

SUMMER SISTERS

A Novel

JUDY BLUME

A DELL BOOK

SUMMER

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藏书章

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To Mary Weaver
my “summer sister”

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Summer Sisters

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Prologue

Summer 1990

THE CITY IS BROILING in an early summer heat wave and for the third day in a row Victoria buys a salad from the Korean market around the corner and has lunch at her desk. Her roommate, Maia, tells her she's risking her life eating from a salad bar. If the bacteria don't get you, the preservatives will. Victoria considers this as she chomps on a carrot and scribbles notes to herself on an upcoming meeting with a client who's looking for a PR firm with an edge. Everyone wants edge these days. You tell them it's edgy, they love it.

When the phone rings she grabs it, expecting a call from the segment producer at *Regis and Kathie Lee*. "This is Victoria Leonard," she says, sounding solid and professional.

"Vix?"

She's surprised to hear Caitlin's voice on the other end and worries for a minute it's bad news, because Caitlin calls only at night, usually late, often waking her from a deep sleep. Besides, it's been a couple of months since they've talked at all.

"You have to come up," Caitlin says. She's using her breathy princess voice, the one she's picked up in Eu-

rope, halfway between Jackie O's and Princess Di's. "I'm getting married at Lamb's house on the Vineyard."

"Married?"

"Yes. And you have to be my Maid of Honor. It's only appropriate, don't you think?"

"I guess that depends on who you're marrying."

"Bru," Caitlin answers, and suddenly she sounds like herself again. "I'm marrying Bru. I thought you knew."

Victoria forces herself to swallow, to breathe, but she feels clammy and weak anyway. She grabs the cold can of diet Coke from the corner of her desk and holds it against her forehead, then moves it to her neck, as she jots down the date and time of the wedding. She doodles all around it while Caitlin chats, until the whole page is filled with arrows, crescent moons, and triangles, as if she's back in sixth grade.

"Vix?" Caitlin says. "Are you still there? Do we have a bad connection or what?"

"No, it's okay."

"So you'll come?"

"Yes." The second she hangs up she makes a mad dash for the women's room where she pukes her guts out in the stall. She has to call Caitlin back, tell her there's no way she can do this. What can Caitlin be thinking? What was *she* thinking when she agreed?

Four weeks later Caitlin, her hair flying in the wind, meets Victoria at the tiny Vineyard airport. Victoria is the last one to step out of the commuter from LaGuardia. She'd spotted Caitlin from her window as soon as they'd landed but felt glued to her seat. It's been more than two years since they've seen each other, and three since Victoria graduated from college and got caught up

in real life—a job, with just two weeks vacation a year. No money to fly around. *Bummer*, as Lamb would say when they were kids.

“Going on to Nantucket with us?” the flight attendant asks and suddenly Victoria realizes she’s the only passenger still on the plane. Embarrassed, she grabs her bag and hustles down the steps onto the tarmac. Caitlin finds her in the crowd and waves frantically. Victoria heads toward her, shaking her head because Caitlin is wearing a T-shirt that says *simplify, simplify, simplify*. She’s barefoot as usual and Victoria is betting her feet will be as dirty as they were that first summer.

Caitlin holds her at arm’s length for a minute. “God, Vix . . .” she says, “you look so . . . grownup!” They both laugh, then Caitlin hugs her. She smells of seawater, suntan lotion, and something else. Victoria closes her eyes, breathing in the familiar scent, and for a moment it’s as if they’ve never been apart. They’re still Vixen and Cassandra, summer sisters forever. The rest is a mistake, a crazy joke.

PART ONE

Dancing Queen
1977-1980

1

Summer 1977

VICTORIA'S WORLD SHOOK for the first time on the day Caitlin Somers sashayed up to her desk, plunked herself down on the edge, and said, "Vix . . ." It came out sounding like the name of a beautiful flower, velvety and smooth, not like a decongestant. Caitlin had transferred to Acequia Madre Elementary School just after Christmas, having moved to Santa Fe from Aspen over the holidays. Everyone in Vix's sixth-grade class fell instantly in love with her. And it wasn't just the way she looked, with her pale, wavy hair, her satin skin and deep-set, almost navy blue eyes. She was scrappy, fearless, and had a smart mouth. She was the first to say *fuck* in class and get away with it. No teacher, no adult, would have believed the words that rolled so easily off Caitlin's pretty pink tongue. And then there was that smile, that laugh.

Vix was too shy, too quiet to even speak her name. She sat back and worshiped from afar as the others fought over who would get to be her partner, who would share desks with her. So she thought she'd heard wrong when Caitlin asked, "Want to come away with me this summer?"

Vix was wearing worn bell-bottoms and a juice-stained purple T-shirt, her dark hair pulled back into a sloppy ponytail. She had a pencil smudge on her left cheek. As Caitlin spoke Vix could swear she heard Abba playing in the background. "Dancing Queen" . . . She missed most of what Caitlin said except it had to do with some island in the middle of the ocean. The *ocean*, for God's sake, which she had never seen. She was unable to answer, sure this was a trick, a joke. She expected the rest of the class to start laughing, even though the last bell had just rung and the other kids were rushing past them toward the door.

"Vix . . ." Caitlin tilted her head to one side and the corners of her mouth turned up. "My dad gets me for the whole summer. July first until Labor Day."

The whole summer. The whole goddamned summer! The music swelled. *You're a teaser, you turn 'em on, Leave them burning and then you're gone* . . . "I've never even seen the ocean." She could not believe how stupid she sounded, as if she had no control over the words that were coming out of her mouth.

"But how is it possible in this day and age that you've never seen the ocean?" Caitlin asked. She was genuinely interested, genuinely surprised that a person could have lived almost twelve years without ever having seen it.

All Vix could do was shrug and then smile. She wondered if Caitlin heard the music, too, if music followed her wherever she went. From then on whenever Vix heard "Dancing Queen" she was back in sixth grade on a sunny afternoon in June. The afternoon some fairy godmother waved her magic wand over Vix's head and changed her life forever.

At home, Vix asked her mother, "How is it possible, in this day and age, that I've never seen the ocean?"

Her mother, who was bathing her youngest brother, Nathan, looked at her as if she were nuts. Nathan had muscular dystrophy. His body was small and misshapen. They had a contraption that allowed him to sit in the bathtub but he couldn't be left alone. He was seven, sassy and smart, a lot brighter than her other brother Lewis, who was nine, or her sister, Lanie, who was ten.

"What kind of question is that?" her mother said. "We live in New Mexico. Hundreds of miles from one ocean and thousands from the other."

"I know, but so do plenty of other people and *they've* been to the ocean." She knew damn well why they'd never been to either coast. Still, she sat on the closed toilet seat, arms folded defiantly across her chest, as she watched Nathan sailing his boats around in the tub, stirring up waves with his arms.

"This is *my* ocean," he said. His speech was garbled, making it difficult for some people to understand him, but not Vix.

"Besides, you've been to Tulsa," her mother said, as if that had anything to do with what they were talking about.

Yes, she'd been to Tulsa, but only once, when her grandmother, a grandmother she'd never known she had until then, lay dying. "Open your eyes, Darlene," her mother had said to the stranger in the hospital bed. "Open your eyes and have a look at your grandchildren." The three of them were lined up in front of their

mother, while Nathan slept in his stroller. This grandmother person looked Vix, Lewis, and Lanie up and down without moving her head. Then she said, "Well, Tawny, I can see you've been busy." And that was it.

Tawny didn't cry when Darlene died the next day. Vix got to help her clean out Darlene's trailer, the trailer where Tawny had grown up. Tawny took some old photos, an unopened bottle of Scotch, and a couple of Indian baskets she thought could be worth something. It turned out they weren't.

She couldn't sit still. She'd never wanted anything so badly in her life. And she was determined. One way or another she was going away with Caitlin Somers.

"Stop squirming," Tawny said, tossing Vix a towel. "Get Nathan dried and ready for supper. I've got to help Lewis with his homework."

"So, can I go?" Vix called as Tawny left the bathroom and headed down the hall.

"Your father and I will discuss it, Victoria," Tawny called back, letting her know it wasn't a done deal.

Tawny never called her *Vix* like everyone else. *If I'd wanted to name my daughter after a cold remedy, I would have.* You'd have thought a person named *Tawny* would have been more flexible.

She'd been to Caitlin's house, an old walled-in place on the Camino, just once, in March, when Caitlin had invited the whole class to her twelfth birthday party. They'd had live music and a pizza wagon with a dozen