

It's Not Summer Without You is the second of three famous books about Belly and her feelings for Conrad and his brother, Jeremiah. Conrad is now at college, and he and Belly are dating. But, Conrad's mother is ill, and Conrad loves her very much. Is this the right time for him and Belly?

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	CEFR level	Story word count	Headlines
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1	A1	1,000-1,600	550
2	A1+	3,000-5,000	700
3	A2	7,000-10,000	1,000
4	A2+	11,000-14,000	1,200
5	B1	15,000-18,000	1,600
6	B1+	18,000-22,000	2,000
7	B2	22,000-26,000	2,500

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People in the story



Belly



Laurel



Conrad



Jeremiah

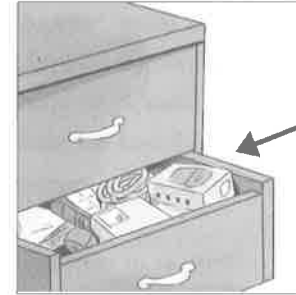


Susannah



Adam (Mr. Fisher)

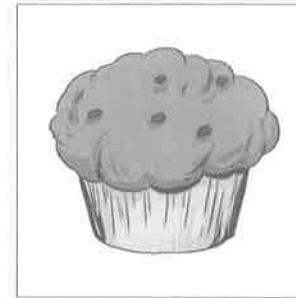
New words



drawer



infinity necklace



muffin



shoulder



suit



surf

Note about the story

It's Not Summer Without You is the second of three famous books about Belly and her feelings for Conrad and his brother, Jeremiah. It follows *The Summer I Turned Pretty* (also available in Penguin Readers, Level 3), which has become a TV show. *The Summer I Turned Pretty* finished with Conrad beginning to show his feelings for Belly.

In this story, Conrad, who goes to college, is in summer school. Students have to go to summer school classes when they aren't doing well enough at college, or (like Conrad) haven't completed their year. If they don't pass the summer school exams, these students have to leave college.

In the United States of America (USA), most schools have dances, called "**proms***," at the end of the year. Many students, like Belly, think that the prom is one of the most important moments in their lives. They buy expensive clothes, take photographs of themselves, and travel there in nice cars because they want it to be really special.

Before-reading questions

- 1 Look at the pictures in the book and read the back cover. Will Belly still be dating Conrad at the end of the story, do you think?
- 2 Look at the picture on page 17. Belly and Conrad are going to Belly's prom. Will they have a good time, do you think?
- 3 What is life for students in the USA like, do you think?

*Definitions of words in **bold** can be found in the glossary on pages 78–80.

CHAPTER ONE Waiting

Every year, when school finished in June, we put all our things in the car and drove straight to the summer house in Cousins. That house was my favorite place in the world, and it was the only place that I ever wanted to be. My mom, my brother Steven, and I never missed a summer there with Conrad and his brother, Jeremiah, and their mom, Susannah. They were our summer family. Susannah was my mom's best friend, and I loved her like a second mom. It was her house, and she started inviting my mom there before I was even born.

I always followed the boys around, trying to **hang out**. Jeremiah was my friend, but Conrad and Steven just thought that I was a little **kid**. I was in love with Conrad, but he never even noticed me until last summer, when he kissed me.

When I got home at the end of last summer, I waited for Conrad to call. August became September, school started, and I still waited. We only kissed so it wasn't like Conrad was my boyfriend. And now he was at college, where there were a million other girls, all prettier and cleverer than me.

I thought about him every minute of every day. What did our kiss mean? We couldn't go back to how things were between us. I knew that I couldn't. Last summer, everything changed between me and Conrad, and between

me and Jeremiah. So when Conrad didn't call, I only had to think about the way that he looked at me after he kissed me. I knew that there was hope; I just had to wait.

The call came the second week of September. Steven and I were fighting about what to watch on TV. The phone rang, and neither Steven nor I moved to answer it. My mother picked it up in her office. She brought the phone to the living room, and she said, "Belly, it's for you. It's Conrad." Then she smiled.

My heart started **beating** loudly in my chest, and I could hear the ocean in my ears. Conrad was calling me, and it felt so good. I took the phone and walked to the stairs.

I sat down, and I said, "Hi."

I tried to keep the smile off my face because I didn't want him to hear it on the phone.

"Hi," he said. "How are you?"

"I'm OK."

"You won't believe this," he said. "My **roommate snores** even louder than you do."

Conrad called again the next night, and the night after. We talked for hours at a time. Steven did not understand. "Why is Conrad calling you?" he asked.

"He likes me, and I like him," I replied.

Steven looked sick. "He's lost his mind," he said, shaking his head.

"Is it *so* impossible that Conrad likes me?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said. "It is *so* impossible."

And it really was. It was like a dream. After all those

years of loving him and wanting him, Conrad was calling me. He liked talking to me. He thought that I was funny, and I understood him. He wasn't my boyfriend yet, but we had something that was really special.

A few weeks after we started speaking on the phone, I told Conrad how I wasn't doing well in **math**. Then I felt bad for talking about it. I was telling him about my small problems, when I knew that Susannah had **cancer**.

"Sorry," I said. "I shouldn't talk about math when your mom's sick."

"Don't be sorry. You can say anything to me," he said. "And, Belly, my mom is getting better." He sounded so hopeful, and I felt even more love for him in that moment.

I said, "Yeah, I heard that from my mom yesterday. That's really good news."



"So, has your teacher taught you about infinity yet?" he asked.

From that day, Conrad started teaching me math. In the beginning, I didn't really listen to what he was saying. I just liked the sound of his voice. But then he asked me questions, and I didn't want to get the answers wrong. I never

loved him more than on those school nights, when he explained the same math problems again and again to me, until I understood, too.

A few times, Conrad drove the three-and-a-half hours from college to my house. Once, he stayed the night because it was really late, and my mother didn't want him to drive back. Conrad slept in the bedroom next to mine, and I lay in my bed awake for hours. I was thinking about how he was asleep just a few feet away, in *my* house.

Conrad didn't try to kiss me, but I knew that he wanted to. It was impossible because my brother was always there, talking to him about football. One night after dinner, I invited Conrad to go out and get ice cream. Steven said, "That sounds good to me."

I looked at him angrily, but he just smiled at me. And then Conrad took my hand, in front of Steven, and said, "Let's all go."

So, we all went, and my mother came, too. I couldn't believe that I was on a **date** with my mother and my brother. But it made that one wonderful night in December even sweeter. Conrad and I went back to Cousins, and it was just the two of us. **Amazing** nights like that don't happen very often, and I'm **glad** we had it, because it was all **over** before May.

CHAPTER TWO

December

It was one of the best nights of my life. It was as good as when I went to Walt Disney World at Christmas. Back then, my parents were still married, and I was nine. We watched the light show over Cinderella's castle, and even my brother Steven enjoyed himself.

When Conrad called a few weeks after our date with my mom and Steven, I was half-asleep. He said, "I'm in my car, driving to your house. Can I see you?"

It was 12:30 in the morning. Boston, where Conrad was staying at Susannah's house, was five and a half hours away. He was driving through the night because he wanted to see me. It was a crazy idea because it was the middle of winter, but he wanted to take me to the summer house in Cousins.

"When you get here, wait in your car down the street," I told him. "I'll meet you on the corner."

I turned off the lights and watched for his car. When I saw it, I went down the stairs and put on my coat, scarf, and hat. Then I was out of the house, flying down the front steps and across the icy garden. Conrad's car was on the corner, and it was dark with no lights. I opened the door and put my head in. I wanted to look at him first. He was wearing a gray coat, and his face was pink from the cold.

"Hi," I said, then I climbed inside. "I can't believe you're really here."

He was quiet. Then he said, "Me neither. Are you still coming with me?"

I couldn't believe that he even had to ask. "Yes," I told him. Nothing else mattered in the world. There was just us. Sitting next to him in the car felt like the best Christmas gift of my life. Conrad was smiling at me, and he wasn't **serious** or sad, or any of the other "s" words that he usually was.

"I think that I'm going to be a doctor," he told me, looking at me.

"Wow," I said. "Is that because of your mom?"

He nodded. "She's getting better. Medicine is making that possible."

Conrad smiled at me, and his face was full of hope. I felt lighter and happier. I moved closer to him and touched his arm. "That's the best news ever," I said, and it really was. Susannah was getting better and I was with Conrad. Everything was as it should be.

When we got to the house, it was really cold. While Conrad made a fire, I found an old box of hot chocolate in the cupboard. Susannah always made us hot chocolate on rainy nights. She used milk, but of course there wasn't any, so I used water. Conrad sat in the armchair, not on the couch next to me, and drank his hot chocolate.

"This is . . ." he said

"Is it amazing?" I asked, smiling because I knew that it wasn't.

"It's . . . not the best."

We both started laughing. "Hot chocolate is actually my **specialty**," I said.

Conrad seemed **nervous**, and this was Conrad, who was never nervous.

"Why don't you sit nearer to me?" I asked him, and I could hear my heart beating in my ears. I couldn't believe that I was brave enough to say what I was thinking.

Conrad looked surprised, too, and he came and sat next to me. I moved closer to him and then he was kissing me. He kissed me slowly and softly, and I never wanted him to stop. That night we only kissed on the couch, and he was careful in the way that he touched me, like he was afraid of breaking me.

Conrad fell asleep first, and I watched him for a while. He looked like a little boy. When I was sure that he was sleeping, I **whispered**, "Conrad, there's only you. For me, there's only ever been you."

The next day, we ran on the beach in old rain boots that we found in the summer house. I wore Susannah's boots, and they were too big for me, so I kept falling down on the wet sand. I laughed and laughed, but I couldn't hear myself because the wind was so loud.

When we came back inside, I put my cold hands on Conrad's face. He didn't push me away. He said, "Oh, that feels good."

I laughed and said, "That's because you have a cold heart."



“I may have a cold heart for everyone else,” he said in a soft voice, “but not for you.”

I kissed his face. I loved that I could kiss him when I wanted. “You’re really sweet to me,” I whispered. I felt so happy and lucky to be there in that moment.

His eyes were dark and serious. “I want to always know that you’re OK,” he said. “It’s important to me.”

“I am OK,” I said. “I’m better than OK.”

Conrad nodded. “Good,” he said. It was getting darker and darker outside. “I should take you home.”

I didn’t get back until it was very late, and my mom was so mad. But I’m glad we had that night and I remember every word, every look. Even when it **hurts**, I still remember.

CHAPTER THREE

Prom night

Four months after our night at the summer house, I decided to invite Conrad to my **prom**. I knew that he didn’t like dances, but I didn’t care. I wanted him to see me in my purple dress and high shoes. I wanted to dance with him all night, with his arms around me. And I wanted to sit in his car after, eating cheese fries and watching the sun come up together. I had this idea of prom in my head. I had it all planned.

When I called Conrad, he sounded busy, but I decided to ask anyway. “What are you doing the first weekend of April?” My voice was shaking because I was so nervous. I didn’t want him to say no.

“Why?” he asked, slowly.

“It’s my prom.”

He **sighed**. “Belly, I hate dances.”

“I know that. But it’s my prom, and I really want you to come.” Why did he have to make everything so hard?

“Can’t you just go with your friends?”

I was silent.

“I’m sorry. I really don’t want to go. I have my exams soon, and driving there for one night will be hard for me.”

He didn’t want to do this one thing for me. He didn’t feel like it. “Don’t worry about it,” I told him. “There are other **guys** I can go with.”

He was quiet for a moment. I could hear his mind working.

"Never mind, I'll take you," he said, finally.

I was so happy but I never really listened to what Conrad was actually saying. He didn't want me to go with anyone else, but he didn't want to go with me either.

I wore my purple dress, and my mother helped me with my hair. When I heard Conrad's car outside, I ran to the window. He looked beautiful in his suit. I flew down the stairs and opened the front door. I couldn't stop smiling.

I wanted to throw my arms around him, but Conrad didn't move toward me so my arms fell back at my sides.

"You look nice," he said.

"So do you."

My mother took hundreds of photos at the house while Conrad stood uncomfortably next to me, with one arm around my shoulders.

"Is everything OK?" I whispered.

"Yeah," he said. He smiled at me, but it wasn't a real smile.

At the prom, we sat at a table with my best friend Taylor and her boyfriend Davis. Conrad **hugged** Taylor, but he didn't try to talk to her or to Davis. He looked uncomfortable, just sitting there.

A slow song began, and Taylor took Davis's hand. They walked on to the dance floor. I watched them dance



with her head on his shoulder and his arms around her.

"Do you want to dance?" I asked Conrad.

"Do we have to?"

I tried to smile. "It'll be fun. Remember that you were the one who taught me to slow dance."

Conrad stood up and held out his hand. "OK. Let's dance."

I gave him my hand and followed him to the middle of the dance floor. We danced together, and I was glad that the music was loud because he couldn't hear my heart beating.

"I'm happy that you came," I said, looking up at him.

"What?" he asked.

"I'm happy that you came," I said again, loudly.

"Me too." His voice sounded strange. I remember that. He was standing in front of me, but there were hundreds of miles between us.

After we sat down, Conrad said, "Can we go somewhere and talk?"

Suddenly, I felt sick. This meant that he wanted to **break up** with me. I knew it.

"Let's not go anywhere," I said, trying to sound **relaxed**. "Let's just stay here."

"All right," he said.

So we sat there all night, watching everyone around us dance and smile.

"Did your mom ask you to come here?" I said after a while. I hated to ask, but I had to know.

"No," he replied, but he waited too late to answer.

After the prom, it began to rain softly. We were walking to Conrad's car when he said, "I think that I'll go back to college tonight because I have an exam on Monday. I'll take you home first." He didn't look at me when he spoke.

"Aren't you going to stay at my house tonight?"

Conrad looked at his car keys. "Sorry," he said, quietly,

"but I think that I should get back . . ."

"But I don't want you to leave," I said, and I hated that I sounded so unhappy. "Did I do something wrong?"

He looked away. "No, it's not you."

"Will you talk to me, please? Will you tell me what's happening?"

Conrad didn't say anything. I knew that he wanted to be in his car, driving away from me.

I said, "That's fine. If you won't say it, I will. We're over. That's what you want, isn't it?" I was crying and it was all mixed up with the rain.

"Belly . . ." he began, but he didn't know what to say.

"Don't talk to me," I said, stepping back from him.

"Just wait a minute," he said. "Don't leave it like this."

"You're the one who's leaving it like this," I said, and I started to walk away as fast as I could.

"Wait!" he shouted.

I didn't turn around. I walked faster. Then I heard him hit the roof of his car, and I almost stopped. I wanted him to follow me, but he didn't. He got into his car and left.

Later, in my room, I tried to believe that it was better this way, but it wasn't true. I wanted him to call, but he didn't. And that was it—we were over.

CHAPTER FOUR

May

When Susannah's cancer came back again, I didn't want to visit her. Seeing her like that was too hard, and it made it real. It felt like pieces of her were falling away.

I tried not to see her that last time. "I can't come," I told my mother. "Maybe I'll go next weekend. Is that OK?"

"No, that's not all right," my mother said, quickly. "You're going this weekend. Susannah wants to see you. I've already bought your train ticket."

Susannah was sitting in the living room when I arrived. "Here's my favorite girl," she said, opening her arms for me.

I hugged her as carefully as I could. "You look so much better," I lied.

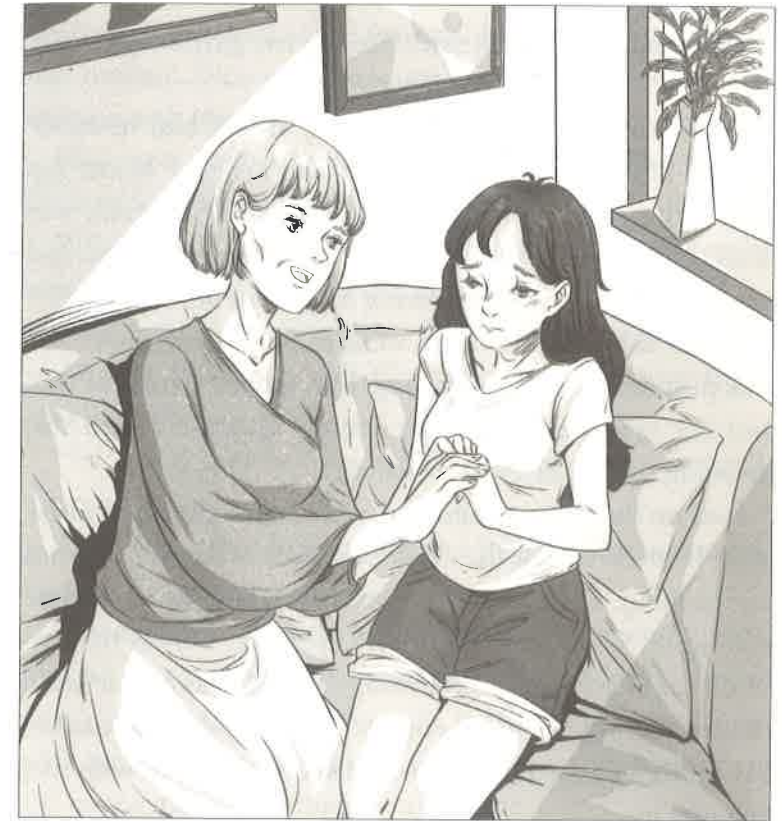
"Jeremiah won't be home until later, so we have the house to ourselves for the afternoon," Susannah said. "And if you're worried about seeing Conrad, don't be. He won't be here this weekend."

I looked at the floor. "Did he tell you?"

Susannah smiled. "That boy doesn't tell me anything, but your mother said something about prom. I'm sorry, Belly."

"He broke up with me," I told her, sadly.

Susannah took my hand and held it. "Don't hate Conrad," she said.



"I don't," I lied. I hated him more than anything. I also loved him more than anything, and I hated that, too.

"Conrad is having a hard time with all of this." She pushed my hair out of my face like I was the one who was sick. "But he needs you, and he loves you. Will you look after him for me?"

"You won't need me to look after him, Susannah. You'll be here to do it," I said, trying not to sound **desperate**.

Susannah smiled and said, "You're my girl, Belly."

The call came early in the morning. It was bad news, of course, because good news can wait. When I heard the phone ring, even in my sleep, I knew that Susannah was dead. I lay in my bed, waiting for my mother to come and tell me. I could hear her moving around in her room.

When she didn't come, I went to her room, where she was putting clothes into a bag. She looked across at me, and her eyes were tired and empty. "Susannah died this morning," she said. And that was it.

I sat on the floor, against the wall. I thought that I knew what heartbreak felt like. But Conrad leaving me at prom was nothing. This was real heartbreak. There was a terrible pain in my chest and behind my eyes, and I knew that we could never go back to how things were. I'm not sure when I started crying, but now I couldn't stop. I couldn't **breathe**. My mother crossed the room and sat on the floor with me, hugging me.

She drove to Boston that same day to get things ready for Susannah's **funeral**. I thought about calling Conrad, but I couldn't do it. I was afraid of saying the wrong things and making everything worse. And then I thought about calling Jeremiah, but I was too frightened. I couldn't speak to them because I didn't want to believe that Susannah was really dead.

Two days later, Steven and I drove to Boston for Susannah's

funeral. We arrived at the **funeral home** early and found my mother. She was busy speaking to someone while helping with the flowers.

"Go and find Conrad and Jeremiah. Belly, talk to Conrad," my mother said when she saw us.

What could I say? The last time that Conrad and I spoke was at prom, which was a month ago.

We found them sitting in a side room. Jeremiah was looking at the floor, and Conrad was sat very straight, **staring** into nowhere.

"Hi," said Steven, moving toward them and hugging them.

Then I hurried to Jeremiah and hugged him as hard as I could.

"Thanks for coming," he said, in a strange voice, like he was speaking to someone who he didn't know. For a moment, I had a thought that maybe he was mad with me, but I pushed it away. This was Susannah's funeral. Of course he wasn't thinking about me.

"I'm really sorry," I said, then I felt bad because those words didn't mean anything. They weren't enough to show how I felt.

I looked at Conrad. "Hi," I said, sitting next to him.

"Hi," he said.

I didn't know if I should hug him, so I just touched his shoulder. He didn't say anything. He was made of stone. I made a promise to myself: "I will not leave his side all day. I will be strong for him."

The funeral was long, and I cried a lot. Mr. Fisher thanked everyone for coming at the end and invited us to Susannah's house after the funeral. He almost cried a few times, and I thought how hard this was for him. He left Susannah when she was sick and broke her heart, and now he was standing in front of everybody who loved her.

At Susannah's house, Jeremiah, Steven, and I sat in Jeremiah's bedroom while the adults stood around downstairs, drinking coffee and talking in quiet voices.

"Where's Conrad?" I asked, remembering my promise.

"I don't know," Jeremiah said. "Are you guys hungry? There's food downstairs."

He said the word "downstairs" slowly, and I knew that he didn't want to go down there and see all those people.

"I'll go," I said.

"Thanks," he said.

Downstairs, there were big bowls of food for everyone on the table. I took two plates, and my mother helped me to fill them with cheese, bread, and grapes.

"Have you seen Conrad?" I asked.

"I think that he's in the **basement**," she said. "Why don't you take him this plate? I'll take this one up to Jeremiah and Steven."

I picked up the plate and went downstairs to the basement. It was dark but I soon found Conrad lying on the couch with a girl. She had dark hair, and she was really pretty. Her hands were in his hair, and Conrad was touching her leg.

Everything in me stopped, and I couldn't breathe. I stood

at the door, not knowing what to do. The girl saw me first. "Hi," she said.

Then Conrad saw me and sat up. "Is that food for us?"



he asked, not looking at me.

"My mother sent it," I said, quietly.

I put the plate down on a table and walked slowly out of the room, then I started to run. I ran past all the people in the living room, and I could hear Conrad following me.

"Wait a minute," he called, catching my arm.
 "What do you want?" I said, pushing him away.
 "That was Aubrey," he said.

Aubrey was the girl who broke Conrad's heart.

I said, "Sorry that I walked in when you were having a special moment."

"Don't be a kid," he said.

Then I said the worst thing that I've ever said to anyone. On the day of his mother's funeral, to the boy I loved, I said, "**Go to hell.**"

I'll never forget the look on his face. I was a terrible person, and he knew it.

He said, "I knew that starting something with you was a bad idea. You're still a kid. It was a huge mistake."

"I don't believe you," I said.

We were standing in the hallway, and people were starting to look at us. My mother was in the living room and could hear everything that we were saying. I could feel my face burning. I knew that I should walk away, but I felt so mad. I wanted to stop, but I couldn't.

"I hate you," I said.

Conrad nodded. "Good," he said, turning back toward the basement. He sounded so bored and tired. I felt sick.

"I never want to see you again," I said, and then I pushed past him, and I ran up the stairs into a bedroom. I lay on the bed and cried.

It wasn't Conrad I hated. It was myself.

CHAPTER FIVE

July

The phone rang early in the morning. I think that I was still dreaming when I heard Jeremiah's voice.

"Belly," he said. "Conrad has gone."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He left summer school a couple of days ago and didn't go to two classes. He never does things like that." Jeremiah was always laughing and never serious, but now he was desperate. "If he doesn't go back, they'll **kick him out** of college."

"What do you want to do, Jeremiah?" I asked, trying to sound relaxed, like I wasn't really afraid.

I didn't think that Conrad was in danger, but he might never come back, and that made me more frightened than anything.

"I don't know," he replied. "His phone has been off for days. Could you help me find him?"

"Yes, of course," I said.

Jeremiah arrived an hour later. I saw his car outside, so I picked up my bag and walked to the front door. When I opened it, he was standing on the steps. I wanted to hug him, but I didn't.

Jeremiah took the bag from my shoulder, and I followed him to the car.

He wouldn't look at me, and it made me nervous. I needed to know that things were OK between us. "So where are we going?" I asked, when we were driving away. "I don't know," he said. "I haven't spoken to Conrad in a while. I was hoping that you had some ideas." But I didn't. "Conrad and I haven't spoken since May," I said.

Jeremiah didn't say anything, so I kept talking. "Have you called his roommate?"

"I don't have his number. I don't even have his name." "His name is Eric," I said, quickly. I was glad that I knew that. "We could go to Conrad's college and talk to Eric."

"That's a good plan," Jeremiah said. "Thanks for coming, Belly. Was your mom OK about it?"

"Yeah, she was fine," I lied. My mom thought that I was staying at Taylor's house. I didn't want to lie to her, but I didn't want her to worry about Conrad either. She was already so sad about Susannah.

For a while, we just drove. Jeremiah and I were two people who usually never stopped talking when we were together. But there we were, not saying a word.

Jeremiah

One summer, when Belly was eleven, she got sick with the **flu** and had to lie on the couch for days. She felt terrible. One afternoon, my mom said to me, "Poor Belly is really bored. Can you stay inside with her today?"

I sighed. I wanted to go to the beach and surf, not look after Belly. But I knew that my mom really wanted me to stay, so I said, "Fine."

Belly and I played games all day and it was actually fun. I got the flu two days later, but it was all right. Belly stayed home with me, and we watched TV a lot. After that, Belly and I hung out all the time, and it wasn't like she was my little sister any more; it was like we were best friends.



But last summer, everything changed between me and Belly and Conrad. Conrad and I were sitting outside the summer house, talking about football, when Belly and her family arrived. Steven got out of the car first, then his mom, Laurel. She gave me and Conrad a big hug.

I started to say, "Where's Belly?" And there she was.

Conrad saw her first. He was looking over Laurel's shoulder at her. Belly walked toward us, and she was different. She wasn't a little kid any more. She was really pretty, and her legs looked miles long. There was a strange look on her face, too, that I've never seen before. She seemed nervous and **proud** at the same time.

I watched Conrad hug her. I wanted to ask her why she had that look on her face, but I didn't. I stepped around Conrad and hugged her, too. Then I said something funny, and she laughed, and she was just my friend Belly again. I was **relieved** because I didn't want her to be anything else. She was one of us. Seeing her in a different way, even for a second, felt frightening.

But that wasn't the moment that everything changed. It was a week later, when Belly and I were in the pool. It was night time and she was laughing at something that I was saying. I don't remember what it was, but I loved laughing with her. It felt great.

Then Belly said, "Jeremiah, you're the funniest person I know."

It was the best thing anyone has ever said to me. I started being silly again, and she was still laughing when Conrad

came outside. He said, "What's so funny?"

Belly looked up at him. Her face turned red, and her eyes were bright. "I don't remember," she said.

It was like being kicked in the stomach. I was so jealous of Conrad. I wanted Belly to look at me like that. I knew then that I liked her as more than a friend. I maybe even loved her.

When she got out of the pool later to get a drink, Conrad watched her walk away. I knew that he had feelings for her, too. I felt sick inside. I wanted to tell him that he couldn't have her just because he felt like it. But we all knew that Belly loved Conrad.

I didn't want to call Belly for help when Conrad disappeared because I was mad at her. It wasn't just that she picked Conrad and not me last summer; that was old news. It was because she wasn't there for me after my mom died. Usually, Belly and I spoke all the time, but in the months after it happened, Belly only called a couple of times and sent a few messages.

But now I was sitting next to her in the car, and I remembered everything that I loved about her again. It was impossible to stay mad at her. When I was near her, I just wanted to hold her and kiss her.

CHAPTER SIX
The necklace

When we arrived at Conrad's college, there were lots of people outside on the grass. It was loud and busy, and I felt so young there.

We left the car in front of Conrad's building and went inside when a girl came out the front door. Jeremiah knew the way to Conrad's room, and I had to hurry after him as he ran up the stairs and along a bright hallway. He stopped in front of a door that had Conrad's name on it. Under it was written, "Eric Trusky."

Conrad's roommate was a big, strong guy with red hair, and he opened the door wearing shorts and a T-shirt. "Hi," he said.

"I'm Conrad's brother, and this is our friend," Jeremiah said. "Do you know where he is?"

Eric opened the door and we walked into the room. "No, I don't. He just left," he said.

"And he didn't say anything to you before he left?" Jeremiah asked.

"He almost never talks." Eric smiled at me. "He only talks to pretty girls."

I felt sick. What pretty girls? Jeremiah sighed and put his hands behind his head. I sat down on Conrad's bed and looked around. So this was where he lived, and this was his life now. He didn't have lots of things in his room.

There weren't even pictures of Susannah or his dad.

"I have to go out now," said Eric. "Will you guys close the door when you leave?"

"Yeah, we will," Jeremiah said, then he sat down on the bed next to me.

Someone knocked on the door, and Eric opened it. It was a girl, wearing a shirt and jeans. "Have you seen my sweater?" she asked him. She looked into the room like she was trying to find something, or someone.

"Did she and Conrad date?" I thought. But it didn't matter because Conrad didn't want me anyway.

Jeremiah jumped up. "Are you a friend of Conrad's?"

"Yeah, I'm Sophie. Who are you?" she said, smiling. I knew that she liked Jeremiah.

"I'm his brother," Jeremiah said, giving her one of his special smiles, which she seemed to love. "Did Conrad say anything to you, Sophie?"

"He said something about going to the beach to surf," said Sophie. "He's so crazy."

Jeremiah looked at me. Conrad was at the summer house.

While Jeremiah went into the hallway to call his dad, I got up from the bed. Slowly, I opened a drawer in Conrad's desk and found a box of pens and some books.

I found it at the back of the second drawer – a small blue Tiffany & Co. box. Even as I was opening it, I knew that what I was doing was wrong. But I couldn't stop myself.

There was a necklace inside, and I took it out. I saw that it had an infinity sign on it, and suddenly I knew that it

wasn't for Sophie or another college girl. It was for me. Conrad bought it for me because he cared about me. All those nights on the phone, talking about math and infinity, were special for him, too.



I put the necklace on. Why didn't I just leave it in the box? I can't explain it. I only knew that I really, really wanted to wear it. It felt like it was mine.

Jeremiah came back into the room, and I pushed the necklace under my shirt. "Is your dad mad?" I asked. "What did he say?"

"He wanted to go to Cousins himself, but he knows that Conrad never listens to him. So are you ready to go to Cousins?"

Suddenly, the idea of seeing Conrad again became real. I thought about the last time that I saw him, at Susannah's funeral. You don't say those things to a person when their mother has just died. You just don't. "I don't think that I should go with you," I told Jeremiah.

Jeremiah stared at me. "Are you serious? I can't do this alone. You don't know how bad it's been. When Mom got sick again, Conrad stopped caring about anything. But I know that he still cares what you think of him."

My mouth felt dry. "I'm not so sure about that."

"But I *am* sure. I know my brother. Will you please just come with me?"

I knew that I had to help Jeremiah. "You win," I said, slowly. "I'll come."

Before we went to the car, I picked up Conrad's books, **notes**, and his computer. "Now he'll be able to study for his exams on Monday," I said.

Jeremiah smiled and said, "I like the way that you think, Belly."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Running away

We drove through Cousins, past all the old stores and restaurants. I was worried about seeing Conrad, but Jeremiah was driving really fast, and we were almost there.

When I saw Conrad's car in front of the summer house, my heart started to beat loudly in my chest. Conrad was in there. Jeremiah jumped out of the car and ran into the house, and I followed him slowly. It was strange. The house still smelled the same. I thought that it might all feel different because Susannah wasn't here, but it didn't.

Conrad was sitting on the couch, and his hair was wet from surfing. He was actually angry when he saw us. He looked at me for one second before saying to Jeremiah, "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to take you back to college," Jeremiah said, trying to sound relaxed. "You're making a huge mistake. Dad is really worried about you."

Conrad shook his head. "Tell Dad to go to hell."

"Conrad, you can't stay here," said Jeremiah. "They'll kick you out of college if you don't go to your exams on Monday."

"That's my problem," Conrad replied. "And what is she doing here?" He didn't look at me when he said it, and it felt like a kick in the stomach. I started to walk toward the back door. I couldn't breathe.



"I brought her with me to help," Jeremiah said. "Look, we've got all your books. You can study tonight and tomorrow and then we can go back to college."

"Forget it. I don't care," Conrad said.

"What's your problem?" Jeremiah asked him.

"At this moment, both of you are my problem." Then Conrad looked at me and said, "Why do you want to help me? Why are you even here?"

I opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out. Conrad could always break me with a look, a word.

He waited for me to say something and, when I didn't, he did.

"Did you forget that you hate me and you never want to see me again?"

"I don't hate you," I said, and then I opened the back door and stepped outside. I just needed to be on the beach. I sat in the sand and watched the waves. There was nothing that I could do to change the past. Conrad hated me. He couldn't even say my name.

After a while, I went back to the house. Jeremiah was alone in the kitchen, and Conrad was out somewhere.

"I shouldn't be here," I said.

"Don't listen to Conrad," Jeremiah said. "He doesn't mean anything that he says. Are you sorry that you came?"

"Yes."

Jeremiah smiled. "I'm not. I couldn't do this without you."

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

Jeremiah looked out the window to the beach. "I think that we'll have to stay here tonight. I'll keep talking to him. He'll come with us, but I just need some time."

Conrad came home in the evening, and we sat around watching TV for a while. Jeremiah didn't try to talk to him, and no one spoke about summer school.

"I'm so tired," I said, thinking that Jeremiah might want to be alone with Conrad. "I'm going to bed."

"Goodnight," Jeremiah said, and Conrad didn't say anything.

When I woke up the next morning, I stayed in bed. I wanted to believe that it was any other morning at the summer house. Susannah and my mother were walking on the beach. Downstairs, the boys were eating all the muffins and not leaving any for me. But it wasn't real, and I knew that.

I got out of bed and looked out my window. Down at the beach, Jeremiah and Conrad were surfing, and suddenly, I was hopeful. Maybe they were finally talking about Conrad going back to summer school. Then I could go home, away from Conrad and the past.

Before I did anything else, I called my mother. "I'm staying at Taylor's house again tonight," I told her. "Taylor and Davis have broken up and she needs me."

My mother didn't even question the lie. "You're a good friend, Belly," she said. I could hear that she was relieved, because she just wanted to be alone to feel sad about Susannah.

After our call, I took a shower and went downstairs. The boys were back inside, sitting at the kitchen table.

"Look what I got," Jeremiah said, passing a bag to me. I looked inside and saw the sugary muffins that Susannah always went out early to buy.

I took a muffin and pushed half of it inside my mouth. It was still warm. "They're so good," I said with my mouth full. "So, what's happening?"

Jeremiah looked at Conrad. "Are you coming back, Conrad?" he asked, sounding hopeful.

But Conrad said, "You guys should go soon, before the traffic gets bad."

Jeremiah looked desperate. "We're not leaving without you," he said.

Conrad sighed. "Jeremiah, thank you for coming out here, but as you can see, everything is fine."

"You keep saying that, but, Conrad, you're not fine. You're just **running away**."

Conrad stared angrily at Jeremiah, and I knew that he was listening to us now. The old Conrad was still in there, and he would never run away from his problems.

I had to say something. "So, how are you going to become a doctor without college, Conrad?"

He stared at me, and I stared back and thought, "Yeah, I said it." I told him what I had to, even if it hurt him.

"I don't want to be a doctor," he said, angrily. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"Then tell us what's wrong," I said, and my heart was beating so fast.

No one spoke. For a minute, I thought that Conrad might really talk to us about his feelings.

But finally, he stood up. "There's nothing to tell. I'm going back to the beach." He opened the back door.

When he was gone, Jeremiah put his head in his hands. I touched his arm and said, "Don't worry. We still have time. It's only Saturday, isn't it?"

"Yeah, we have time," he said, but he didn't say it like he believed it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sandy Donatti

In the afternoon, Jeremiah went out to get a pizza, and I went for a long swim in the pool. Being in the house, trying not to think about Susannah, was too hard. I just needed to be alone, to breathe in and out slowly. After my swim, I was in my room when I heard a car arrive in front of the house. I hurried downstairs but stopped when Conrad opened the door. A blond woman walked in.

"Hello there," she said, surprised to see Conrad. It was like she was the one who should be there, and he wasn't.

"Hello," Conrad said. "Can I help you?"

"Are you Conrad?" she said. "We spoke on the phone. I'm Sandy Donatti, your dad's **real estate agent**."

Conrad said nothing.

"As you know, your dad wants to sell the house quickly," Sandy continued. "So I'm just here to check that everything is ready."

"I sent the movers away," Conrad said in a relaxed voice.

"Why did you do that?" Sandy asked, angrily. "The house should be empty."

"I'm afraid that you were given wrong information. I'll be here for the summer with my girlfriend, Belly," Conrad said, pointing at me.

I stared at Conrad.

He crossed his arms. "Sandy, my dad can't sell this house

because it isn't his. It's my mother's house. Did my dad tell you that?"

"Yes."

"And did you know that she's dead?"

Sandy stopped being angry when Conrad said that. She was so uncomfortable, and moved back toward the door. "Yes, your dad told me. I'm very sorry. I'm going to talk to your dad."

"You do that, and tell him that he isn't selling the house," said Conrad.

She opened her mouth to speak, but decided not to say anything. Conrad opened the door for her, then she was gone.

I sighed. A million thoughts were in my head, and I'm not proud to say that *girlfriend* was near the top.

Conrad didn't look at me when he said, "I only **found out** a few days ago. I was at home, getting some clothes, and Sandy called. I got my things and came straight here. Don't tell Jeremiah about the house."

"Why not?" I asked.

"I don't want him to know what Dad is doing yet. You know that it'll hurt him."

That was true, but Jeremiah wasn't a kid, and he needed to know that Mr. Fisher was selling the house.

"Please don't tell him," Conrad said again.

His voice sounded desperate, so I said, "I won't."

Conrad went upstairs and closed his bedroom door, while I stayed on the stairs. It took a minute for me to

understand. Conrad didn't run away from college to surf. He came to save the house.

Later that afternoon, Jeremiah and Conrad went surfing again. Maybe Conrad wanted to tell Jeremiah about the house, and maybe Jeremiah wanted to talk to Conrad about summer school again. That was fine. I was happy watching them from the house.

I was sitting outside in a garden chair, thinking about all our summers here, when I heard someone behind me. I turned around to see Conrad and Jeremiah's dad.

"Hello, Belly," he said. He was wearing a suit, and he looked like he was at work, not at the beach.

"Hi, Mr. Fisher," I replied, and my voice sounded nervous. "Conrad and Jeremiah are surfing."

Mr. Fisher just nodded and sat in the chair next to mine. "How's Conrad?" he asked.

"He's good," I said, quickly. Then I felt stupid, because he wasn't good. His mother was dead, and he was at the beach when he should be at college.

"I don't know what that kid is thinking," Mr. Fisher said, shaking his head.

I didn't say anything. I never knew what Conrad was thinking either, but I didn't want to agree with Mr. Fisher.

Then we were silent, and it didn't feel easy or friendly. It was uncomfortable. He never had anything to say to me, and I never knew what to say to him. I had the horrible feeling that we were all in trouble.



As Conrad and Jeremiah walked back toward the house, I had a crazy idea. I wanted to run to them to tell them that their dad was here. But it was too late. They came up the steps and saw us sitting there.

"Hi, Dad," said Jeremiah, nervously. Conrad walked past us and into the house, and Mr. Fisher followed him. I stood up, then Jeremiah and I went inside, too.

Conrad and Mr. Fisher were in the kitchen. Conrad was opening a beer, not even looking at his dad.

"Sandy Donatti called me this morning and told me what happened," Mr. Fisher said, loudly.

Jeremiah stopped. "Who's Sandy Donatti?"

"She's our real estate agent," Conrad said.

I put my arms around myself, trying to disappear. "Maybe Jeremiah and I should run away," I thought. "Then Jeremiah won't **find out** that I knew about the house."

Jeremiah stared at his dad. "You never told me that you were selling the house."

"He's not selling it," Conrad said, drinking his beer slowly. "It's not his house."

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Fisher, breathing heavily. "But I'm not doing this for me. The money will be for you boys."

Conrad looked at his dad, with cold eyes. "I'm not like you. I don't care about the money. I care about the house. It's Mom's house."

"Your mother wanted me to decide what to do with the house," Mr. Fisher replied.

That was the wrong thing to say to Conrad. He hit the wall, and his voice was shaking. "You don't know the first thing about what she wanted. You left her when she was sick. You were a terrible dad and an even worse husband."

Jeremiah said, "Conrad, just shut up."

Conrad turned around. "Why aren't you mad with Dad, after everything that he's done?" he shouted. "This is why we didn't tell you."

"What do you mean 'we'?" Jeremiah asked. Then he turned to me and the desperate look on his face cut through me.

I started to speak, to try to explain. But I only said, "I promise that I only found out today . . ." and then Mr. Fisher started speaking again.

"You aren't the only one who is hurting, Conrad," he said. "You can't talk to me like that."

"I think that I can."

The room was quiet, and Mr. Fisher looked so mad. "The movers are coming back, Conrad," he said. "This is happening and you can't stop it."

Mr. Fisher left soon after, and I went straight up to my room and stayed there. I hated Conrad for putting me in the middle, for asking me to keep his secret. I didn't want to be there if the boys started talking about their dad again. Conrad couldn't **forgive** Mr. Fisher for leaving Susannah when she was sick, while Jeremiah always just wanted to make his dad happy.

When I finally went downstairs, it was dark outside and Jeremiah and Conrad were sitting on the couch. They were watching TV, like their fight never happened. I stood at the bottom of the stairs for a moment, hoping that Jeremiah could forgive me, too, for not telling him about the house.

Then Jeremiah looked up, and I knew that it was OK. He smiled a real Jeremiah smile, and I smiled back, feeling so relieved. "Hi, Belly," he said. "I hope that you feel like having a party, because I've invited some guys here later, and they're bringing beer."

CHAPTER NINE

The party

"Welcome!" I said, as boys and girls started to arrive at the summer house. Then I walked around the room, passing out drinks. I drank some **tequila**, and it burned like fire, then I had a beer. When I finished it, I got another, and I drank that, too. The music was loud and suddenly, I wanted to dance. I kicked off my shoes and threw one arm around Jeremiah.

"Belly . . ." he said.

"Just dance, Jeremiah!" I shouted.

So he did, and he was a good dancer. Other people started dancing, too. Conrad didn't, but I didn't care. I danced like my heart was breaking, which it was.

I felt really hot so I said, "Can we swim in the pool one last time?"

Jeremiah said, "Forget it. Let's swim in the ocean."

"Yeah!" It sounded like a great idea to me.

"No," Conrad said, suddenly standing next to me. "Belly's **drunk**. She shouldn't swim."

"But I want to," I said. "And I'm not even drunk." I tried to walk in a straight line to show him.

"Sorry," he said, "but you're *really* drunk."

Conrad was so boring and serious at the worst moments.

"You're no fun," I said. Then I ran to the back door, down the steps, and on to the beach. I felt strong and free

and great, and it felt like the house was a million miles away. I didn't have to turn around to know that Conrad was behind me, but I did anyway.

"Come back to the house," Conrad said. "I'm not going to pull your dead body out of the ocean."

He had the tequila bottle in his hand, and I took it from him and drank some. I felt proud of myself for acting like a girl who could drink tequila straight from the bottle.



I stepped toward the ocean, smiling at Conrad, then I put my foot in. The water was really cold, and suddenly, swimming didn't seem like a great idea any more. But I hated losing to Conrad. "Are you going to stop me?" I called.

He sighed and looked back toward the house. I took a big step, then another. The water was up to my knees, and I was shaking with cold. It was stupid, and I didn't know what I was doing.

And just when I thought that Conrad didn't care, he moved toward me. He pulled me up and put me over his shoulder.

"Put me down!" I screamed, hitting his back.

And for once, he actually listened, and he dropped me in the sand.

"That really hurt!" I shouted. It didn't, but I was mad, and I felt stupid. I kicked sand at his back, and the wind kicked it back at me.

Conrad shook his head and turned away from me. He was really leaving.

"Wait!" I said. I had to tell him.

He turned back around but his face was a closed door.

"I need to tell you something. I'm really sorry for what I said to you that day." My voice was high and desperate, and I was crying. "At the funeral, I was horrible, and I'm so sorry."

"It's fine," he said.

"Do you forgive me?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "I forgive you. Now please stop crying."

I stepped toward him and he didn't move away. We were close enough to kiss. I took one step closer, and that's when he said, "Let's go back."

Conrad didn't wait for me to answer him. He just started walking away and I followed, feeling sick. The moment was over, because Conrad wanted it to be over.

Back at the house, I pushed my way through all the people, ran upstairs and fell into my bed. The room was going round and round, and I thought about all the stupid things that I said on the beach. I lay on my side and hugged my knees to my chest and cried. Everything was wrong and suddenly, I wanted my mother.

I reached across the bed for the phone. "Mommy," I said when she answered.

"Belly? What's wrong, Belly? Where are you?"

"I'm at the summer house," I said. "Mr. Fisher's going to sell it and Conrad is sad and Mr. Fisher doesn't even care."

"Belly, speak more slowly. I can't hear what you're saying."

"Please will you come to the summer house and make everything better?"

Then I dropped the phone because it felt so heavy. I closed my eyes and soon I was asleep.

Jeremiah

When Belly and Conrad came back from the beach, they were both wet and sandy. Belly was crying and went straight

up to bed, and Conrad lay down on the couch. He was still there when the party was over. I was mad with him. The thought of him and Belly together made me sick.

"What happened outside with you guys?" I asked.

"Nothing happened."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"Nothing means nothing, Jeremiah."

I hated when he was like that. He didn't care about anything or anyone. Did he care about Belly? I had to know about him and her and how he really felt, so I just asked him, "Do you still like her?"

He stared at me in surprise. We never spoke about Belly like this. I wanted him to tell me, but he didn't answer the question. He said, "Do you?"

I could feel my face turning red. "I'm not the one who took her to prom."

Conrad thought about that. "I only took her because she asked me to."

"Do you like her or not, Conrad?" I was quiet for a moment, then I said it. "Because I do. I like her. I really like her. Do you?"

"No," said Conrad, quickly.

He was lying. He liked her. He more than liked her, but he couldn't say it. He wasn't the guy Belly needed.

I was mad at him, but I was relieved, too. It didn't matter how many times he hurt her, Belly loved Conrad. But now he didn't want to be with her, and I hoped that she might start thinking about me as more than a friend.

CHAPTER TEN
Breakfast

"Belly!" Someone was shaking me. It was my mother. She had dark circles under her eyes, and she looked really mad. Why was she at the summer house?

Then I remembered. I called her when I was drunk. I brought my mother here.

I sat up. My head hurt so badly from the tequila, and I felt sick. The bed was full of sand and my eyes were burning.

My mother stood up. "You have five minutes to get your things. We're leaving."

She started picking up my clothes from the floor.

"Just listen to me for a second," I said. "I had to come. Jeremiah and Conrad needed me."

But I stopped when I saw the look on my mother's face.

"So why didn't you tell me about it? What are you doing here?" she asked, angrily. "You called me at four in the morning, drunk. I tried to call you back, but your phone was off, so I drove all night to get here. I was so worried about you, and then I arrive, and the house looks terrible. There are beer bottles and paper cups everywhere."

"We'll clean the house," I said. "It was our last night here because Mr. Fisher wants to sell it. Don't you care?"

My mother shook her head. "It's their house, Belly. Adam can sell it if he wants to and you haven't helped by

coming here. Now get your things. We're leaving."

"I'm not going!" I shouted.

"Belly, stop this now! I'm tired of you acting like a baby. Can't you think about anyone else? You aren't the only person who loved Susannah, so stop feeling sorry for yourself."

Her words hurt me badly. I ran out of the room and went to the beach. I sat alone in the sand for a while and cried. Everything was wrong and I felt terrible.

When I went back inside the house, I saw my mother cleaning the kitchen. She stopped and said, "I'm sorry that I spoke to you like that, Belly. I've been so sad since Susannah died, and I haven't been there for you. But you lied to me."

"I'm sorry," I said. "But Conrad and Jeremiah needed me."

"They're important to me, too," she said. "If they have a problem, I want to know about it. Do you understand?"

I nodded.

Then she said, "Are you ready to go?"

I stared at her. "Mom, we can't leave. You can't let Mr. Fisher sell the house."

She sighed.

"I'll call him," she said, finally. "I'll invite him here for breakfast, but it might not change anything."

I saw the look on her face, and I felt hopeful. I knew that it wasn't over yet.

When Mr. Fisher arrived half an hour later, the house was clean and we were ready for him. He walked in and looked at the eggs and muffins on the table. "Wow," he said. "This looks great, Laurel. Thank you."

My mother smiled. "Let's sit," she said.

We all sat down, and Mr. Fisher filled his plate. He loved eggs, and he really loved the way that my mother cooked them. I just took a muffin.

"Thanks again, Laurel," said Mr. Fisher, smiling. "These guys weren't very happy about what I had to say. I'm glad that you're here to help me."

My mother smiled back at him and passed him some orange juice. "I'm not here to help you, Adam. I'm here for Susannah's boys."

Mr. Fisher stopped smiling and put down his fork. "Laurel . . ."

"You can't sell this house, Adam. You know that it would be a mistake," my mother said, slowly.

Mr. Fisher looked at Conrad and Jeremiah and back at my mother. "I've already decided, Laurel. I'm selling this house. I'm sorry, but you can't stop me. I know that it is special to you, but it isn't yours."

My mother's face was red. "I know," she said. "This house is Susannah's. It was her favorite place and that is why the boys should have it."

Mr. Fisher stood up. "I'm not going to fight with you about this, Laurel."

"Adam, sit down," my mother said.

"No, I won't."

"Sit down, Adam," she ordered, angrily.



He stared at her. We all did. Then she said, "Kids, go upstairs."

We all hurried out of the kitchen and sat at the top of the stairs, trying to hear.

Mr. Fisher said, "Why are you doing this to me, Laurel?"

"I'm sorry, but go to hell."

I put my hand over my mouth and Conrad's eyes were bright. But Jeremiah looked like he might cry. I reached out and held his hand.

"Can't you see how important this house is to the boys?" my mother went on. "They need this. I don't want to believe that you're this unkind, Adam."

He didn't answer her.

"This house is hers. I will do everything that I can to keep this house for her boys."

Mr. Fisher asked, "What will you do, Laurel?" and he sounded so tired.

"I'll do what I have to do."

"But coming here hurts so much," he said, quietly. "Susannah is everywhere in this house."

He started crying, and I almost felt sorry for him. I think that my mother did, too, because her voice was soft now. "I know, but, Adam, you were a terrible husband. You left her when she needed you, but she still loved you. Now you need to do this one last thing for her."

I looked at Conrad and he said in a quiet voice, "Laurel is amazing."

A little while later, when it seemed safe, Jeremiah and I went back downstairs. My mother and Mr. Fisher were drinking coffee, and his eyes were red. When he saw us, he said, "Where's Conrad?"

"He's upstairs," Jeremiah said.

"Will you go and get him?"

Jeremiah looked at my mother, who nodded. He ran up the stairs and a few minutes later, Conrad was with him. Conrad's face was careful and serious. "What do you want?" he said.

"I want you to go back to summer school tomorrow and take your exams. If you do that and you pass them, the house is yours and Jeremiah's. Do we have a **deal**?"

"Yes!" shouted Jeremiah, loudly, hugging Mr. Fisher.

"But I haven't studied," Conrad said. "I might not pass."

I knew that Conrad wasn't really worried about passing his exams. He always passed. But he didn't want to take anything from his father.

Quickly, Jeremiah said, "Conrad, just say yes. We'll help you study, won't we, Belly?"

Conrad looked at me and I looked at my mother. "Can I, Mom?"

My mother nodded. "Take the deal," I told Conrad.

"All right," he said, finally.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The kiss

After Mr. Fisher and my mom left, the boys slept for an hour while I got Conrad's books, notes, and computer from the car and found pens and paper. I put everything in the kitchen, then I made some coffee.

After the boys woke up, they came into the kitchen. "What . . ." Conrad said, looking at all his things.

Jeremiah smiled at me and said, "You're amazing!"

I handed them both a cup of coffee. I didn't drink coffee, but I knew that mine was good, because I made it for my mother every morning.

Jeremiah took a big drink and nodded happily. "Thanks, Belly, this is so nice. Coffee is your specialty."

Then Conrad said, "I thought that hot chocolate was your specialty."

I stared at him. Did he really just say that? Did he remember being here with me on that one amazing night last December?

I had to look away. Then I said, "How do you want to study, Conrad?"

"I don't want to study, so you can decide," he said.

"That's fine," I said. I was ready for this. "You'll read. Jeremiah and I will make notes."

I was surprised that Conrad listened. He just picked up a book and started to read. Sitting at the table, studying,

he looked like the old Conrad. The one who loved learning and cared about things like exams. I suddenly understood that I missed him. He was only a few feet away, and I missed him more than ever. I watched him, and I thought, "Come back. Be the person I love and remember."



When I went to sleep at around 4 a.m., Conrad was still studying at the kitchen table. I woke up early the next morning and went downstairs, and Conrad was in the same place. He was still writing notes. "We're leaving in twenty minutes, so be ready," I said.

Conrad said, "I already am."

Jeremiah had the idea of only taking one car. Jeremiah drove and I sat in the front with him, while Conrad sat in the back with his books. Of course, I cried as we drove away from the house. I was just glad that I was wearing sunglasses and the boys couldn't see my eyes. But I loved that house, and I hated to say goodbye. It was more than just a house—it was every summer. It was Susannah.

We arrived at college and Conrad left to take his exam. Jeremiah and I bought sandwiches, and we ate them on the grass. Suddenly, he said to me, "Why didn't you come and see me after my mom died?"

"I d-d-did. I came to the funeral," I said, slowly.

Jeremiah looked at me. "That's not what I mean."

"I-I didn't think that you wanted me there yet."

"No, it was because you didn't want to be there," he said. "I wanted you to be there."

He was right. I didn't want to be anywhere near Susannah's house. Thinking about her hurt too much. But the thought of Jeremiah waiting to see me hurt, too.

"You're right," I told him. "I'm really sorry."

He looked up at the sky. "It's hard because I want to talk about her. But Conrad doesn't want to, and I can't talk to my dad, and you weren't there either. We all loved her, and no one can talk about her."

"What do you want to say?" I asked.

"I really miss her," he said, sadly. "She only died two months ago, but it feels like it has been longer. And it also

feels like it only happened yesterday."

I nodded. That's how it felt for me, too.

"And my dad was wrong. It is your house, and it's Laurel's and Steven's. It's all of ours."

I had a strange feeling, like I wanted to reach out and touch his face. I wanted to show him how much I cared. Words just aren't enough sometimes, and I knew that, but I had to try anyway. "Thank you for saying that."

"It's just true," Jeremiah said.

We saw Conrad walking fast toward us. His eyes were bright. "That was easy," he said, happily.

He smiled then picked me up and put me over his shoulder. I laughed as he ran around, like he was on the football field. "Put me down!" I cried, pulling the bottom of my dress down.

He put me on the ground carefully. "Thanks," he said, his hands still around me, "for coming."

Before I could reply, Jeremiah said, "You still have one more, Conrad."

Conrad looked at his watch. "You're right. This will be a quick one. I'll see you guys in about an hour."

As I watched Conrad go, Jeremiah said, "I'm going to find a bathroom. I'll meet you at the car."

"Do you want me to wait?" I asked, but he was already walking away.

He didn't turn around. "No."

Jeremiah and I sat in the car, listening to the radio.

It was starting to get dark. I touched my infinity necklace, thinking about Conrad.

Sighing, I looked out the window. "Does he ever talk about me?" I asked.

"Don't do that," Jeremiah said.

"Don't do what?" I asked.

"Don't ask me about him," he said, angrily. Jeremiah never spoke to me like that. He never spoke to anyone like that.

"What's the matter with you?" I said.

He started to say something, and then he stopped. He pulled me toward him and kissed me, hard, and then I was kissing him back. My fingers were in his soft yellow hair and my eyes were closed. He kissed me like he was dying and I could save him. It was desperate. It was like there was no world outside that car and it was just us.

He backed away. "Belly," he said.

"Do you still . . . care, about me, want me?" I asked.

He said, "Yes, I still . . ."

And then we were kissing again.

Jeremiah and I heard a noise next to the car and both looked up at the same time. We jumped back, and there was Conrad, looking straight at us. His face was white.

He turned and started to walk away, and then I was on my feet, opening the car door. I didn't look back. I ran after him, calling his name, but he didn't turn around. I took his arm and he finally looked at me with hate in his eyes.

"So, do you like Jeremiah now?" He was trying to hurt me, but he sounded like he was in pain, like he cared about the answer. It made me feel glad, but also sad. I said, "Does it matter to you if I do?"

He stared at me, then he touched the infinity necklace around my neck. "If you like Jeremiah, why are you wearing my necklace?"

"I found it when we went to your college room. It doesn't mean anything," I said.

"You know what it means."

I shook my head. "I don't." But of course, I did. I remembered him explaining infinity to me. He bought that necklace for me.

"Then give it back." He held out his hand, and I saw that it was shaking.

"No," I said.

"It's not yours. I never gave it to you. You just took it."

That's when I finally understood. It wasn't enough to know that he loved me. He had to say the words to me. He had to show me that he cared, but he couldn't. My hands were shaking, too, as I slowly took off the necklace and handed it back to him.

He looked surprised for one second, and then his face was closed again, like always.

"You can leave now," he said.

When I didn't move, he said, "Go to Jeremiah. He's the one who wants you. I don't and I never did."

And then I was running away.

CHAPTER TWELVE
Goodbye

I couldn't go back to the car yet. We kissed, but then I went running after Conrad. How could I look at Jeremiah after what just happened? My mind was moving in a million different directions. So I walked around the college, but after a while, I went to the car. I couldn't just leave without telling anybody, and I didn't have another way to get home.

I guessed that Conrad was thinking the same thing because, when I got back, he was already there in the back seat.

Jeremiah was standing next to the car. "Hi," he said.

"Hi," I said, nervously. I didn't know what he was thinking.

He walked toward me. "Are you ready to go home?" he asked.

I nodded, and he threw me the keys.

In the car, none of us spoke. Two days ago, I went to Cousins to help Jeremiah, but now everything was worse. Just when we thought that everything was OK, we broke it.

We drove for hours, and it started to rain heavily. "Can you see?" Jeremiah asked me.

"Yeah," I lied. I couldn't see two feet in front of me.

The traffic was moving really slowly, and then it stopped. There were police lights ahead.

"I think that there's been an accident," Jeremiah said.

We didn't move for over an hour, and the rain was getting worse. "What should we do?" I asked.

"There's a hotel a few miles away," Jeremiah said.

"Let's just wait for the traffic to start moving," Conrad said.

"It'll be hours before that happens. Let's sleep for a few hours and leave in the morning."

Conrad didn't say anything.

"Belly, what do you want to do?" Jeremiah asked.

"I don't care. Do what you want."

We got to the hotel at midnight. I went to the bathroom and called my mother. When I told her what was happening, she said, "I'm coming to get you."

Every part of me wanted to say, "Yes, please, come this second," but she sounded so tired. So, I said, "No, it's fine, Mom. We'll leave early in the morning."

"Just go to sleep and get up early then. Call me when you're on the road."

After the call, I stayed in the bathroom for a little while, getting ready for bed. I didn't care that the boys might need the bathroom. I just wanted some time alone. Finally, I went back into the bedroom.

Jeremiah and Conrad were lying on the floor, on opposite sides of the bed. I climbed on to the bed and Jeremiah turned off the lights. Nobody said goodnight.

I tried to go to sleep, but I couldn't. I was thinking about how everything was different now. We could never go back to the way that things were.



Jeremiah started snoring. He could always go to sleep so easily. He wasn't thinking about our kiss, so I shouldn't either. I turned on to my other side, away from Jeremiah.

And then I heard Conrad say, quietly, "Earlier, when I said that I never wanted you, it isn't true."

I stopped breathing. I didn't know what to say. Then he said it again. "It isn't true. Goodnight, Belly."

After that, of course, I couldn't sleep. My head was too full of things to think about. "It isn't true." I closed my eyes and heard Conrad say those words again and again. Did he want to be with me? I thought that was what I wanted, but now there was also Jeremiah. When Jeremiah kissed me, he was open, wanting and needing me. And in that moment, I wanted and needed him, too.

So I lay there in the dark, thinking about every word. The boys were asleep and every part of me was awake. It was like an amazing dream, and I was afraid to go to sleep because I didn't want it to end.

I woke up before the boys and took a shower. When I came out, Jeremiah was outside, speaking on the phone, and Conrad was putting on his shoes. I kept waiting, but he didn't look at me.

"Hi," I said.

"Hi," he said. "My friend is coming to get me."

"Why?" I asked.

"It's easier. He'll take me back to Cousins to get my car, and Jeremiah can take you home."

"Oh," I said, in surprise.

We stood there, saying nothing. But it was the nothing that meant everything. There was no sign of what he said last night in his eyes, and I could feel something inside me break.

So we were finally, finally over. I looked at him and thought, "I will never feel that way about you again. I'm not the girl who always comes running back to you when you push her away. I'm not the girl who loves you anyway. I take my heart back from you."

I felt the pain in my stomach that only he could give me. I never wanted to feel it again. I couldn't even be mad at him, because this was who he was.

Jeremiah came inside and asked Conrad, "Is Dan coming to get you?"

"Yeah. I'm going to wait here for him."

Then Jeremiah looked at me. "What do you want to do?"

"I want to go with you," I said, picking up my bag.

He took my bag from my shoulder. "Then let's go." To Conrad, he said, "See you at home."

"Bye, Conrad," I said. I walked out the door and didn't look back.

Soon, we were driving down the road. I opened the window, and my hair went everywhere, but I didn't care. I liked the way that it felt.

I looked at Jeremiah and said, "You haven't said anything about yesterday." I could hear my heart beating in my ears.

"What is there to say?"

"I don't know," I said. "I can think of a lot of things."

"Belly . . ." he started. Then he stopped and sighed, shaking his head.

"What do you want to say?"

"It's nothing," he said.

Then I reached across and took his hand, and it felt like the most right thing in the world. I worried that he might take his hand away, but he didn't. We held hands like that until we got home.

A couple of years later

When I was younger and I dreamed about my future, it was always with the same boy. But it wasn't like that.

It's raining heavily and I'm in a white dress, running for the car. He's running ahead of me, opening the door.

"Are you sure?" he asks me.

"No," I say, getting inside.

I don't know what will happen, but the future is still mine.

During-reading questions

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 What changed between Belly and Conrad last summer?
- 2 What does Conrad teach Belly on the phone? Why?

CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Why does Conrad drive through the night to Belly's house?
- 2 At the summer house, who is nervous and who is brave? Is this surprising, do you think?

CHAPTER THREE

- 1 Why does Conrad agree to take Belly to prom?
- 2 Who breaks up with who after prom? Why?

CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 Why doesn't Belly want to see Susannah?
- 2 Why doesn't Belly call Conrad or Jeremiah after Susannah dies?
- 3 Why does Belly hate herself at the end of the chapter, do you think?

CHAPTER FIVE

- 1 Why does Jeremiah ask Belly for help?
- 2 How did Jeremiah and Belly become best friends?
- 3 Why does Jeremiah feel jealous of Conrad when they are in the pool?

CHAPTER SIX

- 1 How does Belly feel when she finds the infinity necklace, do you think? Why?
- 2 Why does Jeremiah believe that Conrad will listen to Belly?

CHAPTER SEVEN

- 1 Why is Conrad angry with Jeremiah and Belly when they arrive at the summer house, do you think?
- 2 Why doesn't Conrad care that his dad is worried about him, do you think?

CHAPTER EIGHT

- 1 Why did Conrad really stop going to college?
- 2 Why doesn't Belly tell Jeremiah that his dad is selling the house? Was it the right thing to do, do you think?

CHAPTER NINE

- 1 Why doesn't Conrad want Belly to swim in the ocean?
- 2 Why does Conrad lie to Jeremiah about liking Belly, do you think?

CHAPTER TEN

- 1 Why is Belly's mom, Laurel, angry with Belly?
- 2 What deal does Mr. Fisher offer Conrad? Why doesn't Conrad want to take it?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- 1 Belly suddenly understands that she misses the old Conrad. What was he like?
- 2 Why doesn't Jeremiah want Belly to ask him about Conrad's feelings for her, do you think?

CHAPTER TWELVE

- 1 Who is Belly running to the car with at the end of the chapter, do you think? Why do you think this?

After-reading questions

- 1 Look back at your answers to “Before-reading questions 1 and 2”. Were you right?
- 2 Is Belly good at listening to Conrad, do you think? Why/Why not? Find examples in the story.
- 3 In the hotel, Conrad says to Belly, “When I said that I never wanted you, it isn’t true.” Why does he leave without showing any sign of this the next morning, do you think?
- 4 At the end of the story, Belly chooses to go home with Jeremiah. Was this the right thing to do, do you think?
- 5 What do you think will happen between Belly, Conrad, and Jeremiah in the third book, *We’ll Always Have Summer*?

Exercises

CHAPTER ONE

- 1 Put these sentences in the correct order in your notebook.

Conrad ...

- a starts college.
- b has an amazing night with Belly in Cousins.
- c didn’t want to hang out with Belly when she was younger.
- d goes on a date with Belly, her mom, and her brother.
- e helps Belly with math.
- f kisses Belly for the first time.

CHAPTER TWO

- 2 Match the two parts of these sentences in your notebook.

Example: 1 – b

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Belly was sleeping while | a Belly found an old box of hot chocolate. |
| 2 Conrad was waiting in the car while | b Conrad drove through the night to her. |
| 3 Conrad was making a fire while | c Belly ran down the front steps and across the garden. |
| 4 Conrad was sleeping when | d Belly whispered, “Conrad, there’s only you.” |

CHAPTERS THREE AND FOUR

- 3 Match the words with their definitions in your notebook. Then write *adjective, noun, or verb*.

break up	hug	funeral	
basement	prom	breathe	desperate

- 1*break up*.... If you do this with your boyfriend or girlfriend, it means you stop seeing them.*verb*....
- 2 a big party for students at the end of the school year
- 3 to take air into and out of your body through your nose and mouth
- 4 when people come together to burn the body of a dead person or put it under the ground
- 5 a room under a house
- 6 when you put your arms around someone to show them that you love them or like them a lot
- 7 when you want or need something very much

CHAPTER FOUR

4 Are these sentences *true* or *false*? Correct the false sentences in your notebook.

- 1 Belly does not love Conrad any more. *false*. *Belly loves Conrad more than anything*.....
- 2 Susannah wants Belly to look after Conrad for her.
- 3 Belly phones Conrad when his mother dies and makes everything worse.
- 4 Jeremiah and Conrad are helping with the flowers when Belly arrives at the funeral.
- 5 Mr. Fisher left Susannah when she was sick.
- 6 Belly is unhappy when she sees Conrad is in the basement with Aubrey.

CHAPTERS FIVE AND SIX

5 Put the words in the correct order to make *present perfect* sentences in your notebook.

- 1 two / has / been / at / days / Conrad / not / college / for
..... *Conrad has not been at college for two days*.....
- 2 already / house / Jeremiah / has / at / Belly's / arrived
- 3 spoken / not / funeral / to / Conrad / the / since / Belly / has
- 4 her / found / not / has / sweater / yet / Sophie
- 5 called / Jeremiah / just / his / dad / has
- 6 time / enough / Conrad / has / study / still / got / to

CHAPTERS SEVEN AND EIGHT

6 Complete these sentences in your notebook, using the words or phrases from the box.

runs away	finds out	real estate agent
kicked out	stares	forgive

Conrad ¹.....*runs away*..... from college after he ² from his father's ³ , Sandy Donatti, that he is going to sell the summer house. Conrad might be ⁴ of college, but he doesn't care because he wants to save the house.

When his father arrives at the summer house, Conrad ⁵ at him with cold eyes because he cannot ⁶ him for leaving Susannah.

CHAPTER NINE

7 Write questions for these answers in your notebook.

- 1 *Who does Belly dance with at the party?*.....
Belly dances with Jeremiah at the party.
- 2 Belly wants to swim in the ocean.
- 3 Belly thinks that Conrad is so boring and serious.
- 4 Conrad has followed Belly to the beach.
- 5 Belly says "sorry" to Conrad.
- 6 Jeremiah says "I like her. I really like her" about Belly.

CHAPTER TEN

- 8 Complete these sentences in your notebook with the correct word.

if what why that who

- 1 Adam can sell itif..... he wants to.
- 2 You aren't the only person loved Susannah.
- 3 These guys weren't very happy about I had to say.
- 4 It was her favorite place and that is the boys should have it.
- 5 I will do everything I can to keep this house for her boys.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

- 9 Write the correct word in your notebook.

- 1 u y g ...gu!... a man or a boy. You can use this word when you are talking to a group of people, not just boys or men.
- 2 o n e t information that you write down when someone is speaking or when you are reading
- 3 r h t u when a thought or feeling makes you feel sad
- 4 s t a l y e p c i something that you are very good at doing or making

CHAPTER TWELVE

- 10 Who said this? Who did they say it to? Write the correct names in your notebook.

- | | Who spoke? | Who to? |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 "Are you ready to go home?" |Jeremiah..... |Belly..... |
| 2 "I don't care. Do what you want." | | |
| 3 "I'm coming to get you." | | |
| 4 "It isn't true." | | |
| 5 "I want to go with you." | | |
| 6 "See you at home." | | |

Project work

- 1 You are Sandy Donatti, the real estate agent. Plan a page for your website about the summer house. What does it look like? What is it near? How much do you think that you can sell it for?
- 2 You are Belly. Write a diary entry about how you are feeling at the end of Chapter Ten. What do you think will happen to the summer house? How do you feel about your mom, Mr. Fisher, Jeremiah, and Conrad now?
- 3 Write about Conrad and Jeremiah. How are they different? How are they the same? Which of them do you prefer, and who do you think that Belly should choose? Why?
- 4 You are planning a prom. When and where will it be? What music, food, and games will there be? How could you make it really special?

An answer key for all questions and exercises can be found at www.penguinreaders.co.uk

Glossary

amazing (adj.)

very surprising and good

basement (n.)

a room under a house

beat (v.)

Your heart *beats* when it moves and makes the same sound again and again. If your heart stops *beating*, you can die.

break up (phr. v.)

If you *break up* with your boyfriend or girlfriend, you stop seeing them.

breathe (v.)

to take air into and out of your body through your nose and mouth

cancer (n.)

a serious illness that makes cells (= the smallest living parts of the body) grow in a way that is not normal. Some people die of *cancer*.

date (n.)

If you go on a *date*, you meet and go out with your boyfriend or girlfriend, or with someone who you might want to be your boyfriend or girlfriend.

deal (n.)

A *deal* is when you agree to do something for someone, but only if that person also does something for you.

desperate (adj.)

If you are *desperate* for something, you want or need it very much.

drunk (adj.)

when you feel different because you have drunk a strong drink like *tequila*. If you are *drunk*, sometimes you are not able to speak or do things in the way that you usually do them.

find out (phr. v.)

to discover a piece of information for the first time

flu (n.)

When you have *flu*, you are ill. Your body and head hurt, and you are very tired. You feel hot and then cold.

forgive (v.)

to decide that you will not be angry with someone who has hurt you. If you cannot *forgive* someone, you are still angry with them.

funeral (n.); **funeral home** (n.)

A *funeral* is when people come together to burn the body of a dead person or put it under the ground. A *funeral home* is a place where a dead person's body is made ready for a *funeral*.

glad (adj.)

pleased and happy about something

go to hell (phr.)

Hell is a very bad place. You might tell someone to *go to hell* when you are very angry with them.

guy (n.)

a man or a boy. You can use *guys* when you are talking to a group of people, not just boys or men.

hang out (phr. v.)

If you *hang out* with someone, you spend time with them.

hug (v.)

If you *hug* someone, you put your arms around them to show that you love them or like them a lot.

hurt (v.)

If a thought or a feeling *hurts*, it makes you feel sad.

kick out (phr. v.)

If someone is *kicked out* of school or college, they must leave. They cannot go to classes any more or take their exams.

kid (n.)

a child

math (n.)

You learn *math* at school. *Math* is about numbers.

nervous (adj.)

worried or afraid

notes (n. pl.)

information that you write down when someone is speaking or when you are reading

over (adj.)

finished

prom (n.)

a big party for students at the end of the school year

proud (adj.)

If you are *proud* of a person, they have done something good and you feel very happy about it.

real estate agent (n.)

a person whose job is to sell or buy houses and land for people

relaxed (adj.)

feeling happy and comfortable because you are not worried about anything

relieved (adj.)

feeling happy because something bad or difficult has stopped or has not happened

roommate (n.)

a person who shares a room or an apartment with someone

run away (phr. v.)

to leave a place without telling anyone, because you are not happy there

serious (adj.)

a *serious* person is not smiling or laughing

sigh (v.)

to let air out of your mouth slowly when you are tired or sad

snore (v.)

to make a loud noise out of your nose and mouth while you are sleeping

specialty (n.)

Your *specialty* is something that you are very good at doing or making.

stare (v.)

to look at someone or something for a long time

tequila (n.)

a very strong drink. You can get *drunk* if you drink too much *tequila*.

whisper (v.)

to speak very quietly



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