



SUMMER'S WISDOM

CAMDEN LAKE TALES BOOK 1

NEW YORK BOOK FESTIVAL AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR
HEATHER HUMMEL GALLAGHER

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Heather Hummel Gallagher

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Camden Lake Tales Book 1

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CHAPTER 1



*J*amie Winter 1990

Remember me, God? I'm the soul You left on Your workbench one day. You turned to add a final, perfecting touch to someone else's soul. When you turned, the swing of Your elbow knocked me off the bench ...like Santa or one of his elves knocking a misfit toy off his workbench. It wasn't too far of a fall, really. Later, when the janitor swept the floor of Your work area, he swirled my soul up with the sawdust and sent the pile down the chute. I don't know where the chute would have taken me because I was able to hold onto a thread of hope. It was that hope that saved me.

That thread of hope allowed me to swing over to the conveyor belt I had spotted from up above. I couldn't miss seeing it—it was filled with excited souls. I had that same level of excitement just a day earlier. Now, it was going to take every ounce of energy to join them and to not miss out on this next batch of births. Right then, as I was ready to swing, the conveyor belt seemed to slow. It had already had centuries of use, so I'm certain it was worn out. I thought

about all the famous souls, good and bad, who must have passed down it. Kings and Queens from across the lands, Knights and Swordsmen who protected them, George Washington, Shakespeare, Lady Godiva, Cleopatra, and so many more. I even had to wonder if Hitler passed down that same conveyor belt and how the other souls felt about him being there. Then there were the billions of everyday people. They all took their ride down the conveyor belt to birth. *You know the one I mean?* The one where You placed Your finished projects. All of those perfected souls I was batched with. This was my only chance to join them. I whistled, calling out to any soul who could hear me. A few looked up and pointed as I grabbed tighter to the thread of hope and planted my feet firmly beneath me before lunging forward and swinging my legs as I flew across the open space toward the belt. *I had to make it. I just had to.*

To my surprise and relief, three souls reached out and grabbed me. Two took hold of my arms, and one grabbed me around my waist as I landed a bit clumsily on the belt. The taller of the three grabbed the thread of hope and yanked it down. I watched in bewilderment as it fell into a spiral on the belt beneath my feet. I thanked the souls as they commended me on my flight to join them. I sighed, overwhelmed and nearly speechless. I looked up to where God would be working on the next batch of souls and quietly said, "Thank you for giving me strength." I swear I heard him say, "You're welcome."

The conveyor belt took us to the waiting room. It was clear to me that parents were already assigned to everyone, the souls awaiting their birth. Of course, my not being on that list threw things off a bit. Instead, I was tossed into the room with the other orphans to await my birth.

I was born later to a young girl, ashamed of my delivery, her pregnancy. Knowing service would start soon and the

church would be packed, she left me on the steps by the door of a small church on my birthday of Christmas Eve in 1974. I don't remember much else about that day except that it had snowed the night before and into that evening. The snow was piled up high, and on the church's neighboring cemetery icicles glistened on the cold headstones. The young girl didn't even look back after leaving me there, alone on those steps. She just left me wrapped in blankets and placed in a basket like a puppy beside the door where I was sheltered from the cutting wind.

That was the first day of my life. Was that what You had planned for me all along? To start my life with abandonment issues, knowing I may never overcome them? I hope that soul You turned to perfect while I lay on Your workbench is happy in their human body. I hope turning on me was worth it for their sake. He or she probably lives in a beautiful home overlooking an ocean somewhere. Do they have a boat? Do they watch the sunset and appreciate its beauty?

I'm sure You didn't mean to forget about me. Or to have my life start as an unwanted infant. They say You're perfect. That You don't make mistakes. Oh, and I love this one that You live inside each of us. I question these statements because how can You be inside someone You forgot about? Someone You let fall to the ground and be swept away with sawdust?

Well, if You ever want to talk, like if something triggers Your memory that I existed, I am here...waiting for some answers.

* * *

JAMIE SPRING 1990

Jamie woke up from a haunting and recurring dream about her relationship with God. She had awoken from it

several times going back as long as she could remember. But this morning was different because she remembered more of the details—something about a church and a conveyor belt—and when she awoke, she was left with questions she hadn't had before. It wasn't until later that afternoon when she was able to connect the dots and it all made sense.

* * *

JAMIE WAS sixteen when her parents told her she had been adopted just after her birth in 1974. They thought her to be old enough to handle the news like an adult, she supposed. *When are you ever old enough to hear that your birth parents didn't want you?*

It was a Friday night, and she was planning on going to Trinity's house. They had been best friends since the third grade when they bonded and laughed over Jimmy Livingston dropping a frog in the teacher's lunchbox during recess. They never knew if she found the frog, as she would have been too proud to admit it if she had, let alone if it scared her. Jamie and Trinity had been sent from the playground back to the classroom to find Jimmy, who told the teacher he needed something from his backpack. She should have known better, but it was the beginning of the school year, and she was a new teacher, so she didn't know yet what Jimmy was capable of. They always put the rotten kids in the new teacher's classroom and then wondered why retention was so poor.

On the day she found out she was adopted, Jamie sat at the kitchen counter in their home in Rhode Island watching the small television at the end of it while snacking on Oreos and an orange, her favorite after school snack. Jamie never knew why they picked that day to tell her, especially knowing she was spending the night at Trinity's. Her

sixteenth birthday, which happened to be Christmas Eve, had come and gone a few months earlier with the usual hoopla of turning sixteen. Her parents took her to a restaurant in Newport. While the food was good, and the restaurant beautiful, it was a bit over the top for Jamie's taste and liking. Trinity joined them and was much more impressed. What mattered most to Jamie was being with her best friend and her parents. Sixteen was just another year.

Yet now her parents came in the kitchen, and her dad turned the television off—something she intuitively knew not to argue over—while her mom pulled two of the stools closer to hers. They held hands as they began to talk, the first sign it wasn't going to be good news. Her father began speaking while her mother teared up. "Honey, there's something we've been meaning to tell you. We've thought long and hard about when the best time would be, and honestly, there is no best time. But you've grown into a wonderful young lady and we...well, we..."

The only word Jamie recalled coming out of their mouths after "wonderful young lady" was "adopted" because after that, and even before that, nothing else mattered. The rest of her father's speech was about justifying Jamie's birth parents' actions and finding ways to assure Jamie that she was *their* daughter and they had always loved her as such. Jamie felt it was quite selfish in hindsight, them wanting to make themselves feel better. At the same time, she knew how much they loved her, and this knowledge didn't change that.

Jamie's overnight bag sat packed by the front door. Her eyes never left it until her dad, her now known adoptive dad, said, "Are you okay, honey?"

Jamie nodded, not knowing what they expected of her. Questions didn't immediately come through the wall of shock around her. "Can you take me to Trinity's now?" was all she could muster.

“Dear, we can stay and talk about this. You must have questions.” Jamie’s mom let go of her dad’s hand and touched her arm. Jamie instinctively jerked back, and instantly regretted it. Her mother didn’t deserve that.

“No. I’m good,” Jamie said quietly. “I just want to go to Trinity’s.”

Her dad patted her mom’s arm and glanced at her. He wanted this over with as bad as Jamie did; she could tell. Her mom, on the other hand, wanted a family moment that Jamie just wasn’t able to give her right then. Thirty minutes later Jamie was in Trinity’s driveway, bag in hand and her dad pulling away in the car.

Jamie lost all footing that day. The solid ground she knew to be beneath her no longer existed. She had no idea who she was anymore or who she would become. Any label previously given seemed either meaningless or false.

Jamie couldn’t tell Trinity everything that night because she didn’t remember most of what they had said. She just told her they said she was adopted. At first Trinity thought they had been mad at her and said it to be vicious. But the more they talked about it, and the more Jamie assured her there was no anger or argument. It all made sense, actually. The whispering and gestures toward her by adults after church last Sunday; the private conferences with teachers and the principal in the weeks leading up to them breaking the news. The pieces started to come together. Sixteen years old and no longer was acne and slowly developing breasts her biggest issues. It didn’t matter anymore if Paul liked her or not. It didn’t matter if she brought her B- in science up to a B+ or an A-. At the time it didn’t even matter who her real parents were. They didn’t deserve to know her or know that she even knew about them. They had sixteen years to live with the knowledge that she was adopted. She had only had an

hour at most before it sunk in as she sat on the floor in Trinity's bedroom.

"Okay, so this is so going to get around school. We need to make up a story about why your real mom couldn't keep you. Maybe she's a CIA agent and couldn't cart you around?" Trinity flipped her long, blonde hair over her shoulder with dramatic flair. Her blue eyes looked over at Jamie, who didn't respond with laughter.

"Very funny," Jamie said sarcastically and threw herself on the bed.

"C'mon, it's not that bad, Jamie."

Jamie just looked at her.

"Okay, so maybe it is. But you'll be okay. You'll still make it in this crazy world with the rest of us. Lots of people are adopted." Trinity smiled her big, toothy grin.

Jamie loved that about Trinity. Her pure optimism. However, there were times when Jamie just didn't want to be cheered up. This was one of them.

"It's like God messed up when he made me and put me in the wrong place." Jamie tried to explain. "Not that my parents don't love me, but you know what I mean? How could a mother not *want* her child?"

"God messes up all the time. Just look at Jimmy. He's still trying to get away with that stupid frog trick."

Jamie had to admit that was funny and the smile on her face and the relaxing of her shoulders must've made Trinity feel better because she jumped up and grabbed her phone.

"Okay, who are we going to prank call?" she asked.

That was Jamie's best friend for you, although Jamie didn't feel like calling anyone. She wanted to leave the rest of the world out there and far away. Instead, they went downstairs and filled two bowls with chocolate chip ice cream. Each bite of numbing cold ice cream that quickly melted in Jamie's mouth helped to ease the blow she had undergone.

Jamie slept pretty well that night, considering. But when she awoke the next morning, and every morning after that for several weeks, her first thought was that her real parents, or at least her real mother, didn't want her.

"I don't want to talk about it for a while." That's what she told her parents when she got home the next day. They left her alone, but she knew they checked in with her teachers at least once a week to make sure she was okay. Her grades dropped a little in the coming months, but she knew she'd have to keep them up or they'd send her to therapy or, God-forbid, group counseling. She couldn't imagine sitting around with other adopted kids talking about their abandonment issues. She had no doubt it worked for many, but as a firm believer in privacy, her laundry stayed in her own washing machine, not on the line outside for everyone to see and snicker at. Instead, Jamie turned to her journal. She wrote in it every night before going to bed. It was a habit she had already started, but now she needed it more than ever for guidance and as a place to explore her feelings in private. It's funny though, it seems like writing in a journal is really like sharing your thoughts with someone else, you just don't know exactly who that someone is. But you do know it's someone who cares about and understands you more than anyone else, perhaps God himself. A big part of Jamie hoped it was Him because she needed Him to know what was going on so He could right the wrong.

The first night, while Trinity was in the bathroom brushing her teeth, Jamie looked in the mirror hanging on the back of Trinity's door. Her long, auburn hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Her hazel eyes looked brown that day but had been known to look green in certain light. Her cheekbones were just starting to replace the baby fat cheeks that never seemed to go away no matter how much weight she lost. The one feature she loved, which she had been told was

perfect by more than a few people, was her nose. It sloped perfectly down the middle of her face, and her eyes set it off at just the right equal distance to the left and right while her mouth curved upwards at just the right distance below it—all a combination of features that one of her classmates told her were model-worthy. She wondered about the woman and man who gave her those features. Which one gave her the hazel eyes? The perfect nose? The turned up mouth? The auburn hair?

Jamie sat back down on the bed, pulled her journal out of her backpack, and wrote two words: *I'm adopted!* She didn't know what else to write. She hadn't processed the reality yet, but wanted it documented on the exact day she found out.

* * *

IN THE FOLLOWING WEEKS, other than her journal entries drastically changing from what she did on any given weekend to her questions and thoughts about being adopted, she tried to stay the same 'ol Jamie everyone knew—clothes, hair, smile—all for the same reason; she didn't want her life to change. But inside she was indeed forever changed.

After some thought, Jamie decided the best thing to do that summer was to work as a camp counselor at a sleep-away camp. In the weeks before school let out, she went to the school library during study hall and researched camps. She wanted to apply to them with the goal of having a counselor job lined up when summer began. Trinity was going to Camden, Maine for several weeks to spend time at their family cottage, and Jamie figured she could visit her for a few days before or after camp. Once she began looking, she realized there were so many summer camps to choose from, not only all over the country, but right there in Maine. What she had to do was narrow the search down to two ideals: loca-

tion and the camp's focus. She didn't want to spend her summer ensconced in a traditional swimming and tennis camp. She wanted one with an emphasis on creativity, the arts, writing, and theater rather than all the activities that required sunblock and agility. She loved sports, but she loved the arts just as much and thought it would be fun as a counselor to teach the arts rather than rescuing kids from overturned canoes.

Jamie also knew her parents wouldn't want her to be too far away. They would worry too much and there was no point in them worrying about her more than they already were. So, she kept her choices to New England. At the same time, she wanted to be far enough away that it was worth going. Not that they would come visit her at camp, but the point of going to camp was to have some freedom. If they knew she was just up the road, it would help. Rhode Island is such a small state that it didn't take much of a drive to at least be in Connecticut or Massachusetts, or even Maine for that matter. Maine was also a strong possibility with Trinity right there. Knowing she was up the road, now that Jamie could handle.

Between those two prerequisites, Jamie's options were narrowed, which made it easier. She sent her application to two camps. One on Camden Lake in Maine, and as a backup, one in northeastern Massachusetts. When she told Trinity, she added that she hoped to land the one in Maine since it was only thirty miles north of Trinity's cabin. Next, she had to tell her parents. Sometimes when she broke news to them, she did it when Trinity was with her. She knew it wouldn't lessen the blow, but it often lessened the repercussions. That was before the big announcement though. Now Jamie seemed to be given a little more freedom because they didn't want to upset her. *Parents can be so easy to manipulate.* When Jamie told them about camp, Trinity was there because she

wanted to convince them to let Jamie spend a week, or at least a few days, at her cabin before camp started.

As Jamie expected, they weren't too thrilled with either announcement.

"But honey, don't you think you want to relax here at home this summer? Take a load off after school? Maybe get a job at the concession stand at the pool?" her mom suggested.

"No, I really want to do this. These camps have great arts programs, and there isn't anything like that around here. Besides, it'll look great on my college applications," she added as an impromptu negotiation tool.

And that sold it.

A week later Jamie heard back from the two camps. She was offered a job at both and chose the one on Camden Lake in Maine, partly because Trinity was right up the road and partly because of their specific arts programs. Now all she had to do was count down the days until summer vacation and then start packing. With the end of school approaching and camp to get ready for, the discussion of therapy never came up again.

"So, what are you going to tell the kids at camp when they ask about your mom and dad?" Trinity asked. It was a Friday night, and they were watching television at Trinity's house. She asked Jamie the question during an old replay of a 1970s Pepsi commercial—the one with all the Labrador Retriever puppies crawling all over the little boy.

"No idea. I hadn't really thought about that yet," Jamie said.

Jamie didn't forget Trinity's question. Trinity had always been the extrovert, and with that came the curiosity of what other people thought. Jamie, on the other hand, was an introvert and didn't consider such things until in the moment. She was juggling her own internal emotions, not worrying about kids at camp and what questions they might ask, no more

than any personal questions she'd be asking them. Jamie's mind just didn't work the same way Trinity's did.

Kids at school never really asked because they knew Jamie had her parents and once the word got out that she was adopted, they were only slightly curious about her real parents. Camp would be the first time she'd be faced with new people. It's not like asking if you like ice cream and what flavor. If someone asked about her parents, she supposed it would depend on the conversation. Even still, it was a lot for a sixteen going on seventeen-year-old to take on, and she resented being in that situation in the first place.

If Jamie said her mom was an interior decorator, her dad was an architect, and they live in Rhode Island, she'd certainly be telling the truth. The choice to add that she was adopted was all hers. It felt weird at school when people first started asking her because at that point the news had circulated around school, and she had no control over who knew. The teachers knew before she did because her parents had told them they were going to tell her and asked them to keep an eye on her in the coming days afterwards. Camp would be different though. Jamie could choose not to tell anyone, and for four splendid weeks not think about it or talk about it.

* * *

OVER TIME, Jamie had been able to bring her grades up and maintain some semblance of her old self. Still, her parents occasionally pushed her to talk about the adoption. Jamie had pulled away from them quite a bit during the spring semester as she tried to sort everything out. She didn't want their words or answers to interfere with her own thinking and resolving. She, naturally, had questions, though. Most of them she wrote down in her journal. Everyone who really knew her, which were only a few, knew that her journals

were her saving grace. She wrote all of her questions on those pages, whether she ever got answers or not didn't matter; it was the process of recognizing her dreams, expectations, fears and anxieties—all between the covers of whichever journal she was writing in. She tended to write through them a lot faster during that late winter and early spring. She had a lot of questions, but they were for God and no one else. As far as she was concerned, He knew the answers better than anyone else. After all, He had dealt her these cards, so He was the one she had to question.

One Saturday night, Trinity was away visiting her aunt in the Berkshire Mountains and Jamie was home alone because her parents had gone to a dinner party. She sat in bed and pulled out her red leather journal and wrote a letter to God.

Dear God,

Remember me, God? If it's okay, I've got some questions. I know You're busy, so I get it if You can't get back to me right away, but I thought I'd write You anyway. There isn't anyone else I want to talk to about this stuff, so it's between You and me right now.

I guess I'll start with the basic questions, if that's okay. I'm wondering if my adoptive parents ever met my birth parents? Were my birth parents in love? Were they even together?

I don't want to ask mom and dad. Not yet. I just wanted You to know these are the things I'm wondering about.

Love,

Jamie

Even though she wrote letters to God, Jamie wasn't sure she wanted answers—some questions are meant to remain questions for a reason. At the same time, she didn't think she would necessarily be able to handle the answers her parents so valiantly wanted to give her, such as whether or not her real parents really loved her and just couldn't keep her. That was when it hit Jamie. She pulled her journal back out and wrote:

p.s. How does someone know when a daughter is worth keeping?

Jamie put down her pen, closed the journal and lay back on her bed. Her head sunk into the pillow against the headboard as the last thought sunk in. A plump tear rolled down her cheek, its salty essence landing on the side of her lip for a taste before it continued down her cheek. Jamie rolled over and faced the window, letting the rest of her tears absorb into the pillow.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Heather Hummel Gallagher is a best-selling, award-winning author. Her books have appeared in newspapers such as: Publishers Weekly, USA Today, and the Washington Post; and in magazines that include: Body & Soul, First, and Spry Living, a combined circulation of nearly 15 million. Additionally, Heather is a graduate of the University of Virginia (Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies).

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