, finishing with what Meg Giroux had done to their daughter. Rosie had sobbed for what seemed like hours and then she had finally fallen asleep, utterly exhausted.

Over the following days there were meetings with the school's principal and guidance counselor, an appointment with the Patterson's doctor to ascertain Rosie's physical health, and then the family interview with Dr. Lowe, psychotherapist, at her office in her charming old house in Kittery. It had been the most trying week of Jane's life.

Jane took the broom from the tall, narrow closet where it had lived alongside a mop, bucket, and cleaning supplies. She had swept

the kitchen floor after breakfast, but there always seemed to be stray bits of food or dust to catch. As she swept, methodically, starting in one corner of the room and working with short, rhythmic strokes, she thought back to Mother's Day. It had been a bittersweet occasion, coming hard upon the heels of Rosie's breakdown. Mike had done his best to make the day enjoyable—he had made Jane's favorite breakfast, eggs Benedict, and given her a lovely bouquet of flowers from her favorite local florist—but her heart had felt too bruised for celebration.

Of course she was glad that her daughter hadn't tried to kill herself, as so many bullied children did. Of course she was glad that Rosie genuinely seemed to want to get better. She went without protest to Dr. Lowe's office once a week, and while school was still in session she had kept up with her homework. The school administration had been very supportive. A teacher had come to the house to bring Rosie her final exams and to monitor her while she completed them. She had passed each class, even math, and most with flying colors.

There was a lot for which to be thankful. But there was also a lot to regret. True, Rosie had given her a beautiful Mother's Day card. But it had only partly reassured Jane that her daughter didn't hate her for not coming to her aid quickly enough against those awful girls. Jane suspected that someday, sooner or later, Rosie would lash out. She just had to be angry. But so far she had displayed nothing but sadness. At Least, that was all that Jane could see. Maybe Dr. Lowe was seeing and hearing a different story.

Yes, Jane thought, emptying the meager contents of the dustpan into the garbage and returning the broom to its closet, it was too late for self-recrimination, even though she knew that her job as a responsible adult was to focus on the future and on healing the damage done to her family.

That was what Dr. Lowe had advised. That was what her husband counseled, and that was what the self-help books she had been devouring in the past weeks recommended. "Try to have some

compassion for yourself,” Mike had said. He was a good man and generally gave very smart and thoughtful advice, but in this case, Jane found herself unable to really hear and accept it.

The one person who might have been able to help her heal, the one person to whom she might have listened, was the one person to whom she absolutely could not go. And that was Meg’s mother, Frannie Giroux.

Jane sank into a chair at the round kitchen table. She felt tired and unhappy and her back was aching. She wondered if she should be taking an antidepressant. So far, Rosie was doing well without any medication. Her therapist had advised they hold off on a drug unless it was absolutely necessary.

Maybe I should make an appointment with Dr. Lowe, Jane thought. Or, if Jacqueline Lowe didn’t think it was a good idea for mother and daughter to see the same therapist, with someone she could recommend. Jane had met alone with Dr. Lowe only once; it was common for her to have individual conversations with the parents of a new, underage patient. Jane had cried a lot and was pretty sure she’d been inarticulate. What Jane did remember clearly was that Dr. Lowe hadn’t judged or condemned her failure to detect Rosie’s troubles earlier. Well, if she had judged or condemned her, she had kept her thoughts and opinions to herself as a professional was trained to do.

In fact, Dr. Lowe had been the one to suggest the books Jane could turn to for information about bullying, as well as about forgiveness and recovery. What Dr. Lowe couldn’t have known was that Jane would read so obsessively, desperate in her desire to better understand Rosie’s experiences through the previous winter and spring. And after absorbing a mind-boggling amount of information, some of it puzzling, some of it contradictory, Jane had come to the unhappy conclusion that she had sheltered her daughter too closely. She had raised a child unprepared to face the craziness of the world without falling apart. She was entirely to blame for Rosie’s present

situation. Not Mike. It always came down to the mother, no matter what anyone said to the contrary.

Jane wiped an invisible crumb from the table. The mother-daughter relationship, she had come to realize, was wonderful, but it was also a relationship famously fraught with jealousy and resentment and frustration. Why had she thought that her relationship with her own daughter would be exempt from trouble? Why had she thought they were so privileged or lucky, or, as Frannie with her belief in God would say, blessed?

Jane glanced over her shoulder. Through the window over the sink she could easily see the Giroux house. Her head began to tingle and she felt the blood rush to her face. It was a surge of anger that frightened her in its intensity. She turned away from the window and put her hands on her burning face. Would this awful rage ever go away? It came upon her several times a day, sometimes sneaking up on her full-blown, sometimes making its presence known with a tiny spark that, no matter how vigorously she tried to douse, eventually roared into a flame.

It seemed like a cruel joke that the two families should live next door to one another, that a symbol of what had been a close, almost symbiotic relationship should now exist to mock her. She didn't want to remember all the good times the Pattersons had shared at the Giroux home, and all the good times Frannie and her children had shared at Jane and Mike's house—the family game nights, the holiday meals, the rainy Saturday afternoons when Mike would make popcorn and they would watch a funny movie. But the memories, like the scars on Rosie's arm, were there and not likely to fade away into oblivion anytime soon.

Jane rubbed her tired eyes. In some moments she found it hard to believe that she and Frannie had ever been friends. She wondered how she could have allowed her daughter to be so badly deceived. She was as angry with herself as she was with Frannie and her daughter. And she was determined never, ever to forgive the Giroux family.

Jane got up from the table, went to the fridge, opened it, and stared inside. It was time to start thinking about dinner. She had lost weight since Rosie's breakdown (God, she hated that word, but what other word would do?), and it wasn't flattering. There were lines on her face that hadn't been there only weeks before, and her neck looked downright scrawny. Rosie's appetite, usually hearty, had also suffered. The last thing Rosie needed was for her depression to lead to anorexia.

With a sigh, Jane closed the fridge. She wished she were only being dramatic, thinking such a thing. But Dr. Lowe had told them that often kids who took to cutting were prone to developing eating disorders. Almost as proof, there was Rosie's disturbing weight loss, something Jane had been only marginally aware of over the past few months. And that was another crime. She couldn't help but wonder now if she had been willfully ignorant of that, too, simply unwilling to believe or to admit that her own child could be less than perfect.

If I turn my head, the problem will go away. If I pretend nothing is wrong, then nothing will be wrong. There was a bitter irony to it all, Jane thought now. If anyone should have noticed ill-fitting clothing, it should have been her. She could spot poorly fitting pants on a stranger at the mall, but she hadn't noticed sagging jeans on her own daughter.

Jane suddenly became aware that her head was throbbing and went to the kitchen drawer where the first aid kit was stored. She was taking ibuprofen at least twice a day lately, which was probably too often. But the headaches just kept coming, maybe because nothing in her world seemed solid or certain anymore. Everything had been put to question, every assumption and every comfort.

Thankfully, Mike would be home from work soon. He would spend some time alone with Rosie before dinner, encouraging her to work on a jigsaw puzzle with him or to play a quick, intense game of Scrabble. At times, Jane felt a tiny bit jealous of their relationship; she wanted to be the one doing puzzles and playing Scrabble with her daughter. But whenever that tiny feeling of jealousy emerged, Jane carefully squashed it. She knew that Rosie loved her, and anyway, it

was so much healthier for a girl to have a good relationship with her father than to be virtually ignored by him, like Meg was virtually ignored by her father. Look at that Peter Giroux's neglect had wrought!

Jane picked up the vase of fresh-cut pink peonies that sat on the kitchen table and for the second time that day refreshed the water. Peonies were one of Rosie's favorite flowers, but so far she hadn't commented on this bouquet. Her interest in so many once-loved things hadn't yet returned. Jane hoped that it did, and quickly.

The flowers re-arranged, Jane again slumped into a chair at the table. This far in her life as a parent she had always felt as if she could handle whatever challenges cropped up, maybe with some help from Mike or even a dose of sheer good luck. But now, from the moment she got out of bed each morning until the moment she got back into it at night, she felt horrible, crippling doubt about her ability to shepherd her daughter through the remaining years of childhood and then safely into adulthood. And maybe she deserved to suffer from that doubt.

Jane heard the sound of a car coming up the drive toward the garage. Mike. She sighed in genuine relief. She always felt stronger and braver when Mike was around. She got up, almost knocking over her chair in the process, and hurried to the front door to greet him.

CHAPTER 3

October 22, 2011

Dear Diary,

Today was pretty good. It's actually kind of fun being a freshman. I was sort of afraid that the upperclassmen were going to give me a hard time, but there's actually a kind of mentoring or big sister/big brother program where every ninth grader gets assigned a twelfth grader who's supposed to look out for them. My big sister is this girl names Carly. She seems okay, though she doesn't seem all that interested in being a mentor or a big sister. She forgot my name the other day and called me Rita. I didn't correct her, but Meg did. But so far everything's been fine, so it's no big deal. I have her class schedule so I know where she is if I need her for advice or something.

This is kind of interesting. Carly has a tattoo on the back of her neck. I think it's a flower, but I don't want to stare (not that she would see me behind her!) or to ask her, so I don't really know for sure. I didn't even know you were allowed to have a tattoo in school. I mean that you were allowed to show a tattoo. I'll never get one. I think they're kind of gross and it's supposed to hurt a lot when you get them. Why would I want to have someone stick a sharp needle or whatever it is they use into me? Meg says she's going to get one as soon as her mother lets her. She thinks maybe a small rose on her ankle or maybe a cross, if her mother won't freak out about the cross. Mrs. Giroux is pretty religious. She doesn't think you should wear a cross as jewelry, which in some ways, I guess, is what a tattoo is. She says it's sacrilegious. Mrs. Giroux wears a cross but that's because she believes in Jesus.

Anyway, Meg's big sister is really into checking in with Meg and making sure she's doing okay. Her name is Tiffany and she says she's going to college in Florida because she hates the winters in Maine. I don't think she's been accepted into college yet—but the way she talks she's determined to throw away her parka and boots for good! I can kind of understand what she feels about hating the long winters, but I could never move so far away from my mom and dad, not even if I could come home for holidays. I'd miss them way too much.

Yesterday was my fourteenth birthday and Meg gave me a piece of polished rose quartz in the shape of a heart. (She said she got it in this fantastic store up in Portland called Stones and Stuff. She said this really nice woman named Heather owns it. I wonder when she got her mom to drive her to Portland without me knowing? That was pretty sneaky!) It's got a silver piece on top, kind of a loop so I can wear it on a chain. I love it! Mom and Dad gave me a new copy of the last Harry Potter book (somehow my old copy got lost, maybe when we stayed overnight in that hotel when we went down to Massachusetts for Dad's brother's wedding; anyway now my collection is complete again, which is a big relief) and then Meg and her mother and Petey came over for dinner.

To read the rest of LAST SUMMER

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER ONLINE](#)

Available in paper or ebook formats from your favorite online bookseller.

HollyChamberlin.com