



# Reading Jane: A Daughter's Memoir

**After the calculated suicide of Susannah Kennedy's domineering and narcissistic mother, Susannah Kennedy grapples with the ties between mothers and daughters and the choices parents make in this gripping memoir that shows what freedom looks like when we choose to examine the uncomfortable past.**

Jane is to the world a charismatic personality—opinionated, an inner-city teacher and public activist, a lover of Italy, proud and successful—who thrives on a carefully crafted life narrative. Susannah is her beautiful only daughter, her intended protégé. All through Susannah's childhood, Jane settles once per day to chronicle her life. In those years of magnetic twosomeness, "Mommy, can I read your diaries?" is a frequent question. Jane starts off saying "Some day" and then she changes to "When you are the age I was when I wrote them," then, later, it becomes "Maybe," then "No, probably never." The diaries recede. Susannah grows up.

But then Jane at 75, healthy and fit, chooses suicide, insisting it would be better for everyone this way. That controlling assessment is wrong from the moment Susannah hears the news and has to identify the body. As someone who has always sensed the stricter, darker truth, and fought to resist the control imposed on her by her mother's seductive tale, she actively resists reading the 45 years of diaries her mother left behind. When she finally dares to "read" Jane, it's like unlatching Pandora's Box. For a year, Susannah reads, twisting and turning to the truths she uncovers, comparing what she remembers against the strange pull of her mother's public tale. This process is accompanied by physical symptoms, each memory encased in her body. And then she uncovers yet another secret, one that redefines her mother forever. At last Susannah is able to separate, heal and embrace her own story.

## ***Reading Jane: A Daughter's Memoir***

BY SUSANNAH KENNEDY

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Berkeley and Oxford-educated anthropologist **Susannah Kennedy** was born in India and raised in the United States. Later, she traveled extensively on her own, first in Italy, and then through the Middle East and India, settling for two years in Egypt before becoming a reporter in Dallas, Texas. At Oxford University, she specialized in Arab culture and politics, receiving her DPhil in social anthropology. She and her psychoanalyst husband lived and worked in Germany, raising three children in a thatched-roof farmhouse in the countryside outside Hamburg. Her mother's suicide and its aftermath brought them back to Santa Cruz, California in 2017. They now reside in Marin County.



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## CONTACTS

**Vicki DeArmon**, Publisher (marketing partnerships and events), [vicki@sibyllinepress.com](mailto:vicki@sibyllinepress.com)

**Anna Termine**, Rights, Licensing & Special Sales Director, [rights@sibyllinepress.com](mailto:rights@sibyllinepress.com)