

Dear Sarah Dessen,

Your book *That Summer* has been inspiring me ever since the first time I read it. Whenever I'm in a situation like Haven, the main character, I think to myself, what did Haven do? How can I handle it better? This incredible book has influenced me so much this past year. I've read it four times to get a better feel of Haven's feelings. Every time problems occur in my life, I always remember the closing paragraph. It told me that even though it seems like the world is ending and nothing can get worse than this, that I have to move forward and stop dwelling on the past. New years are ahead of me, and they are filled with great trust, promise, and love.

Like Haven, I'm tall. I am not a striking six feet or anything, but I am the tallest in my eighth grade class. Haven isn't too pleased with the way she looks. Unlike her, I am satisfied with my appearance. I love being tall; I'm glad I'm getting longer! However, being "different" wasn't always what my peers were looking for. I used to find myself the subject of gossip. "Oh, my gosh, she's too tall...she's too ugly...I hate her glasses...I hate braces..."-- it would all overwhelm me. I had nowhere to go and no one to turn to in my small school. Being unable to fit in seems like such a normal thing in junior high.

But if being normal meant being hurt all the time, I wanted out. I used to be shy and a hard book to crack, but once I found my true friends, people to laugh with, I changed. I became loud and bubbly, forgetting all the things that used to happen to me. I became very straightforward, wanting to have a great time and not let groundless drama bother me. I found my way through it all just like Haven did, but we each did it in very different ways.

Only a couple of short weeks after I bought this ingenious book one summer, a change occurred in my family. Just like Haven's family, my mother and father spilt up. I feel that *That Summer* was fate's way of preparing me for the things that happened between my parents. It blows my mind that someone as sweet and fragile as Haven could deal with ten years of cheating. The reasons why our parents divorced are completely different. However, I feel, for a young girl, it is always hard to see your dad not live at your house anymore.

I believe that I really matured over those couple of months. Suddenly, it felt like the jobs flipped in my house; that I had to be the mother to my mom: take care of her instead of the other way around. Haven and I both had this in common. Our mothers seem so delicate but strong at the same time. Unlike Haven, I had a big support group behind me, getting me through it all.

I finally confronted my feelings and realized that even when I thought I knew it all, I was wrong. I can see that there is so much more love, hurt, trust, and broken promises waiting for me in the next years of my life. The past is the past, and I have the whole world ahead of me. I can start again, just like Haven thought she could.

Sincerely,

*Kate Arsenault*