

Part 1

Jonah Blake stood in one of the several six-cart-deep, crawling Costco checkout lines and fussed with his cell phone. He was finishing a Cliff Bar and Spindrift whose larger boxes sat in the cart, looking like a hungry bear had ripped at them, along with bags of produce, cleaning supplies, massive packages of toiletries, a rotisserie chicken, coffee, oat milk, frozen fruit, and several bottles of alcohol. Had he not been in a moment of forced idleness, he might have missed the two-word text that popped up, and it would have joined the several hundred other messages that had fallen off the *Messages* home screen.

“Faye Court!”

The alert was sent from his contact “Kandy” (Jonah’s college roommate, Andy Karlsen, Carleton College, Class of 1991, current Director of Sales for the medical device start-up *Kedzie* in Minneapolis, and still one of Jonah’s closest friends).

“What made you think of that?” Jonah responded.

Those two words had not been thought of for a few years, at least not in sequence. Now they alighted on his heart; how she had landed softly on the metal kitchen prep table upon their first meeting so many years ago.

Jonah was nineteen years old when he first heard the name *Faye Court*. He was in the dining hall at Camp Birch, a youth summer camp on Lake Swanson - about halfway between Minneapolis and Duluth. It was the last day of orientation, and the 150 grade-school campers would arrive the next day.

For two of Jonah’s college friends, Camp Birch had been the summer camp of choice during their growing-up years, and they now served as pied-pipers for the joy of working there in the summertime.

Jonah’s parents weren’t keen on him making \$1,000 for almost three months of work, yet also knew the number of carefree summers was quickly waning and were wondering what the point of all their working even was, so they consented. Jonah applied, was hired, and would spend the summer managing a cabin of ten boys while running the “Athletics” segment of daytime programs.

Across the lake from Camp Birch was Camp of the Pines, the larger, fancier compound under the “Camp Swanson” non-profit umbrella. Camp of the Pines catered to families, church groups, and corporate bonding events, with several lodging options, a spacious dining hall, and a pristine swimming area with the “best snack shack north of Pine City” (a moniker bestowed by a cheeky camper in the 1970s after he spent a day in bed with food poisoning, and one now carved into a heavily lacquered piece of wood and posted above the food window - between the signs that read “Orders” and “Pick Up”).

Many of the same families came to Camp of the Pines year after year, so connections and memories were abundant. Also, Carleton College had deep roots at the camp since the summer program director of “The Pines” had been attending since childhood. She was now a long-time staff member of the Student Development department at Carleton, and recruited many of her students to serve on the summer crew.

Stephanie Nelson had a limited chance of promotion at Carleton, since her boss was hired just a year before her, was the same age, and would probably never leave thanks to deep

roots in the Minneapolis area. But during the summer, she was known to staff and campers as “Skip,” “Skipper,” or “Super Steph” - the last supposedly short for “Supervisor,” but most people thought she just liked being referred to as “Super.” She’d even bought a t-shirt with the Superman “S” on the chest, and one summer the staff had presented her with a red cape, which she wore a little too frequently. This act of self-aggrandizement had led a previous staff to secretly moniker her “Skippy,” along with the less frequently used “Jif” and “Peter Pan,” and it had stuck.

Kandy texted again.

“I was in Edina for a meeting and stopped to get a coffee. She was two people in front of me. I didn’t think she’d remember me, but I told her I was your friend and took her dad’s class. Sounds like she moved back to be closer to him.”

“How is she?” Jonah texted right back.

“It was a 1 minute chat. She was on her way out. But she told me to say hi.”

There was a pause, intentional on Andy’s part. He could be an ass, which is why his friends had loved watching his irritated responses to being called *Kandy* and all other nicknames. Over the duration of their college years, “Karlsen, Andy” had become “K, Andy”, evolved into John (for John Candy), then “Gus Polinski, Polka King of the Midwest” after John Candy stole a scene in *Home Alone*, then shortened to Polka King, then Gus or P.K., and the occasional Polka Kandy. After all the years, Kandy was still the most frequently used.

Jonah didn’t know if he was joking, but he felt his heart flutter.

“It seemed heartfelt.”

Heart emoji.

Faye Court’s father, Paul Court, was a revered philosophy professor at Carleton. His class “Ethics, The Making of a Good Life, and the Honing of Our Moral Compass” was always on the “Best of Carleton” list, and juniors and seniors clamored to use their priority registration status to get enrolled.

He was admired for his scholarship and intellect but more so for his ability to make complex subjects understandable and exciting. He was a master at connecting with students and developing mutual affinity. The problem for Paul was that, in his desire to be attentive and responsive to the ever-growing number of students taking his class, his book on Utilitarianism and the application of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill’s writings was perpetually “getting a bit closer to being finished.”

During her senior year of high school, Faye decided that, despite the financial advantage of staying in Northfield for college, she would prefer to attend a school *other* than where her father taught. The idea of someone commenting on her “lack of moral compass” as she re-filled her Solo cup at a party had no appeal whatsoever. She considered a few schools, mostly in the Midwest, and ultimately ended up at Denison University in Granville, Ohio, where she would play on the field hockey team and attempt to double major in Economics and Anthropology.

Faye enjoyed Denison, but when she returned home after the fall term, she was fried. Classes had been surprisingly difficult, and the field hockey season required more time and travel than expected. Social life was okay, but an annoying roommate and never quite feeling

ahead of responsibilities had Faye ready for a bit of a reboot. And there was still a half-year to go.

Her parents weren't accustomed to their child of big smiles and lightness seeming so burdened. They proposed that she talk to the woman in Student Development about the camp she helped run. Faye had always been a worker, up for a challenge, and it might be fun for her to be with kids her age who weren't from Denison. One thing led to another, and by the time March rolled around, Faye looked forward to working in the famous Camp of the Pines Snack Shack.

Jonah had finally reached the conveyor belt and register at Costco when his phone pinged again.

"And...I didn't see a ring on her finger." Jonah imagined Kandy's joy from bringing this to light. He then looked at the base of his ring finger, where a scratched band sat below his second knuckle. The ring had been slid onto his unblemished finger while he stood before family and friends and promised to be "faithful and forever"; a line that his wife had seen in a wedding planning book but now sounded like a cheap wall hanging from *Home Goods*.

Jonah had kept his promise on the first part of his pledge, but the frayed strands holding the second together had been ready to break for far too long. There was still affinity and on-again/off-again affection; memories and children and family and shared property and bank accounts; and a great deal of discontent, fueled by too many of the same conversations around how they had become different people over the last quarter-century and probably weren't meant to be together anymore, one person having leaned into their OCD and slowly becomes less carefree, and the other with a need for levity and an ADHD brain with too many things going on - or left on a counter (Or side table. Or desk.)

These parts had been there when they were dating, but a person can overlook quite a bit when young and hopeful and believing they have the power to help someone change.

Jonah rubbed his thumb along the top edge of his ring, where the skin had become rough and calloused. Then, the cashier broke him out of his oblivious musing with an annoyed look. "Card *please!*" This phrase had apparently been repeated more than once.

For the first few days of staff training, the summer crews rarely left their respective campgrounds. The facilities - especially Camp Birch - could get dusty and musty in the winter and spring months. The work days were busy, as tasks included airing out spaces, cleaning, prepping, putting in docks, as well as learning what to do when a big donor complained about the food or a kid peed in the bunk

Near the end of the week, Jonah was working with the other two Athletics staffers to get their particular station ready. They had just finished improving the horseshoe area and were now prepping the archery station.

Ken Dahl was a rising freshman at the University of Minnesota, had come to camp every year of his life, spent last summer as a C.I.T., was excited to be on staff, and was already starting to smell. This was an unfortunate omen, as Ken's body odor, the July heat, and the thinking that true camp folk never take showers, would cause many unfortunate encounters in the tight confines of the Athletics shed in the weeks ahead.

Kris Anderson, an affable farm girl from outside of Mankato, was 18 years old and taking a year off before heading, hopefully, to North Dakota State to study theater. If there was a compass for a person's sensibility and awareness, Kris's would point straight at "Clueless." She also had some of the largest, perkier breasts Jonah had ever encountered, and an ever-present cheeriness.

These attributes led to the amusement and arousal of many male campers that summer - and likely many females. At least once or twice a session, at the end of an activity, Kris would run tirelessly to fetch errant frisbees and kickballs, doing everything she could to help. Meanwhile, the throng of pre-teens and teens would simply stop and stare, and Jonah often needed to reprimand boy campers who intentionally threw frisbees hither and yon during their time on the field.

A pickup truck had come to rest near the three of them, where they hoisted and stacked hay bales, preparing a place to attach archery targets. Jonah was wedged precariously between aroma and areolas.

Four Pines staffers sat in the truck bed, regular traffic laws not applying in campland, and Jonah recognized only Jeff Johnson. Jeff was a Carleton classmate and one of the slickest and flirtiest guys on campus, with a schtick that worked on peers and adults alike. It was no surprise that he was chosen to be Assistant Program Director at The Pines.

A glance revealed that, after manicuring the sand in the horseshoe pit, Ken had left the rake on the ground with tines pointing skyward. Jeff was vaulting out of the truck in its direction, and Jonah let out a yell with a bit too much aggression.

"Be careful for the rake!"

Jeff landed safely and, instead of thanking Jonah, made sure to mock him with gesticulating arms.

"WHOA! Look out for the SCARY RAKE!"

Jonah glared, and Jeff continued toward the shed.

"Skippy said we should come down and grab some things for our games tonight."

Jeff sauntered into the shed, grabbed various balls and equipment, and then tossed them into the back of the truck, where a girl deftly caught two things simultaneously. As the truck departed, Jonah caught her profile and was intrigued; suddenly more excited about the upcoming All-Staff Training and Orientation

Before the throngs of campers would arrive, staff at Camp Birch and Camp of the Pines gathered for an afternoon of games, BBQ, information applicable to the staff of both camps, and an ice cream social in the Camp Birch Dining Hall, complete with every topping imaginable. Many staff knew each other from former years as campers or because of the Carleton connection, while others were brand new to Camp Swanson.

Camp Birch hosted this event every summer, as the dining hall and grounds at The Pines had already been set and decorated, and adults had much higher expectations for decor and cleanliness. At Camp Birch, rolls of butcher paper and bins of tempera paint still spread across the tables, as some "Welcome to Camp Birch" and "This Way to F-U-N!!" signs still needed to be crafted. If they were still there a few days later, the 4th-6th graders would hardly care less.

As the Pines students folded out of vehicles in the Camp Birch parking lot, the staff sized each other up, as college students can, and continued to do so as they moved to the field for various mixer games.

Between every New Student Orientation, RA training, and dorm mixer they had attended, the college staff had played just about every variation of “say your name, and act like an animal that starts with the same letter,” “cat and mouse,” “duck, duck, goose” (or “duck, duck, grey duck,” or “duck, duck, loon,” as the locals liked to call it).

Today, they would start by standing in two circles, one facing out and one facing in. Participants would answer a quick question, then move one or two people to the right for a new question and introduction.

The blond mystery girl from the pickup truck was soon on Jonah’s radar. He thought of his friend Tim’s line, “Jonah, you would not even know what to do with that,” and rued that Tim was probably correct.

As the circles slowly rotated, Jonah watched as she got closer and closer, finally perched at a diagonal from where he stood. Steph yelled the next question: “What is your favorite thing to do?”

Jonah sought to hear her answer, and thought he heard her say, “Sit by the water and read a good book,” but had a hard time hearing while being reprimanded by the person directly across from him about how he needed to be a better listener before she yammered on about her love of making all varieties of baked goods.

After a minute, Steph said, “OK, this time, move two people to the right.”

Jonah nearly exclaimed, “WHY?,” but caught himself just in time. His consolation, however, was a little wave and smile from the girl with the few freckles that glistened on her nose and cheeks.

“I’m Faye,” she said as she crossed his path,, and then, “Nice knowing you,” as she moved by.

“I’m Jonah,” he responded. “Don’t be a stranger.”

He thought he saw her laugh as she looked down to set her feet before looking at her new partner.

“Next question. What is your favorite type of ice cream?”

“Cookie Dough or Chocolate Peanut Butter” was an easy answer for Jonah, and he was straining to hear the words from his left. They sounded like Chocolate Chip Mint or Vanilla Bean, but voices engulfed him. Before long, the wheel spinning had continued long enough that she was a diameter away.

During the barbecue, final orientation, and paperwork, both staff stayed mostly to themselves - squeezing next to familiar faces on picnic table benches. After the last release forms and medical info sheets had been filled out and turned in, everyone was free to use the bathroom, clean up, and then return for the ice cream bar.

As Jonah entered the camp kitchen, he watched Ally launch effortlessly onto a table, ice cream bowl remaining level, no spills on her pants or oversized sweatshirt. It was indeed mint chocolate chip, with a healthy dose of hot fudge and whipped cream.

She landed next to Mindy Hansen, a frequent classmate of Jonah’s back at school. Lucky for Jonah, Mindy spotted him.

“Jonah!” She gushed as she slid off the table and hugged him. “Finish all our summer reading yet?” They both smirked, knowing they wouldn’t attempt to tackle Dostoevsky, James, or Dickens until it was probably too late.

“Have you met Faye?” Mindy continued.

Jonah felt like he was in one of those movies where time slows to a crawl, and he was able to, all at once, soak in the smile and sparkling eyes, simultaneously emitting kindness and mischievousness. He returned to reality as Faye extended her hand and gave a surprisingly strong handshake.

“Faye Court,” she said. “Rising sophomore at Denison University, flipper of burgers and fries at the World Famous Snack Shack. And yes, I am related to Paul Court. He’s my dad.”

Jonah stood dumbstruck for a moment.

“And you are?” She teased.

“Oh right... Jonah Blake, rising junior English and Education major at Carleton, classmate of the sometimes respected, sometimes wordy, but always intelligent Mindy Hansen, I am not related to Paul Court, nor do I know Paul Court. However, I *will* spend much of the summer on the *basketball* court as Director of Athletics at Camp Birch.”

Jonah had made her smile, despite his imbecilic “Oh right” (or maybe because of it?), and this energy coursing through him felt unfamiliarly overwhelming and so spectacular. Connection. Bonding. The incomprehensible, mysterious, and immediate way that the occasional person seems to know you and be known by you. He wasn’t so much nervous as energized.

Jonah tried to remember his high school Chemistry lessons and how specific molecules were created by the coming together of atoms, with space in their outer rings for another to attach more easily. Did he have that right? He knew H₂O and CO₂ formed easily, but could all atoms connect with effort? And were they covalent bonds that shared electrons, or ionic?

“What will you do with the kids in athletics?”

Faye’s question snapped Jonah out of his chemical conundrum.

“We’ve been trying to figure that out. Lots of big games and lots of instruction. ‘Here’s how you hold a football. Here’s how you shoot a basketball. Here’s how to hold a bow and arrow. Etc.’”

“I imagine the kids will likely have athleticism somewhere in the range between Dr. J and Dr. C. Everett Koop,” Jonah spread each hand wide with the naming of each respected doctor, and he, Jonah Blake, had made her smile. Again! And with spontaneous wordplay from his very own brain!

Jonah realized that, by this point, Mindy was feigning interest. He secretly hoped she sensed a love connection, causing her to pine for her absent boyfriend - the rising senior Brian LeRoux, who was in Chicago for an advertising internship with Leo Burnett.

“I’m gonna go get more ice cream. You all want anything?”

They shook their heads, Mindy departed, and Faye posed a question.

“You’re quite fond of your rake, aren’t you?”

Jonah didn’t understand, and his face showed it.

“I was in the truck a couple of days ago. You were very protective of your rake.” Her face was solemn, and Jonah finally knew what she was talking about. He quickly went on the defensive.

"I mean, no. Not really. I was just afraid that Jeff was gonna..." Faye broke character and started laughing.

"I'm teasing... But it did give us something fun to talk about on the way back."

"Oh good. Glad I could help. Did Jeff mock me some more?"

"More like we got to mock Jeff." Jonah could not have been more pleased. "Darren told him he could be an ass, which we all know is true. So that shut him up - for a bit."

Jonah figured she must be pretty good at reading people if she already had Jeff figured out. He also liked people who were Anti-Schmarmy.

"No," she continued. "We were trying to figure out the best way to phrase that sentence. You said, 'Look out *for* the rake,' which could be interpreted as your being very protective of the rake. We thought 'Be careful of the rake' made more sense. But then we thought it could be the opposite, and you might've used the right sequence."

"What did you all decide?"

"We got bored and moved on to something else. But in your favor, the consensus was that you're nice, and Jeff's an asshole."

Jonah raised his can of Coke. "Here, here!"

The following two hours were a blur. Different people came and went. Some headed back to their cabins. Many jokes and stories were told. Faye and Jonah introduced one another to peers from their respective camps. She would occasionally kick or punch him when something struck her funny, and he never once thought to leave her side.

Suddenly, Steph Nelson burst into the Dining Hall.

"Vans are here for the Pines staff," she bellowed. "It's starting to rain pretty hard, so stay at your own risk."

People started grabbing their belongings and moving toward the door, and Jonah was struck with the recognition that Faye may be waiting for a tell. Camp of the Pines was on the other side of the lake, about a one-mile walk on a pot-holed, dirt road - and in the dark, it was enough to creep just about anyone out.

"If you wanna stay, I'll walk you back," he said, hopeful. "Maybe we can get someone to play euchre or hearts. If you like card playing..."

"I'm in," she quickly confirmed.

The rest of the Pines crew loaded into the vans while Faye and Jonah grabbed a deck of cards from the staff room and talked Mark Bregmann and Carl Fell into joining them. Mark was a finance major, and Carl was focused on math and accounting. Both had worked at Camp Birch the previous summer, and they rarely lost when partners in any trump game: spades, hearts, or euchre. To their chagrin, no one else on the staff knew how to play bridge, and no one wanted to learn, knowing it would simply be an exercise in getting one's butt kicked.

Cards were dealt in twos and threes, and the game of euchre commenced. Faye was quick to tease Carl and Mark, celebrating a bit too much for their cocky selves when she held the right card at the end. She seemed to pick up on Jonah's cues and never misplayed, and Jonah was enraptured, even if they lost 10-8.

Carl and Mark were obvious in their shared affinity, as she was the first person all week who had nearly beaten them. And far better looking than all other challengers.

Carl asked, "What's your job this summer at the Pines?"

"Shake mixer, candy pusher, soda schlepper."

"Tom's gonna love having you there. They need a competent person after last summer."

"Why's that?"

"Oh God! Have you not heard about Vanessa Wilson?" Both Carl and Mark laughed.

"She had every guy at this camp wrapped around her finger. That woman knows how to flirt."

Mark burst in. "But while her flirt IQ is high, she's not the brightest bulb in the Snack Shack."

Mark continued.

"Legend has it..."

Carl waved his hands to shut him up, then interjected. They were on a very similar wavelength.

"*Legend has it?* That makes it sound like some epic tale."

"More like an epic *fail*," Mark retorted, then proceeded with finger quotes, a pause, and a knowing smirk.

"Legend has it," long pause, "That at the end of a long, busy Sunday, Tom once asked her to give the grill a thorough cleaning while he ran up to his office for a bit. It had gotten nasty, and Tom wanted to close things up so he could go home."

Carl looked toward Jonah and Faye, "Epic!"

Mark continued, ignoring him.

"She then - *epically*, I might add - asked Tom the best way to do it, and he told her it was just gonna take a bunch of good old-fashioned elbow grease."

He paused a moment and sipped his root beer, using the time for emphasis.

"Thirty minutes later, Tom returned from the office to lock up for the night, and the grill was still gross and virtually untouched. Vanessa was just standing in the middle of the shack, frozen."

"As you can imagine, Tom was miffed and asked what she had been doing. She looked at him and said with all earnestness and confusion, 'I've looked everywhere, and I can't find the elbow grease you talked about.'"

Laughter and "no way" soon filled the air.

Carl piped back in. "I think everyone will miss having her around because the stories were always just so good."

Mark added, "Not those who had to work with her. But certainly, the guy campers and counselors who flocked around her."

By the conclusion of the card game and the story, the rain was still heavy and didn't seem likely to let up soon. While Faye cleaned up with the guys, Jonah ran to retrieve his rain jacket for Faye, grabbed a couple of trash bags for himself, and then they started the journey through the puddles and mud.

As they reached the road, Faye asked, "Well, Jonah, what kind of stuff do you do for fun?"

"I play a lot of basketball, listen to music, go to movies, read. I'm pretty countercultural," he said with self-effacement

"Favorite music?"

"Top 5... Probably U2, Prince, REM, The Smiths, and The Replacements. Or maybe Public Enemy."

“Ever heard of *female* musicians,” she said with a soft punch to his shoulder, then continued with more questions, and he asked some of his own.

They talked about their favorite books, hers being *Anna Karenina* and his being *The World According to Garp*. They told stories of their week of training.

They wondered how to choose a “Best Of...” when genres differed significantly. *Do The Right Thing* versus *When Harry Met Sally*, or Prince’s *Sign O’ The Times* versus *Guns and Roses’s Appetite for Destruction?*”

They ranked all the John Hughes films; Jonah had a soft spot for *Some Kind of Wonderful*, they both loved *Ferris Bueller*, and Faye took *Breakfast Club* over *Pretty in Pink*.

They were playful and did what they could to make the other laugh. They talked about their favorite places in Northfield and the similarities and differences between their schools. They connected over life as a college athlete (Jonah was actively involved in Carleton Intramurals and threw the discus on the track team).

And before they knew it, they had arrived at Camp of the Pines.

“Well,” Faye said. “This is my stop.”

Something was happening between them, but knowing what to do with the situation was well beyond Jonah’s scope of expertise.

“You know,” Faye continued. “It’s probably not safe for you to walk back by yourself. Want me to walk you back?”

Jonah wanted to be gracious and let her escape the rain, but he was much more interested in extending time with her.

“Are you serious?”

“It’s not like I can get any more wet,” she smiled, then shook her head and let the water fly off her long, blond hair.

As they set out, she asked, “How would you rate these books: *Handmaid’s Tale*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Matilda*, *Beloved*, *The Name of the Rose*, and *Love in the Time of Cholera*”

“Well, I guess I could do it by number of pages.”

“Fair enough,” she chuckled.

“First, I guess I’d need to categorize as ‘read’ and ‘unread.’” He hated to admit that, even though an English major, he was less read than her. She was a reader, and he wanted to impress, not look like a dope.

“Then, I’d say *Crime and Punishment*, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and *Beloved*.”

“As read or unread?” she asked cheekily.

“Read, and ranked first to third.”

“You have to read *The Handmaid’s Tale*. That book will mess with your mind.”

Faye circled back on music, espousing the importance of Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, and *Earth, Wind, and Fire*, as well as Madonna, Al Green, Nina Simone, *The Pretenders*, *Blondie*, *Siouxsie and the Banshees*, and *The Cure*. Jonah lobbied for *Husker Du*, Robert Cray, and Stevie Ray Vaughn, then admitted that he was aware of merely lengthening his all-male list of performers.

More important to Jonah, however, was the way Faye leaned in to tease him or to emphasize a point with a push to his shoulder. Every point of contact felt like he was the key on Ben Franklin’s kite, and she was the lightning bolt.

Before they knew it, they were back at Camp Birch; clothes drenched, shoes muddied, and a heart thumping madly in Jonah's chest.

"Well, as I've heard said," Jonah said. "This is my stop."

Faye smiled, and Jonah quickly added, "But...what kind of chivalrous, patriarchal-music loving male would I be if I didn't offer to walk you back."

"And," he added, "It's not like I can get any more wet."

He shook his head, as Faye had done 30 minutes earlier, using his short hair to elicit a laugh.

Jonah was quite deficient in romantic or intimate experience. Despite his 19 years of life and, at least in his mind, comparatively good looks and personality, he had not been privy to the romantic or sexual exploits his peers often bragged of.

His church and parents had done him no favors. The instruction of his youth pastor was "Don't do anything you wouldn't want someone to do with your sister," "Keep your zipper up," and "Don't put yourself in any situation where you might be caused to lust."

One night at a high school youth group meeting, following one of their youth leader's Sex Ed (or lack thereof) talks, Jonah leaned to his friend Matt Brooke. "Man, I think I'm only gonna wear sweatpants with no zipper and disown my sister."

Jonah's mother had tried to do a little bit of normalizing by letting him know that "Sometimes, boys your age will wake up in the night with their underwear wet and sticky. All you need to do is put it in the laundry. It's normal and okay." And that was it. His father was awkwardly mute on the topic.

Jonah had wanted a girlfriend, or to at least be with a girl, but had also watched his friends disappear from their social group once they started dating, and he didn't like the idea of choosing one over the other. He was also too young to realize this wouldn't have to be the case.

Given the coaching around the need to repress sexual exploration, Jonah came to this moment on the road with Faye with nothing more than a few end-of-date awkward kisses and a couple of end-of-party make-out sessions.

Faye was blessed with at least one of the following: a greater level of confidence, a more carefree nature, a more open-minded upbringing, and/or a willingness to step into the unknown.

Jonah assumed that, just like everyone else, she'd had more experience in this arena than he had. Kind of hard not to. And something about her spirit made him think she wasn't asworried about all this baggage as he was.

The rainfall had continued to lighten, and the air was surprisingly warm.

"I have a solution for us," Faye said. "You walk me two-thirds of the way back. I'll give you your jacket back, and then we'll both book it back to our cabins."

He concurred before she even finished her proposal.

During the last leg of the journey, Jonah felt like his aorta was going to pop, and was aware of the breathiness in his voice. He found himself trying to create more points of physical contact while trying to keep things light, as brushing against her and having her reciprocate caused him to stir.

He kept thinking, "There is no way she could *'like me like me.'*"

They turned the pond at the end of the lake, signaling that they were nearing The Pines. Toads would often fill the night air with their croaks, but the rain was again falling and pummelling the water's surface, springing beads of small splashes across the entire lake.

Jonah remembered learning something about this in first-year physics, but thanks to often falling asleep in his 8 am class, he did not remember that a microscopic layer of air, 50 times thinner than a human hair, can obstruct a drop of water that is 1,000 times larger (essentially equal to a 1-centimeter layer of air aborting a tidal wave from destroying the beach). The parts of the water drop that can't break through subsequently fly off, causing the splash effect.

"Thanks for a really fun night," Faye said, stepping closer.

Jonah felt that he was welcome to reciprocate the approach, but instead responded with an awkward "Sorry I played that Jack of Diamonds wrong. We could've beat those bastards."

"Next time," she affirmed.

Water cascaded down both their faces, flowing off lips that he could only dream of touching with his. Then she looked at him with a twinkle, "It's okay if you kiss me."

Jonah leaned in cautiously and gently pressed his lips against hers. And again. And a little firmer again. She moved in closer for a hug, and he was all too aware that it wasn't just droplets of water or active toads springing into the air. But she stayed there, tight in his embrace, her head under his chin. He breathed deeply; the smell of her hair and fresh rainwater intoxicated him.

Faye tilted back a little and looked at him - her gaze seeming to magnify every dream and hope and love he'd hope to ever have.

"Are you okay?" she asked, and he realized he quivering ever so slightly.

Jonah nodded and tried to respond. He thought, "I've only known her for seven hours, but she is the perfect integration of beauty and brains and kindness and laughter and gentleness and light."

Instead, he gurgled a response with stammered words.

"Uhh. Yeah. This is... Um. Wow. I guess I'm just a little cold."

"Well put," Faye mocked before standing on her tiptoes.

"One more, for the road?"

This time, when their lips met, they were looser, ajar, and more relaxed. The touch of tongue and teeth and saliva nearly broke him in pieces.

Faye pulled off Jonah's jacket, tossed it his way, and took off down the road with a long, athletic stride.

"Oh, wait," Jonah yelled. "I like Sinéad O'Connor and Tracy Chapman!"

She turned and walked backward.

"Look at you. Both feminist and random." She glanced back over her shoulder to look for puddles. "And we can't forget Joni Mitchell!"

She blew him a little kiss, looked into the sky as if to say, "Can you believe this rain?" and yelled, "Don't be a stranger!" before disappearing into the darkness.

Jonah walked back to his cabin in a daze, then swaddled himself in dry sweats before climbing into his sleeping bag and attempting to warm up. In every scenario he had ever created, no one as beautiful and smart as Faye was interested in him. Now, he shook with excitement more than cold while replaying every minute, glance, and exchange. And, of course, that last kiss.

Soon, the clang of the morning wake-up bell roused Jonah from his brief sleep, and he woke in foggy disbelief, wondering if he had even slept.

Campers arrived every Sunday at 1 p.m. and left every Saturday at the same time. This first Sunday morning was a blur of finishing all the procrastinated preparations, doing laundry, cleaning up, and eating an all-staff brunch.

During the first week of camp, it seemed every time Jonah had closed his eyes, the image of Faye's face - inches from his - appeared. But other than nights and post-lunch rest hours, every minute of every day was filled with responsibility, and Jonah was often lost in all that he was still figuring out about running a summer camp station and managing ten grade-school boys. The week was ending, but before he could head over to try and find Faye at the famous Snack Shack, there were Saturday responsibilities to take care of:

1.) Help campers pack all their belongings, and if possible, get them to help clean the cabin. Candy was a good negotiating tool, and it was always a plus to have campers happy and energized (aka "amped up on sugar") when they reunited with their parents after a week apart.

2.) Make sure every camper was signed out by a parent or guardian, even if that person was late. All campers needed to be under a counselor's watchful eye until someone's name was on the dotted line.

3.) If necessary, finish cleaning the cabin and have it ready for the next week's group. Wait for the Camp Birch director to come by and sign off.

4.) Take care of assigned tasks that went beyond the scope of cabin cleaning. In Jonah's case, this meant having the Athletics section of camp clean and organized. He also shared boy's bathroom clean-up responsibilities with Michael Wick, which was a lucky pairing since Michael's father owned a ServiceMaster franchise in Duluth, and he knew the most efficient ways to spray and clean down toilets, scrub sinks, and mop up shower floors.

When all these tasks were done, counselors were free until the following morning at 9 a.m. Jonah scurried excitedly through the cleaning of the bathrooms and the straightening of his cabin, anxious to walk the route he had, just a week ago, ventured down with Faye.

He took a shower, pulled on one of his last clean shirts, and headed down the now dried-out and dusty road. Nervous, he played through different greetings and tried to think of a witty quip he might make, and wondered if he should order a mint chocolate chip ice cream sundae so she would notice another commonality.

From the corner of the pond to the beach at Camp of the Pines, the memory of a week ago flooded him. And then, there on the beach, he saw something that caused his heart to plummet. There was Faye, in a swimsuit and a wide-brimmed beach visor, sitting on a towel with four guys surrounding her, including Jeff Johnson, all attentive and ogling.

Jonah moved out of their sight line and watched. He felt voyeuristic, as he too was held in a trance by the legs and arms jutting from the neon baby-blue swimsuit. The way she flirted, gave people the shove to the shoulder and adjusted herself in that tight one-piece, nearly made him nauseous. He wished he dared to go over and say hi, see how she might respond; if she would introduce him and ask him to sit down next to her.

Rather, he turned and headed back down the road, which felt twice as long as it had just moments earlier, trying to avoid psychic and physical potholes.

That night, as was Camp Birch tradition after the first week with campers, everyone loaded in the vans and went into town for pizza. The upholstery was stained, the rubber floor

mats were torn (hidden beneath crumbs and trash from who knows how long ago), and the counselors were ecstatic to get off camp property and eat in a new setting.

The sequencing of vehicles at Camp Swanson went this way: every five years, shiny new vans went to The Pines, the replaced ones were moved down to Camp Birch, and the old Camp Birch vans, which were thoroughly destroyed after 10 years of camp service, were sold for \$250 to the local mechanic for parts. Counselors would usually pull bench seats out before the vans were disposed of, so a few were strewn around Camp Birch and in cabins, seat covers dirty and sunbleached.

The staff reveled in their recollections of the past week. They had survived 150 elementary school kids, and had also taught them tricks, jokes, and manners that their parents would abhor. Jonah attempted to engage as best as possible, but the image of Faye welcoming and flirting with four others left him pensive and saddened, allowing only 40% of him to be present. How quickly his plans of summer romance had flittered away.

On the way back from Lakeside Pizza, the vans stopped at Camp of the Pines. The staff hoped to raid leftover ice cream and cookies from the walk-in freezer, and the kitchen staff needed to grab some essentials for the coming week.

Jonah stepped into the dining hall, and sitting at a table directly in front of him was Faye Court. To his surprise, her eyes widened and gleamed as if to say, "Yay. You're here." She hopped up, and came straight to him for a hug. God, the smell of her.

"How was your first week?" She asked, interested.

"Super fun," he replied. "How's the snack shack?"

"Good. I think I've figured it out. Might I even suggest *mastered*?" She winked. "I now make a very good, VERY fancy, artisanal, yet greasy, double cheeseburger. I was hoping you'd come down today so I could impress you."

The discomfort of wondering where you stand with a new crush can be excruciating, and Faye had been brave enough to offer obvious clues. Jonah missed every one, his mind in a completely different lane.

"Did you work today?" he asked.

"10:30 to 6:30. Probably gonna be my schedule every Saturday and Sunday, sadly."

"Any breaks at all?" Jonah was fishing.

"Just a little bit."

There it was! Jonah couldn't shake that image from earlier in the afternoon.

"Did you go to the beach for some tanning?"

"I wish. I went to my room to lie down and read, but I had to get up and get a coffee after about 15 minutes so I wouldn't fall asleep. Snack shack work is way more tiring than I would've thought. And it's a sauna in there."

"That was your only break?"

"That was it. Then, back to the grind."

"So no sunning on the beach?"

Faye wondered why he was so fixated on her sunbathing routine, and he wondered how she could tell such an intricate and convincing lie on such short notice.

"Nope. Hopefully tomorrow, but it sounds like Sundays are even busier than Saturdays, with all the families doing drop off at both camps."

Just a day ago, the touch of her tongue to his had seemed to break something open within him. Having her lie with that same tongue now left him completely shattered.

Jonah was grateful to hear the announcement that it was time to load up and head back. He hugged her with a tinge of indifference and sensed her confusion. Hurt even.

Carl Fell was talking to Steve and John Sundeen, twin brothers from Madison, WI. They were affectionately known as the "Birch Bros" because they had been coming to camp since they were first eligible and were both now topped out at 6'5". One was a senior at Saint Olaf, and the other at Gustavus Adolphus, and their summer job was to lead all the 6th-12th grade programming at The Pines.

Carl and Faye locked eyes.

"Jonah and I want a rematch," she fired at him. "just name the place and the time."

Carl gave a little salute as he backed out of the exit door. "Aye, Aye, Captain."

As Jonah followed Carl, he heard one of the Birch Bros say, "Hey Faye. What do you think is a pirate's favorite letter?"

She thought a second, then with a jolly-ho arm swing, said, "RRRRRRRR."

A Birch Bro said, "You'd think it was the RRRRRRR, but it's the 'C'."

The door to the Dining Hall closed behind Jonah, but not fast enough, as he heard her bust out with a delighted "That's awful!"

For the following week, Jonah tried to remember that she had seemed to reach out to him, that she was excited to see him and had risen quickly from her folding chair. When he could, he held that image of her face in his mind's eye. But someone else could also make Faye laugh; someone who would be near her all summer.

On the following Saturday, Jonah went down to the snack shack. True to her word, Faye fixed him an afternoon cheeseburger; her hair pulled back in a ponytail, her skin aglow. She chuckled when showing him a couple of the cleaning bottles where someone had written "Elbow Grease" in Sharpie.

Once or twice a week, Jonah would spot Faye as she ran by the camp, doing one of her training runs for the upcoming field hockey season. She would always wave, seemingly happy to see him. Jonah even made a few different poster board signs when working on other projects, and would climb a ladder to hang them high enough in the tree that campers couldn't reach.

Over the first few weeks of the summer, signs read, "DON'T STOP RUNNING FAYE! PEOPLE ARE WATCHING!"; "IF YOU CAN READ THIS, YOU'RE NOT GOING FAST ENOUGH!"; "RUN LIKE THE COPS ARE STILL CHASING YOU!"; and his favorite, "IF TRAINING WAS EASY, IT'D BE CALLED JEFF JOHNSON!"

Word must have got back to Jeff on that one, as it was taken out of the tree before Faye ever saw it.

Weeks flew by, and the Camp Birch staff was surprised by how quickly they were halfway done with camp. Yet they were also happy, as it meant another group pizza outing to celebrate the midpoint of summer.

On the way back, they again stopped at The Pines. The staff at Camp Birch had quickly learned that the food and leftovers at the fancy camp were much better than at the kid's camp,

so Birch staff used any opportunity to sneak into the large walk-in storage cooler and rummage through whatever desserts, sandwich meat, or fruit were available.

They found only two Pines staffers, sitting at a table playing *Scrabble*, who told them of the popcorn, apples, and movie in the Meeting Hall. Excitedly, the staff from the other side of the lake climbed the hill to see their friends, get free food, and see what movie was showing.

As they walked into the darkened room - *Top Gun* projected on the big screen, the climactic battle scene about to commence - it took Jonah's eyes a moment to adjust. He found a seat toward the back, then scanned the room for Faye, finally spotting her with head rested - was it snuggling? - on the shoulder of John Sundeen.

She had been watching Jonah, waiting for him to spot her, and gave a little wave when he did. John gave a nod after turning to see who was there, and then the two turned their attention back to the screen.

Jonah tried to keep focusing on the Maverick tale rather than the storyline to his left, which invoked far greater interest. He peeked sporadically in the direction where John and Faye cuddled and once caught John planting a kiss on the side of her head, causing Jonah to wonder if Faye's hair could smell even better to someone with different sensory neurons.

Soon, Maverick did his fly-by, and everyone but Jonah cheered; he was still spinning, his parachute tangled, his fear confirmed: Faye had a boyfriend.

The rest of the summer blurred by, as each week seemed exponentially crazier than the last, the staff trying to outdo the programming, chaos, and decorations of the previous week's session. Counselors walked almost zombie-like in the morning, so tired from late-night work and even later-night fun; they were lucky to have formed a great staff bond, which also led to sneaking out after the campers had fallen asleep and not returning until around 1 a.m.

The term "cereal stares" was coined by Carl after looking around the dining hall one morning and realizing that half the counselors leaned their chins forward within inches of their cereal bowls, stared straight ahead at the box of *Frosted Flakes* or *Life* placed in the middle of their table, and slowly scooped spoonfuls of cereal into their mouths without moving their heads.

Jonah was usually too tired and busy to think much about Faye since seeing her on movie night. He would still catch the occasional sight of her as she ran by, and once thought he saw her looking up in the tree, hoping to locate a new sign. (Jonah contemplated making one that read, "Local sign maker has retired due to heartbreak," but soon realized how terribly pathetic that sounded.)

Yet when Saturday afternoons rolled around, he could not fight his hunger for a double cheeseburger, fries, chocolate shake, and a dose of Faye; T-shirt sleeves rolled up, ever-tanning limbs, ever-freckling face, and ever-dirtying low-top Chuck Taylors.

During every visit, his curiosity and jealousy caused him to ask the same question in varying forms: "You and John still hanging out?" "How's Birch Bro Number 1?," etc. After the third week, Jonah realized he was spending far too much time crafting what would hopefully be an even funnier and unique variation of the question. To his dismay, the answer was always the same.

With just one week remaining in the camp schedule, Jonah got to the front of the line and caught Faye's attention. Normally, she would see him, smile, and ask, "The usual, Mr.

Blake?" He once blurted, "I'll put that in your court, Court," which led to his consternation about whether she smiled because it was funny or stupid. After that, he just responded, "Yes, please."

But on this day, Faye surprised him with a different question. "Think we can get a rematch with Carl and Mark tonight? It might be our last chance to take them down a notch."

Jonah would move mountains to make it happen, and he fortuitously saw Carl sitting on the beach nearby and yelled out..

"Carl! Euchre tonight?"

"Absolutely!" Carl responded.

The match was set for 8:00 p.m., so at 7:50, Jonah sat in the Camp Pines dining hall waiting for the other three; *anticipating* Faye, more than *waiting*, and a bit indifferent to the appearance of Mark and Carl.

After a few minutes, Jonah saw her pull up on a bike. She set the kickstand, her grease-stained Chucks replaced with clean, brand-new ones.

Jonah would spend his life trying to refrain from saying dumb or innocuous things, but he just couldn't help himself when trying to make points of connection.

"New shoes."

"Care package from the folks. Won't be much time for back-to-school shopping, so they surprised me with a box of stuff I said I'd need to get."

They saw Carl and Mark approaching.

"Ready to lose again?" Carl asked.

"Pride cometh before the fall, my friend," Faye retorted.

They settled into their familiar seats, sorted the cards, and began.

Jonah wouldn't have been able to articulate what he was feeling at the moment, but looking back, he realized that he was basking in gratitude, soaking in the good friends, fun game, and Faye sitting directly across from him on Camp Birch turf, no distractions, and his being able to look at her *all night*.

Nearly every deal seemed to go in Faye and Jonah's favor, and their score climbed quickly while Carl and Mark lamented, "There's nothing we can do with these frickin' cards!"

Faye gave Jonah the look of "This is so awesome," then poked the bear. "Funny, you weren't complaining a few weeks ago."

Two hands later, Jonah had not only the lead but also the four highest spades and the ace of diamonds. When Mark passed on picking up trump, Jonah pounced with "Spades, go it alone!"

And to rub it in just a bit more, he asked, "Do you want to play it out, or just have me lay down my cards now?"

Mark and Carl steamed, and Jonah asked Faye, "How did that expression go about pride?"

They jumped up, high-fived, and then did a little jig followed by a victory hug. Their routine was short-lived, though, as "REMATCH!" was quickly demanded.

The next round reversed the luck, and Jonah and Faye were crushed 10-3. But they had knocked the crown off, if for just a moment, and that dance and hug was worth never beating them again.

The time was now past 10:00 pm, and Faye spoke up, eliminating any thought of a rubber match.

"Well boys, it's been fun. But I need to get back and do some packing. I have a big day tomorrow, and then I have to leave on Monday."

Mark gave a Scooby Doo double-take.

"I'll have a couple days at home, then head to school. Preseason starts on Friday."

Carl piped in. "We might survive the news, but what about the snack shack? How will it survive?"

"Funny story; especially that this is coming full circle to our first night. Turns out the famous Vanessa has been working in Boston this summer, but had stopped by camp for a day before she left to say "hi," hang out, and let people know she'd be willing to volunteer for a week or two at the end of the summer when she got home. Apparently, Tom reached out, and she's coming to camp this weekend. Saturday's covered, but she'll start working on Sunday."

"Poor Tom. But I can't wait," Carl added.

"Along with many other guys on staff, it seems."

Jonah had sat in silence, still processing the news.

They rose from the table, Carl and Mark took turns with hugs goodbye, and then Jonah and Faye headed to the road, Jonah offering to push the bike and walk her back.

"How's John?" Jonah asked somewhat sheepishly, eyes looking down more than at Faye.

Her shrug expressed indifference. This was the first time Jonah had seen a crack.

"It's been fun... but summer's over soon."

They walked and talked, and Jonah wished he could have a do-over from the first night, that he could have a do-over from every day of the summer, when he didn't sneak over late at night with a letter explaining what he had seen that first weekend on the beach, why he'd been hurt, and distant, and how despite it all, he still thought of her every day.

But his internal dialogue was overrun by a desire to change the subject. Awkward and forthright conversations were not a space he was comfortable entering.

"Any advice for someone taking a class with your dad this fall?"

"I don't know... Study. Stay awake. Do your work. And don't rub it in if the Vikings beat the Bears. He grew up in Chicago, so might lower your grade." She made herself laugh, then continued.

"I'm sure you'll enjoy him. He's a good guy. And really smart."

"I've only heard good things," Jonah confirmed.

Then, after a few steps, Faye looked at Jonah.

"Have you heard of the trolley problem?" Faye asked.

Jonah shook his head.

"I'm sure my dad will bring it up early in the class," she continued. "It's an imaginary situation that plays with morality and ethics. It's one of his favorites, and he loves to talk about all the variations."

She started using her hands to emphasize directions and actions.

"Let's say you're driving a trolley, and suddenly the brakes give out while you're headed toward five workers who will be killed if you don't switch the track. You have the controller, and

you're nearing a junction point, so you can switch the trolley to another track to save them. But if you do, you will kill one person who works on the other track with his back to you. What do you do?"

"So my only option is to kill five people or one person?"

"Yep. But it's okay. They're hypothetical people."

"I guess I go with one."

"That's what pretty much everyone says. But then you can mess with it a little."

"Like how?"

"Would you switch to kill only one person if it was someone you loved? Like your spouse, or your child?"

"Aha... I'm gonna need to think on that one."

Ally jumped in front of Jonah, shook him by the shoulders, and yelled, "THERE'S NO TIME! YOU HAVE TO DECIDE NOW!"

"Okay, okay. The five." Jonah faked a sob. "And now everyone died because of me!!"

Faye continued. "And what if there's no one on the other track, so you can save all five lives? But you will likely crash into a wall and die."

"Jeez."

"Right?! It's tough. And there are all kinds of scenarios that are used, and people have a variety of responses to different options. For instance... what if the trolley is unmanned and going under a bridge you stand on? It will hit and kill five people unless you push the person next to you off the bridge, who will either die from the fall or being run over by a train, but whose body stops the trolley when it gets stuck in the track, saving everyone else."

"God, this is morbid!"

"But let's remember. It's *hy-po-thet-i-cal*." She was making this so clear and accessible. Likely the teaching fruit didn't fall far from her father's tree.

"The research shows that most people will switch the track to kill a stranger but will not *push* a stranger off a bridge, even if it's the same 'Trade one to save five' swap."

"Lastly, say you're in a hospital, and there are five people in need of different organs to survive. Do you kill one healthy person if it means five will live? If yes, would you give your own life if it meant five could live?"

A full moon hung in the sky, flocking the upper and outermost branches of the trees, cascading a long shadow down the road in front of them.

Faye continued. "We're making decisions all the time. Obviously. We usually know what we're willing to sacrifice for our interests and well-being, but what would we do for others, whether strangers or loved ones, when put on the spot? We're going to create residual damage with our living, but how much are we comfortable creating?"

Jonah thought himself relatively smart, and he loved learning and bantering and being challenged, stretched like intellectual taffy before being pressed back together. He loved how Faye's brain worked, what she knew, and how she processed. Being raised by a philosopher seemed to create comfort and expectation around skipping the small talk, being real, holding one's own, and reframing new information.

During his first week of college, Jonah met with his freshman advisor, Dr. Vince Peters. As the meeting began, Dr. Peters presented an empty, clear glass and a pitcher of water, filled

the glass to the top, and created an impressive surface tension. He then handed the pitcher to Jonah and asked him to pour more in.

Always ready for a dexterity challenge, Jonah brought his eye low and parallel with the glass's rim, held the pitcher tightly while approaching the water's surface, and attempted to add a few drops.

He got one drop in, but the next attempt was shaky, and water fell over the glass's edge.

"That was pretty impressive, actually," Dr. Peters commended. "You're one of the few who got any in."

He gave a little "namaste" nod to Jonah, then drank the water.

"Here's the point," he continued. "We all have lots yet to learn. And always will. But if we walk around with a full cup, thinking we know more than everyone else, we won't be able to take anything more in. And we stay boring and close-minded."

He grinned knowingly, took the pitcher, and talked as he slowly filled the glass.

"But if we realize that everyone has *something* they can teach us, and we stay inquisitive, and if we surround ourselves with people who can teach us many things, that's what makes learning - and life - more full." He stopped pouring well before reaching the top.

Whenever Jonah talked to Faye, he thought of this meeting; appreciative of how Faye seemed to fill his cup so quickly.

"So here was my trolley problem," she said. "The first week I was here, a guy got on the trolley with me, and I loved his company. He had to climb off for a while, but I assumed he'd be back on soon."

"I kept driving my trolley, I kept seeing the guy along the way at different stops, but he never climbed back on. So I kept going, and going, and going. Eventually, I had to wonder, 'Did I miss something? Is he ever going to reboard?'"

"Then, I saw someone standing beside an adjacent track, and he waved and looked like he'd be good company. So I switched tracks and let him on."

Jonah clearly understood what she was saying but wasn't sure how to respond. Should he say he was hurt by her lying, that he didn't know how to address feeling heartbroken?

"The new guy was nice and fun. But I still had my head on a swivel, looking for the other man. Sometimes, I thought I would see him, but then he would vanish."

Jonah felt the tension, likely heightened by the fact that they were near the pond where this all began.

She stopped walking.

"Anyhow," she said, breaking the stalemate and removing her red Denison Field Hockey backpack before reaching in and grabbing something.

"I wanted to give you this."

She handed Jonah an envelope, which felt like it contained a deck of cards.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Nothing much. You'll see when you open it." She then extended her arms with a shrug that said, "Hug?"

Jonah was suddenly conscious that, in true camp counselor style, his only shower in the last few days had been a swim in the lake.

"Just be careful," he said. "I probably smell a bit like a camp counselor and a bit like the lake."

She stepped in for a hug, and Jonah wanted to tell her that the top of her head smelled like an ice cream sundae made by unicorns and rainbows and covered with pixie dust, Love Potion #9, and leprechaun kisses, and that he wished he would have been able to smell her all summer long.

"Maybe I'll see you in Northfield," she said as she stepped toward her bike.

He responded, "That'd be awesome," with a telling amount of vigor. At least she would know he welcomed seeing her.

"If you're ever in town," he continued, "I'm usually in the back corner of the second floor of the library. I'll be trying to catch up on the Faye Court suggested reading list."

"You do that." She smiled and climbed on the seat.

And just like that, she once again disappeared around the corner and into the night.

Jonah walked back to camp on a zigzag, kicking at dirt and rocks illumined by his flashlight, stunned and perplexed by what Faye had just revealed: Jonah had committed a major screw-up this summer.

Back in the cabin, he gently opened the envelope which revealed a card and a mixtape, which he looked over briefly before opening to the note. He realized he had never seen her penmanship; as he probably could have anticipated, it was spectacular.

Dear Jonah,

I'm packing my things, reflecting on the summer, and anticipating the return to school. But before I left, I wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed getting to know you, albeit in very small doses.

The first night we hung out was one of my favorite nights of the summer. And while I try not to overanalyze things (at least not excessively), I'm still not quite sure what happened in the days following and why things were awkward for the weeks following. Maybe someday you'll clarify for me.

I'm glad we could see each other a few more times, despite our camp schedules being out of sync, and that things kind of normalized between us. I will think of you every time I play Euchre, or listen to Sinéad O'Connor or Tracy Chapman :)

I hope you have a great fall, and hopefully we'll get to hang out in Northfield soon.

*Your friend,
Faye*

**This has been my go-to mix tape for the last couple months. I figured you'd get a kick out of it.*

Jonah looked at the playlist on the tape and was excited, not only by the songs contained but also by the artwork and doodles that Faye had created and the fact that she had thought to give this to him.

Side 1

Blue Monday - New Order

Let's Dance - David Bowie

Tainted Love - Soft Cell

Everybody Wants to Rule the World - Tears for Fears

The Tide Is High - Blondie

I Love Rock and Roll - Joan Jett

Borderline - Madonna

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun - Cyndi Lauper

It's the End of the World as We Know It - REM

Rio - Duran Duran

Two Hearts Beat As One - U2

Side 2

Let's Groove - Earth, Wind, and Fire

Peek a Boo - Siouxsie and the Banshees

RESPECT - Aretha Franklin

Talkin' Bout a Revolution - Tracy Chapman

My Baby Just Cares for Me - Nina Simone

I Melt with You - Modern English

What's So Funny about Peace, Love, and Understanding - Elvis Costello

Love Will Tear Us Apart - Joy Division

How Soon Is Now? - The Smiths

Jane Says - Jane's Addiction

Both Sides Now - Joni Mitchell

He fell asleep thinking about the actor's masks, feeling like he had put on the Muse of Tragedy and the Muse of Comedy at the very same time.

A few days later, when done with his Saturday clean up and his attempts to Lysol the mildew and teenage boy smell out of his cabin, Jonah headed to the Pines; walking with enhanced confidence, knowing John Sundeen might not have been Faye's first choice.

Approaching the snack shack, he was suddenly bewildered. There on the beach, in her neon baby-blue swimsuit and sun visor, sat Faye.

She was surrounded by Carl, Jeff Johnson, and two other staffers, all jockeying for her attention while she half-paid attention and half-looked at a magazine. Jonah realized that for the entirety of the summer, he had never seen her in anything less than a tank top and shorts - except for the first time he saw her in that same swimsuit while he stood at the tree's edge.

Hadn't she said she was leaving? And why would she make such a deal of giving him a letter? Jonah felt braver this time and approached the group, noticing that she seemed more tan

than he remembered - almost artificially - and that her breasts were larger than he thought. It seemed like the others had also noticed, judging by where their eyes were focused.

Carl spotted Jonah, then beckoned excitedly with a wave.

"Jonah, come meet Vanessa."

Vanessa looked up, her blonde hair cascading down her shoulders. She stood and brushed herself off, then extended a hand for a firm shake. She was about 5'5", thin and fit like Faye, both with longer legs than one would expect.

Jonah stood speechless. Vanessa, of course, assumed her beauty had struck him dumb, as it had many others. Jonah, however, paid no attention to what she looked like. He was instead stuck in the middle of wanting to throw up and laugh hysterically, which left him to either scream "NOOOOOOOO" or stare stupidly straight ahead.

He wanted to steal a camp van, turn on Simon and Garfunkel's *Mrs. Robinson*, and start straight for Granville, Ohio. He wanted to punch John Sundeen for no reason. He wanted to punch himself for being nineteen years old, heartsick, immature, and inexperienced with anything romantic.

Mostly, he just wanted to return to his cabin and curl up alone on his bunk.

Jonah had loaded his car and sat among the smell of warm chicken, vegetables, and cardboard when his phone rang.

"What are you doing?" Kandy asked.

"Sitting in the Costco parking lot. What are you doing?"

"I had a couple of minutes and was sick of texting. Did you get a hot dog?"

"You know me and the food court. \$1.50 for a dog and a drink. It might as well be free!"

"You know," Kandy said, "If you and Faye Court ever reconnect and get married, she can keep her maiden name, and you could just add a name and be Jonah Blake Food Court."

Jonah shook his head and laughed, grateful for someone who enjoyed "punny" jokes as much as he did.

"Speaking of which, I texted Mindy Hansen-Scott and got Faye's contact info. And a little bit of other info too."

Jonah loved having a friend who seemed to speak a secret language with him. He knew Kandy had said "speaking of which" because Mindy Hansen was the most adamant of their friend group about the importance of married couples having hyphenated names. Her "Feminist Studies" course during Junior year prompted many lectures while they sat together in the Carleton library or dining hall.

Jonah and Kandy quickly realized that trying to set Mindy up with their classmate and friend, Tyler Jantzen, would be well worth the effort. (And the next year, when they were seniors, telling Mindy about the cute freshman, Wayne Franzen, always made them laugh.)

Their greatest Mindy prank, however, was when they pretended to be campaign managers during student elections in the spring of their junior year, got enough signatures, and, unbeknownst to Mindy or Tyler, nominated them for student body President and Vice President.

They then used Kandy's Business School T.A. key, made 100 copies of the flier they had created, and taped the signs all around campus:

"Want a Carleton College filled with dancin', romancin', career enhancin', and low-interest loan financin'? Vote Hansen-Jantzen!!"

"What's the other info?" Jonah asked.

"Well, I was right that she's not married, but she's been dating a guy from London for the last five years. Sounds like she works for an International NGO, and is often back and forth between the US and Europe."

After a brief pause, Kandy said, "There. I just texted you her contact info."

Jonah glanced down to make sure it was there while Kandy continued.

"I've gotta run to a meeting, but let's get together soon."

They exchanged their "laters" and hung up.

Jonah sat in his car and looked longingly at his phone. Faye Court's contact information was now at his fingertips, but he had a gnawing feeling that, at this point in his life, it would be best if he did nothing with the information.

Right now, Jonah's trolley problem was more like trying to get an entire Amtrak train safely to its destination. He pictured large signs on each car, written on poster board in his handwriting: "Marriage", "Kids", "Extended Family", "Happiness", "Finances", "Self-Respect", "Home", "Future", "Friendship", "Integrity", "Passion," and "Possibility."

Jonah was the opposite of the Steven Spielberg-inspired boy in *The Fablemans*, trying to move all cars forward *without* a massive pile-up, knowing that if one tipped sideways, more would likely come crashing down with it.

He also knew himself well enough to know that in the days ahead, he would look her up on the internet, avoiding LinkedIn in case she could see who was on her page, sticking to Google and finding old jobs and bios on past staff pages and images.

Over time, he knew she would again fade from his memory as she had in the past. There would be times when the word "Faye" or "Court" would be heard, or a song from that mixtape would be on the radio, and she would flash into his memory.

He would hear Joni Mitchell sing: "*Rows and flows of angel hair, And ice cream castles in the air, And feather canyons everywhere, Looked at clouds that way, But now they only block the sun, They rain and they snow on everyone. So many things I would have done, but clouds got in my way*" and he would be transported, if just for a moment.

He would watch Keith and Watts share a steamy kiss in *Some Kind of Wonderful*, or watch Buttercup and Westley share their innocence in *Princess Bride*, and hear the narrator say "Since the invention of the kiss, there have been five kisses that were rated the most passionate, the most pure. This one left them all behind."

Jonah would then think of that night in the rainstorm, when the joining of hydrogen and oxygen drenched his clothes, and the first convergence of hope and hormones, innocence and infatuation, comfort and chaos drenched his heart.

He would wonder what Faye Court had been doing for the last 30 years, and hope that she ended up with a good life, a happy life, content with a book in hand and a water's edge and mint chocolate chip sundae nearby.

He would also wonder if she ever thought of him, if she remembered that rainy night's kiss, and if it was nearly as fond a memory for her as it was for him.