

a summer novel

we'll
always
have
summer

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On Wednesday nights when I was little, my mom and I would watch old musicals. It was our thing. Sometimes my dad or Steven would wander in and watch for a bit, but it was pretty much always my mother and me on the couch with a blanket and a bowl of sweet and salty popcorn, every Wednesday. We watched *The Music Man*, *West Side Story*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, all of which I liked, *Singin' in the Rain*, which I really liked. But I loved none of them the way I loved *Bye Bye Birdie*. Of all the musicals, *Bye Bye Birdie* was my number one favorite. I watched it again and again, as many times as my mother could stand. Just like Kim MacAfee before me, I wanted to wear mascara and lipstick and heels and have that “happy grown-up female feeling,” I wanted to

hear boys whistle and know it was for me. I wanted to grow up and be just like Kim, because she got to have all of those things.

And after, when it was bedtime, I would sing, “We love you, Conrad, oh yes we do. We love you, Conrad, and we’ll be true” into the bathroom mirror with a mouthful of toothpaste. I would sing my eight-nine-ten-year-old heart out. But I wasn’t singing to Conrad Birdie. I was singing to *my* Conrad. Conrad Beck Fisher, the boy of my preteen dreams.

I’ve only ever loved two boys—both of them with the last name Fisher. Conrad was first, and I loved him in a way that you can really only do the first time around. It’s the kind of love that doesn’t know better and doesn’t want to—it’s dizzy and foolish and fierce. That kind of love is really a one-time-only thing.

And then there was Jeremiah. When I looked at Jeremiah, I saw past, present, and future. He didn’t just know the girl I used to be. He knew the right-now me, and he loved me anyway.

My two great loves. I think I always knew I would be Belly Fisher one day. I just didn’t know it was going to happen like this.



chapter *one*

When it's finals week and you've been studying for five hours straight, you need three things to get you through the night. The biggest Slurpee you can find, half cherry, half Coke. Pajama pants, the kind that have been washed so many times, they are tissue-paper thin. And finally, dance breaks. Lots of dance breaks. When your eyes start to close and all you want is your bed, dance breaks will get you through.

It was four in the morning, and I was studying for the last final of my freshman year at Finch University. I was camped out in my dorm library with my new best friend, Anika Johnson, and my old best friend, Taylor Jewel. Summer vacation was so close, I could almost taste it. Just five more days. I'd been counting down since April.

"Quiz me," Taylor commanded, her voice scratchy.

I opened my notebook to a random page. “Define *anima* versus *animus*.”

Taylor chewed on her lower lip. “Give me a hint.”

“Umm . . . think Latin,” I said.

“I didn’t take Latin! Is there going to be Latin on this exam?”

“No, I was just trying to give you a hint. Because in Latin boys’ names end in *-us* and girls’ names end in *-a*, and *anima* is feminine archetype and *animus* is masculine archetype. Get it?”

She let out a big sigh. “No. I’m probably going to fail.”

Looking up from her notebook, Anika said, “Maybe if you stopped texting and started studying, you wouldn’t.”

Taylor glared at her. “I’m helping my big sister plan our end-of-year breakfast, so I have to be on call tonight.”

“On call?” Anika looked amused. “Like a doctor?”

“Yes, just like a doctor,” Taylor snapped.

“So, will it be pancakes or waffles?”

“French toast, thank you very much.”

The three of us were all taking the same freshman psych class, and Taylor’s and my exam was tomorrow, Anika’s was the day after. Anika was my closest friend at school besides Taylor. Seeing as how Taylor was competitive by nature, it was a friendship that she was more than a little jealous of, not that she’d ever in a million years admit it.

My friendship with Anika was different from my

friendship with Taylor. Anika was laid-back and easy to be with. She wasn't quick to judge. More than all that, though, she gave *me* the space to be different. She hadn't known me my whole life, so she had no expectations or preconceptions. There was freedom in that. And she wasn't like any of my friends back home. She was from New York, and her father was a jazz musician and her mother was a writer.

A couple of hours later, the sun was rising and casting the room in a bluish light, and Taylor's head was down, while Anika was staring off into space like a zombie.

I rolled up two paper balls in my lap and threw them at my two friends. "Dance break," I sang out as I pressed play on my computer. I did a little shimmy in my chair.

Anika glared at me. "Why are you so chipper?"

"Because," I said, clapping my hands together, "in just a few hours, it will all be over." My exam wasn't until one in the afternoon, so my plan was to go back to my room and sleep for a couple of hours, then wake up with time to spare and study some more.

I overslept, but I still managed to get another hour of studying in. I didn't have time to go to the dining hall for breakfast, so I just drank a Cherry Coke from the vending machine.

The test was as hard as we had expected, but I was pretty sure I would get at least a B. Taylor was pretty sure

she hadn't failed, which was good. Both of us were too tired to celebrate after, so we just high-fived and went our separate ways.

I headed back to my dorm room, ready to pass out until at least dinnertime, and when I opened the door, there was Jeremiah, asleep in my bed. He looked like a little boy when he slept, even with the stubble. He was stretched out on top of my comforter, his feet hanging over the edge of the bed, my stuffed polar bear hugged to his chest.

I took off my shoes and crawled into my twin, extra-long bed next to him. He stirred, opened his eyes, and said, "Hi."

"Hi," I said.

"How'd it go?"

"Pretty good."

"Good." He let go of Junior Mint and hugged me to him. "I brought you the other half of my sub from lunch."

"You're sweet," I said, burrowing my head in his shoulder.

He kissed my hair. "I can't have my girl skipping meals left and right."

"It was just breakfast," I said. As an afterthought, I added, "And lunch."

"Do you want my sub now? It's in my book bag."

Now that I thought about it, I was hungry, but I was also sleepy. "Maybe a little later," I said, closing my eyes.

Then he fell back to sleep, and I fell asleep too. When I woke up, it was dark out, Junior Mint was on the floor, and Jeremiah's arms were around me. He was still asleep.

We had started dating right before I began senior year of high school. "Dating" didn't feel like the right word for it. We were just together. It all happened so easily and so quickly that it felt like it had always been that way. One minute we were friends, then we were kissing, and then the next thing I knew, I was applying to the same college as him. I told myself and everyone else (including him, including my mother especially) that it was a good school, that it was only a few hours from home and it made sense to apply there, that I was keeping my options open. All of those things were true. But truest of all was that I just wanted to be near him. I wanted him for all seasons, not just summer.

Now here we were, lying next to each other in my dorm-room bed. He was a sophomore, and I was finishing up my freshman year. It was crazy how far we had come. We'd known each other our whole lives, and in some ways, it felt like a big surprise—in other ways it felt inevitable.