



The Last Summer: A Novel

John Hough Jr.

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A classic love story, "The Last Summer" chronicles a young man on the verge of growing up and an older woman running away from a life out of control. It is the summer of 1968: The world is poised on the cusp of radical change. Politicians question the status quo, blacks react to decades of oppression, and students protest the injustices of war. Change is in the air, too, for 37-year-old single mother Claire Malek. She has just walked out on her rather cushy job in Washington, DC, as "special assistant" to Senator Bob Mallory. DC had become an impossible place for Claire, heavy with regrets and burdened with secrets she knew she could never divulge. Anxious for both escape and change, Claire packs her 15-year-old daughter, April, into her Camaro and heads to a small town on Cape Cod, where Claire takes a job as cub reporter on a twice-weekly newspaper called the "Covenant." She knows it's a big risk, but Claire is desperate for a new start and a new life, and the town and all it has to offer seem to be a good beginning. For Lane Hillman, son of the publisher of the "Covenant," change is just beyond the horizon. Twenty-two years old and fresh out of Harvard, he's come home to celebrate the last summer of his youth and one final season as a reporter on his father's newspaper. In an effort to avoid the draft, and possible service in Vietnam, Lane has enlisted in VISTA -- the America-based Peace Corps -- and in the fall will begin a four-year stint working in the inner city of Detroit. Claire's first day on the job is the same day Robert Kennedy is shot. Racial tensions around the country continue to erupt into violence and confrontation. But in a few days another more personal tragedy strikes the town as a young girl is found murdered -- the first such death there in more than twenty years -- and on the same day a teenage boy is found drowned under suspicious circumstances. As Claire and Lane work together to try to make sense of the seemingly unrelated deaths, a closeness grows between them, and with it, the stirrings of sexual attraction. At first Claire resists, knowing that the fifteen years separating them is an unbridgeable gap, but before either of them realizes what's happening, she and Lane are swept up in a romantic passion that threatens to overwhelm them both. As the summer progresses, so does their affair, and soon the whole town knows about it, including Lane's parents, who are not at all pleased with this turn of events, and April, Claire's daughter, who feels both awe and resentment at the changes the affair brings in her mother. Before the summer ends, however, Claire and Lane will have to contend with more than the opinions of family and townsfolk. A shadowy figure responsible for the death of the young woman begins to fixate on someone new -- and the lovers find themselves in a race to save their own lives. A work of great tenderness, taut suspense, and historical immediacy, "The Last Summer" is a captivating portrait of love and sacrifice.

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