



A roller-coaster ride, One Broken Summer discovers Randi as a 17 year-old young woman wanting to save her parents' marriage, struggling to understand her own love life, while striving to become an actress and solving a murder.

One Broken Summer

By Jane Rita

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ONE BROKEN SUMMER

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Chapter 1

She pulled and scooped her hair up trying to make it look stunning for her ponytail. Instantly she changed her mind and had to twist it instead into a little bun. Her soft brown hair was so difficult to style. Staring into a cracked smoky glass mirror she saw her lipstick was on thicker than usual and screwing her lips she shook her head and shrugged. *Just so I don't get any smears on my teeth today when I give my lines. But I'll deal with that later. And I don't care what my mother thinks. I have to tell her right now.*

Randi ran into the kitchen and yelled, “Don’t you dare say anything more about it! I’m *not* going to the Chautauqua Institution without Sooty and there’s nothing you can do to make me!”

Her mother smiled at her and with a warm voice said, “Miranda, you can leave Sooty behind for six weeks. Accept it. You are coming with me.”

Throwing on her school’s white monogrammed jacket, Randi slammed the front door behind her. Holding her laptop tightly against her breasts, she waited for Jeff. *I can’t believe she’s sprung this on me the day of my county tournament! My God, why did I make that promise*

to Daddy? If I'd lose Sooty... No, I can't let myself even think that! I've got to manage this somehow.

But after locking her seatbelt, she turned her head and looked up at Jeff's clean-shaven face in profile. When he turned and glanced at her, a trace of a smile formed on her lips as she gazed into his deep-set eyes. She admired his firm chin. She tried to relax as she watched him steer his car with his left hand, while with his right hand he changed music tracks and kept his thick hair brushed off his broad forehead.

Looking at him she felt a tingle of excitement but her irritation with her mother wouldn't go away. She knew, however, she had to concentrate right now on today's tournament. She'd be performing scenes from *Macbeth* and Jeff was even driving her himself to her forensic tournament.

Jeff smiled.

Randi smiled back, staring into his questioning eyes. Shaking his head, he asked, "Why are you sitting there so stiff like a statue? And why's this tournament so important anyway?"

"Jeff, I explained everything to you yesterday. Don't you remember?"

"Thinking about something else, I guess."

Trying not to get upset, Randi prayed that despite his insensitive answer, perhaps he really did love her. He definitely was physically stronger than the few other guys she had dated and she thought he always had tried to answer her honestly. But she couldn't understand

why he didn't understand how important forensic competitions were in her life.

She remembered the first time she had seen him. He was dribbling a basketball down the court and his every move revealed powerful muscles as he stretched, weaved, and dodged his way through the opponent's defense. With his strong jaw he looked like a guy who had just stepped off the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. So sexy. And she knew immediately she wanted him to be in love with her.

All that had happened after her parents found out about the bullying going on at her troubled intercity high school and made her transfer last fall to Bishop Vincent. At Bishop Vincent's Academy, however, Randi made new friends, liked her teachers, and fell in love with Jeff.

Breaking silence, Jeff yawned. "So, tell me again why you're so excited about this tournament."

"Jeff, can't you really remember? I'm the only junior from Bishop Vincent in dramatic interpretation who's made the final round! I have a chance to qualify today for districts against the other county schools. It's a big deal, believe me, and my real break."

"What are you talking about? What kinda break?"

"I've told you many times that I want to be a professional actress. Don't you remember? This tournament will help me prepare for my future acting career."

“C’mon, Randi, get real. You’ve got about as much chance of being a star actress as I have being a star player in the NBA. Anyway, I thought girls just wanted to look at stupid stuff on their phones.”

“I don’t have time to look at stupid stuff! I’m too busy practicing my lines! Besides, I’m proud of my ambition to be an actress and forensics helps me develop my acting skills.”

“Okay, so you’re going to be performing before thousands then?”

“You really don’t remember anything I told you. I’m not going to be performing before thousands on a stage. I’ll be acting in front of a crowded classroom with three professional judges and dozens of kids sitting in a classroom watching me. The judges will then rank us. We’ll be competing against each other to qualify for the state tournament. And in one of my scenes I’ll be Macbeth when he sees Banquo’s ghost.”

“Sounds so boring.”

Even though what Jeff just said hurt her badly, she knew she had to ignore it because she needed Jeff in her life. Her mother wanted to divorce her father and Randi worried which parent she and Sooty would eventually end up living with if her parents couldn’t settle their differences.

When her parents discussed a trial separation last fall Randi fell into despair. Although her parents still lived in the same house, they now slept in separate bedrooms and didn’t talk to each other. And if it

hadn't been for her forensic competitions, Randi wondered if she would even have stayed in school.

But at Bishop Vincent's, Randi became best friends with Laurel Lee and Jasmine. They were talented girls who were great at reading prose and poetry aloud in the tournaments. It was the challenge of dramatic interpretation, however, that kept Randi stable. She lived for today's chance to compete for the state tournament.

Jeff swung his car with ease into the unfamiliar high school's parking lot and yawned again.

“So, when's your big show over with then?”

Randi ignored him and tightened her hands around her laptop as she felt her stomach rumbling. Excited but nervous, she tried picturing herself performing her lines. Unexpectedly her mouth went dry worrying that her dad might forget to give Sooty cold water with the afternoon feeding.

“C'mon, Randi, come out of it. Tell me. What time am I supposed to pick you up?”

“When they make announcements who's qualified that's when. I'll text you.” She looked at Jeff and he looked back at her. She said, “You're supposed to say ‘break a leg’ to me.”

When Jeff didn't answer she turned away from him, lifted her head up, slid off the seat, and slammed the car door. “Just wait in the parking lot. I'll wave when I get out.” *I don't care anymore if he doesn't care. I'm on my own now.*

* * *

Randi sat in amazement watching a pretty competitor give her lines with absolute perfection. The girl was acting out scenes from popular modern plays. Randi knew the high school where the girl came from was in a rural area of the county and she hadn't expected much competition from her. In fact, she thought kids from that particular high school probably were really dumb and just a bunch of hillbillies, but the girl's acting sparkled with brilliance. Randi turned and looked at the judges who appeared awestruck with the girl's performance.

Oh, my God, I've got to get hold of myself. But my mouth's too dry. How can I get my lines out right?

Randi forced herself to calm down by sliding into a daydream. She imagined herself wearing a wedding gown with a trailing white train cascading behind her. Long hair fell over her shoulders, a band of spring flowers held bangs off her forehead, and she carried wildflowers in her bouquet. Bishop Vincent's chapel overflowed with creamy-pink Alba roses. Long silk streamers floated across the pews as she and Jeff walked down the aisle to the altar. She saw her parents holding hands and they were smiling at each other.

A sudden silence filled the room.

She's finished. The judges are writing down their comments. No! I'm next!

Standing in front of the crowded classroom, Randi commanded everyone's attention by immediately becoming Lady Macbeth. Hearing

a gasp from the kids, Randi kept on twisting her hands, keeping her fingers severely straining against each other at unnatural angles and using her hands to express Lady Macbeth's hands dripping King Duncan's blood. Switching parts, Randi became a terrified king who thinks he sees Banquo's ghost. Her performance lasted twenty minutes and she finished with the judges nodding their heads in agreement with her interpretation of her characters.

* * *

A certificate strung with multicolored ribbons waved breezily in the warm May afternoon sun as Randi gripped her award tightly. She kept laughing, "I've made it! I've made it!" to anyone who brushed past her.

Randi did qualify for districts by winning a first place ranking for her performance. She hadn't forgotten her lines and managed to get saliva rolling around in her mouth helping her deliver the terror in Lady Macbeth's voice. And with Randi's eyes bulging wide, her eyebrows raised high, and her face contorted, she exceeded even her own expectations of portraying Lady Macbeth's pathetic state of mind.

* * *

Hours later, sitting comfortably in Jeff's convertible, she shouted, "Oh, it was thrilling and wonderful! I held everyone spellbound!" "Congrats, Randi...Now, just calm down."

Randi allowed minutes of silence to pass before she said anything else. She just wanted to feel again that thrill of acting. One judge had even written on her score sheet: “Hope to see you on Broadway someday.”

Then it happened.

All that thrill of acting in front of an audience and all that enjoyment of sitting next to her boyfriend vanished. Randi started panicking again thinking about a summer’s separation from Sooty. She wouldn’t even answer Jeff’s questions as Jeff kept yelling, “What the hell’s the matter with you now? Lost your voice? Get with it! You made it. Get happy!”

“Jeff, please drive faster. Sooty expects her afternoon walk now. The tournament lasted longer than I thought it would.”

“Randi, you know I don’t speed. Sooty will just have to wait.”

* * *

Holding the brightly colored retractable leash, Randi smiled as she walked Sooty down the leafy tree-lined sidewalk. She allowed her beloved old dog to take charge now, letting her stop, smell, or pee as often as she liked and wherever she wanted to.

Jeff shook his head as Randi focused all her attention on Sooty. He grabbed Randi’s arm forcing her to stop. “What the hell’s wrong with you now? You don’t want to talk to me? You *do* care more about Sooty than me, don’t you?”

Randi turned and looked at Jeff while still holding tightly onto Sooty's leash. "Jeff, please don't. I do want to talk with you. Do you remember me telling you yesterday that I have to spend six weeks alone this summer with my mother? I have to leave Sooty behind with my dad."

"I remember you said something yesterday about saving your parents' marriage. But what the hell can you do about their problems?"

"Please, just listen to me."

"It's that my mother wants to divorce my father. But my dad doesn't want a divorce. They did agree, however, to a trial separation for this summer and my dad begged me to promise him that I would try to keep my mother happy and go with her to the Chautauqua Institution. She wants to go there and my dad hopes if she has a happy summer she'll change her mind about wanting a divorce."

Randi looked at Jeff with tears in her eyes, but he slowly turned away from her and stared into space. He finally said, "Never heard of this Chautauqua place."

"Jeff, the Chautauqua Institution is a famous historic arts and music community on a pretty lake in Southwestern New York state. It has a nine weeks special summer season that brings people from all over the world. It even has a professional theater company."

Suddenly, Randi couldn't breathe. Her throat tightened and she couldn't move.

"My God, Randi, what *is* wrong with you?"

“It’s that I...that I’ve never been there before. Sooty and Daddy won’t be coming and I’ll have to be alone with her. My mother *dumped* it on me this morning that the apartment she’s rented doesn’t allow dogs. If I had known that I *never* would’ve made that promise to Daddy. He has so much work to do, and I’m afraid he won’t have enough time to take care of Sooty like I do. It’s hopeless.”

“Why in hell did you agree to go in the first place then?”

“Because I don’t want my parents to split. That’s why.”

A short distance away church bells started ringing and hearing them Randi froze. Jeff moved toward Randi and put his arms tightly around her waist and she loved feeling the strength of his muscular body.

Looking directly into her eyes, Jeff said, “Randi, I don’t really want to...but I’ve got to tell you something. My friends want me to go with them to Camp Jumonville this summer. It’s an isolated church camp in the mountains south of Pittsburgh. In fact, it’s so isolated it only has spotty cell phone and internet connections. So, don’t be expecting me to be phoning or texting you. Besides, I’ll be too busy to stay in touch. I’m sorry.”

“Jeff, I just want to keep Sooty safe.”

“Okay, all right. You said you’d have to stay at that Chautauqua place six weeks, but you’ll get to spend the rest of the summer with Sooty and your dad. Did your dad say where you’ll be going when you get back home?”

Remembering past summers, Randi saw her family together laughing on a beach as Sooty barked at the seagulls. The three of them held hands as they gathered seashells together. Those were the summer vacations she wanted to remember and she loved those special moments holding Sooty in her arms. *If only I could make this summer like those I had before!*

Randi held on tightly to Sooty's leash, and Jeff held onto Randi until she calmed down. She looked at Sooty when she asked, "Jeff, you do love me, don't you?"

"Don't ask silly questions. You know you're my number one girl."

Randi broke away from him but he grabbed her back.

"Look, I care about you a lot. Isn't that enough?"

For this late spring afternoon, it had to be.

* * *

The morning of the final forensic tournament started with a crisis. The humid May weather had made her hair limp. There was nothing Randi could do with it and there was nothing on her vanity stand cluttered with brushes, combs, and makeup to help her. Looking at herself in the mirror, she thought her hair added nothing to strengthen the performance of her characters in *Macbeth*. Remembering the conversation she and Jeff had had about the imminent summer break, Randi gripped the edge of the table.

It's over! She kept thinking, continuing to look in the mirror. This is the last forensic tournament and my last chance to be with Jeff before summer begins. For the first time in her life Randi didn't experience any excitement thinking about a summer break. She knew Jeff would be at Camp Jumonville and she wouldn't get to see him again until August. School started again in September and the forensics team always had a party at their coach's house before Labor Day. Randi wondered if Jeff would even want to go with her to a forensics party. *He's not the arty type like me. He really loves to just hang out with his macho friends.*

But what was it Jeff said about spending the summer with Sooty when I get back home? I must keep telling myself that Sooty will be alright. Still, how can I? That time I went away on that field trip, she missed me so much she wouldn't eat until I got back home.

That was years ago. Now she's an old dog and I'm the one who takes care of her. I know Daddy will try to take care of her too, but he gets distracted with his demanding work. He might even forget to give Sooty her medicine.

Suddenly the anger at her mother flared-up again. *How could she rent that apartment without considering what might happen to Sooty?* And again Randi panicked just thinking about a summer away from the dog she loved so much.

AUTHOR BIO



Jane earned a B.A. in Speech and Drama from West Virginia Wesleyan College and a M.A. in English Literature from Fairleigh Dickinson University. She studied under tutors from Trinity College, Oxford at Wroxton College, Wroxton, Oxfordshire, England. She also studied in summer sessions at the University of Colorado at Boulder, West Virginia University at Morgantown, and the University of Pittsburgh.

She taught English, coached forensic teams, and served as a yearbook and newspaper advisor at the Greater Johnstown Senior High School in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

Jane loves dogs and growing roses. She is an avid supporter of animal rights and a constant gardener.



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