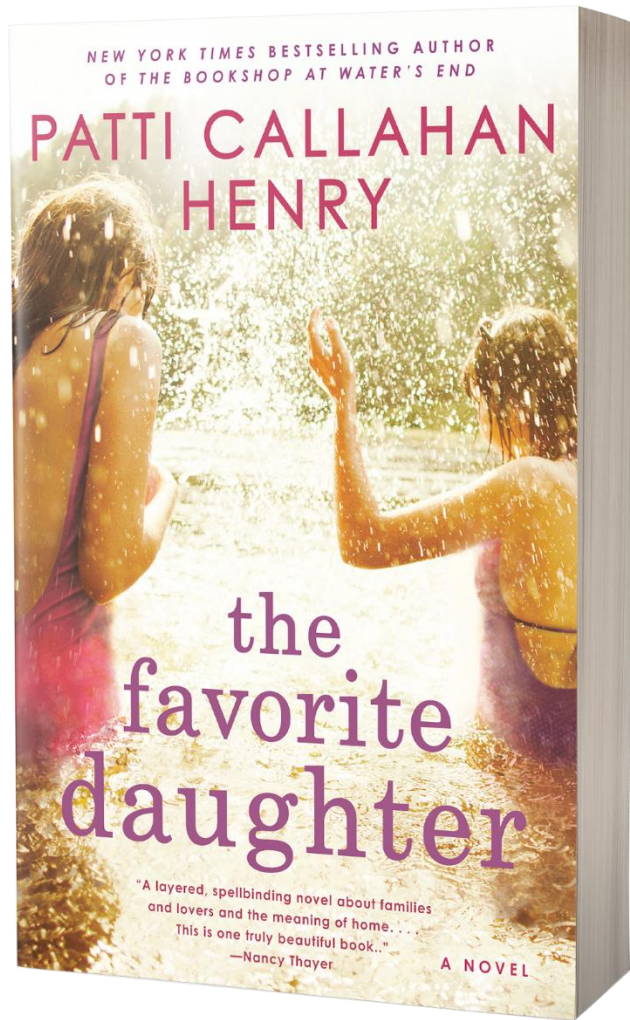


On the heels of her popular historical fiction release *Becoming Mrs. Lewis*, Patti Callahan Henry returns to her roots with another Lowcountry read **THE FAVORITE DAUGHTER**, out June 4.



## Excerpt From 'The Favorite Daughter' By Patti Callahan Henry

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“May you never forget what is worth remembering, nor ever remember what is best forgotten.”— *Irish Proverb*

### Chapter One

TEN YEARS LATER

The problem with memories, Colleen Donohue often thought, wasn't with the ones she couldn't let go of, but with those that wouldn't let go of her.

She was no longer called Lena; now she was Colleen. She had long ironed-straight hair, bright red lipstick, a loft apartment in New York City and scant vestiges of a

Lowcountry river running through her veins. Gone were the curls and the sundresses, the flip-flops and fishing poles.

Her apartment in Brooklyn was a studio—functional, sunny and chic. Once a Presbyterian church, the stone building had years ago been divided into apartments. Colleen lived in the smallest unit, in the far top corner overlooking Arlington Place. She'd once found faded photos of the church and believed her studio had been part of the old choir loft.

That August morning she knew better than to leave the apartment. Although the air conditioner strained, it still kept her space at a lovely seventy-two degrees. Outside, the city was almost intolerable, the heat roasting the garbage and wilting anything green and lovely. No one talked much of that, but it was why New Yorkers who had them left for their Hamptons homes or their seaside cabins. Colleen had neither; her job as a freelance travel writer kept her out of the city most of the time anyway. Yet she was home that day, having just returned from Mexico.

The rainy morning was sluggish and insolent, having its own personality it wanted to impose on Colleen.

She needed coffee.

It was ten a.m. Colleen wasn't exactly the type to jump out of bed and make a run for the day. She brought the day to herself on her own terms, slowly and carefully. How many office jobs had she turned down merely because she'd have to rise to an alarm, dress in something presentable and chat inanely with colleagues over the tops of cubicles? Here, she rose at her own internal clock—sometimes early but usually not—and poured coffee before launching into her writing.

With her coffee cup and a stale croissant beside her, Colleen set to work on an article describing the Mexican resort. It was coming slowly. Too slowly. She hadn't yet found a hook for the reader, an overarching narrative that might turn a run-of-the-mill tourist trap into something special. They'd paid her to go. She'd indulged in the Presidential Suite and the spa treatments. She'd met a guy at the bar and enjoyed an easy flirtation.

She'd taken the ecotour and suffered through a slide show. She'd drunk the house margarita and tolerated the mariachi band. Now she needed to craft words to turn it all into an exotic journey.

She tapped her fingers on the keyboard and words scrolled across the white space. Music from the apartment next door vibrated the wall—her neighbor's teenage son was home alone, obviously skipping school, and listening to the Grateful Dead. She rose from her chair and banged on the wall, knowing the gesture would be ineffectual. She turned up her own music, Nina Simone, coming from the wireless speaker on the kitchen counter, her version of her family's old turntable in the kitchen at Watersend. Why she wanted to re-create a place she'd rejected, she left that to her subconscious.

She glanced around her apartment and smiled. This place made her happy. As happy as May River? her brother had asked her one day over the phone. Yes, she'd said, although it wasn't really true. Yet and still, this space soothed her. It was all one room—with a curtain that hung between the bed and the living space and a kitchen area with a long bar made of honed black marble. One couch of cream linen faced two bright blue upholstered chairs. Standing at her narrow windows framed in iron, she looked at the brick building across the street, at the lanterns and sidewalks of her neighborhood streetscape. Everything inside her studio was in its place, unlike the cluttered family house in Watersend where the collections and remnants of years of Donohue life needed dusting and organizing. Here, photos of the exotic locales she'd visited were set on tables in matching white frames and hung in pleasing arrangements. The kitchen was stocked with pale blue plates and appliances. This space belonged to Colleen.

Two hours until her deadline. Procrastination usually spurred her toward productivity, but not now.

Hearing her phone ring and seeing her brother's name on her cell made her jump up to answer. God, she loved talking to Shane, hearing his voice across the miles; he and Dad were her last ties to the Lowcountry and she wanted to hold tight to both of them.

She answered on the second ring, imagining him at the family pub, the Lark, cleaning glasses behind the bar or meeting a delivery truck in the back alley. If Colleen closed her eyes, she could smell the hoppy aroma of beer; she could visualize the dark wood

paneling glowing under the lantern lights and hear the clang of glasses, the call of patrons, and a fiddle being tuned in the corner. Nothing, not one thing in her life, was as familiar to her as the Lark.

"Sis." Shane's voice vibrated in her ear.

"What's up?"

"A lot."

"Is something wrong?" she asked, as she could tell his voice was off, something amiss. Colleen automatically placed her hand over her stomach where fear seemed to wait to be awoken.

"There is," he said.

She heard the difference; his tone lower and quieter. There wasn't a joke hidden in his voice this time.

"Dad." Colleen walked to the window overlooking the street, brownstones across the way lit with the sun rising to midsky, and she rested her forehead on the glass. "It's Dad, isn't it?"

"He's been acting funny."

"He's always acting funny." She smiled as she invoked her dad's favorite entry into a sentence. "As the Irish say, when Irish eyes are smiling, they're usually up to something."

“This isn’t about his funny sayings, Lena. It’s complicated, too. And I don’t know if I can tell you everything over the phone. You have to come home.”

Colleen laughed, relieved now because nothing was really wrong with her dad. This was another ploy to get her to return home. Another trick. They’d tried many times before and in many ways—her niece Rosie’s baptism; her other niece, Sadie’s, first birthday party; her sister Hallie’s pneumonia that was so threatening. Of course there were also the holidays and anniversaries and milestones of family life. She was accustomed to the pleas to return.

“Shane, what’s going on?” Colleen walked the few steps to the kitchen, poured more coffee into her pottery mug shaped like an owl’s face, one she bought in a city and country already forgotten.

“Dad’s not doing well. Don’t make me go over this entirely complex situation on the phone. I’ve tried to handle it without you, but now I need you.”

“I’ve already made plans to come for his birthday party in two weeks. I can’t come right now.”

“Lena.” He said the name she didn’t use anymore. “It’s been six months of fast decline. I’ve tried to figure it out by myself. Like you, Hallie is too busy to help and ... ” His voice trailed off.

He usually knew better than to mention Hallie’s name, and now the dull pain crashed into Lena’s chest. “Fast decline?” she asked.

“Yes. Forgetting names; losing things; getting lost ... ”

“It’s just comedy-Dad—he’s like that. He’s always been like that: absentminded, stumbling along. Why is this time different?”

"I've tried to keep the worst of it from you, but I took him to the doctor last week. He believes it's Alzheimer's." He paused in the time it took Colleen's breath to gather in fear. "I need you to come home."

Dizziness enveloped Colleen and she sat on a stool as coffee sloshed from the mug onto the black marble counter. "You better not be mucking with me," she said, using her dad's only curse word, if it could be called a curse word at all.

"I'm not mucking with you."

Between brother and sister, this line was a solemn vow that they were telling the truth.

"It can't be," Colleen said, brightening for only a breath. "His sixtieth birthday is in two weeks, and that's too early. I know that—"

"Yes, it's called early onset."

"Why am I only hearing this now? I talked to him just a few days ago. He was fine."

"That's the thing, Lena. He's fine until he isn't. You only talk to him when he is. But when I received a late mortgage notice ... It's a long story. Come home and I'll tell you everything." Shane had never been so direct. Maybe he was thinking that her arguments often won, that she always had excuses. Maybe this time her baby brother didn't want to hear them.

"Okay," she said softly. "I hear you. So what are we going to do?"

"I have an idea." His voice was resolute; she'd heard it before. "I have a really good idea."