

Something Like Summer © 2010 Jay Bell

Paperback ISBN-13: 978-1453875049

ISBN-10: 1453875042

Other available formats: PDF, HTML, Mobi, Kindle

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Cover art by Andreas Bell

Chapter Four

Ben was back in front of Tim's front door, a book tucked under one arm. He had done nothing but worry since he had left a few hours ago. First Ben had returned to the scene of the crime where he had so carelessly left his Rollerblades. They were still in the ditch, not far from a sharp, blood-spattered rock that jutted out of the ground. At least the culprit for the shin injury had been discovered, Ben thought, well aware that he was trying to shift the blame away from himself.

Once he was home he declined his mom's invitation of a snack and instead went to his room. Ben anguished over the foolishness of his actions for the better part of an hour before his self-pity gave way to a growing concern for Tim's well-being. A million nightmare situations played out in Ben's head, the worst being that Tim would contract some sort of infection and have his leg amputated or would die. The morbid medical fantasies piled up until Ben decided to seek out facts from his mother's family medical guide.

The gruesome book had provided Ben with hours of entertainment as a kid. Not only did it show nauseating pictures of diseases in their most advanced and repulsive stages, but it also featured self-diagnosis charts that were all too easy to navigate successfully. Ben had previously utilized their wisdom to diagnose himself with everything from vaginal yeast infections to critical brain tumors. Now for the first time he was turning to it with all seriousness.

What Ben had learned had brought him scampering back to Tim's house. Stomach bubbling nervously and palms breaking out in sweat, Ben rang the door bell. Someone called out in response. Thinking that Tim had fallen somewhere and was helpless, he opened the front door and gave a tentative, "Hello?"

"Hey! Come in!"

Tim certainly sounded more cheerful. Ben rushed to the living room and found Tim lying on the same uncomfortable couch as if he had never moved, which couldn't be true since an open can of

Coke and a bottle of pills were on the coffee table. The leg was now bandaged and elevated on the arm of the couch, but Tim looked pale and cold. He was still wearing his jogging shorts and tank top, and with the air conditioner going full blast, it was no wonder. The ankle was just as swollen as before, but now it had graduated to a deep shade of maroon.

"Good that you're here," Tim croaked, sounding very much like Leon before he cleared his throat. "I think it might be worse than I thought."

"Yeah," Ben held the book up, brandishing it as if it were a medical degree. "I think you have a third-degree sprain. Either that or it's broken. You really need to get to a hospital."

"Probably should," Tim nodded with glassy eyes.

"Er, I know this is a really stupid question, but are you all right?"

"Yeah. After you left I dragged my ass into the kitchen and remembered some pills from last time. They've got me feeling--" he gestured with his right arm before letting it flop onto his forehead-- "Oh man," he finished.

Ben cast around for a phone. "I'll call an ambulance."

"No, fuck that," Tim muttered. "I'm not dying or anything. We'll take my car. You can drive, right?"

"Yes," Ben said a little tensely. He *could* drive, but he hated it. Since winning his driver's license with solid "D" in driver's ed, he had driven all of three times, each occasion forced on him by his parents.

"Well get me up and we'll be on our way."

Tim appeared cold, but his skin was hot when Ben wrapped an arm around his back to help him up. Maybe it was a side effect of the pills, or maybe he had a fever. Either way, Ben was relieved that they were finally taking action. Getting Tim to the car was very much like all those movies Ben had seen where a drunken man hung like a limp doll on a supporting friend. Just how many of those painkillers had he taken?

There was a brief and harebrained argument where Tim insisted that no one but him could drive his car, but eventually he

was safely buckled into the passenger seat and Ben was behind the wheel. He put the key in the ignition and turned it, Beck's voice exploding out of the stereo system. Ben jabbed at the controls until the voice died, leaving in its wake the noise of the engine, which sounded powerful. This wasn't the usual sports car noise that, frankly, sounded a bit unhealthy. Instead it was a subtle, constant hum that rose delicately into a growl once they were cruising down the road.

"Nice," Ben said, not knowing if it really was but feeling it was a good guess.

"Yeah, she's my girl." Tim proudly patted the dashboard.

"So this is a, uh--" Ben squinted at the steering wheel, hoping for a hint. "Firebird?" he said, once he spotted the three diamonds.

"Pff," came the reply. "Please. This is a 3000GT!"

"Right." Ben risked a glance over to see Tim wearing an expression of mock offense.

"What kind of a guy doesn't know his cars?" Tim pushed.

"I'll give you three guesses," Ben said evenly.

Tim was silent for a moment. "So it's true?"

Ben let a slow smile play over his face. He loved this part. It always felt like revealing to a disbeliever that he had magical powers or something. "Yup."

"Hmmm."

That took Ben off guard, since it wasn't the usual response. Normally, one of two things would happen. The guy would either play it off like he wasn't surprised and name some random gay uncle or somebody else he barely knew to show that he was both worldly and accepting of such things, or he would slide straight into being offensive. Tim had done neither and opted for a musing "hmmm." Whatever that meant.

"You have some sort of car name, right?"

Ben chuckled. "Yeah. Bentley, but I don't know anything about Bentleys either."

"So, Benjamin Bentley, do you know my name as well as where I live?"

"It's Ben, not Benjamin," he replied, avoiding the question.

"Benjamin it is," Tim teased. "Hey! Easy on the curves! Jesus!"

"Sorry. So where are you from? I mean, I haven't seen you in school before this year."

"Kansas." Tim settled back into his seat, but was now watching the road with prepared alertness. "We moved down here so Dad could straighten out the southern division of his company. So he says. I think it's only because Mom never stopped bitching about the winters up there."

"You miss it?"

Tim sighed and looked out the passenger side window. "I don't know. Maybe."

Ben wished he knew how it felt to leave everything behind. He had lived in The Woodlands his entire life and often fantasized about moving somewhere new. Anywhere would do, even Kansas. He just wanted to see something unfamiliar.

"Fuck!" Tim yelled.

Ben snapped out of his daydream in time to avoid hitting the car ahead of them that had slowed at a stop sign. He swung into the empty oncoming traffic lane and barreled through the intersection to the angry honking of an old pickup truck. He hit the gas again to make it through before they collided with anyone and veered back into the proper lane on the other side.

"Pull over!" Tim growled. "I'm driving."

"We're almost there." Ben's nerves were steady as steel. Something like this happened every time he drove.

Ben pulled up and stopped the car at the hospital's emergency entrance where wheelchairs were scattered around aimlessly like shopping carts at a supermarket. Once he had Tim settled into one of these, Ben got back into the car and parked it, having to brake suddenly at one point to avoid hitting an old lady.

"It's no wonder you ran me over," Tim said as Ben pushed him toward reception. "They shouldn't let you near anything with wheels."

Clipboards and paperwork occupied the next half hour, followed by a heated debate with the receptionist as to why Tim didn't know what sort of insurance coverage he had. Eventually,

everything was handed in and they were left to wait with a number of other patients with minor injuries.

Tim became withdrawn again as they waited, his head leaned back and his gray eyes focused on the ceiling. His jaw clenched occasionally. Ben watched, counting the seconds between each clench, like he did with thunder to measure the closeness of a storm. There was the slightest hint of stubble on the line of his jaw. Ben wanted to reach out and trace his finger along his skin to see what it felt like.

"I hate doctors," Tim murmured.

"Do you want me to hold your hand?" Ben asked with a straight face before he and Tim both burst into laughter.

"I really do," Tim insisted. "Hate doctors I mean. You have no idea!"

"Oh, I might," Ben said with a smile. "One of the few times I was in the hospital as a kid was for a couple of fillings."

"Like for your teeth?" Tim sat up and looked at Ben.

"Yeah. I screamed and bit my way through so many dentists that it was the only option left. I was terrified. Once they got me there, I ran away before the procedure began, hospital gown and all."

"How old were you?"

"This was last week."

"You're full of it," Tim chuckled.

Ben grinned back at him. "Seriously, though. I must have been nine or ten. Eventually my dad came to find me and they had to put me under with a shot to the butt."

"What, did they shoot you with one of those tranquilizer guns like in Jurassic Park?"

"Something like that."

"Wyman!" a nurse called, glaring at the waiting room impatiently.

She led them down a hall to a room where, much like at a doctor's office, vitals were taken and they were left to wait again. Before long, a gray-haired doctor came in consulting a chart.

"Mr. Wyman," he said. "I'm Dr. Baker. And this is?"

"I'm the one who did this to him," Ben answered sheepishly.

"Ah, and what exactly happened?"

Red-faced, Ben recounted the accident, blaming the collision on a squirrel dashing across the sidewalk. The doctor nodded and "mm-hmed" his way through the story while examining the ankle in question.

"I see," Dr. Baker said when Ben was finished. "We'll need X-rays to be sure, but I believe the ligaments in the ankle might have torn completely."

"Yes!" Ben exclaimed victoriously. "I knew it. A class-three sprain."

"Well, well!" Dr. Baker said appraisingly. "Are you a medical student?"

"No. I just did a little research is all."

"I think he just runs people over so he can diagnose them later," Tim said.

"Let's hope not." Dr. Baker smiled. "I'm busy enough as it is. If the X-rays check out, we'll get the swelling down and put a cast on it."

"You think it's broken?" Tim asked.

"Casts aren't just for broken bones. We need to keep the ankle protected and in position so it can heal. We'll have it off in a couple weeks, don't worry. I'll need to inform your parents about this, of course."

"They're in Switzerland," Tim said, scowling at his ankle as if it had betrayed him.

Dr. Baker adjusted his glasses. "Any other family in the area?"

"Nope."

"My family can take care of him until they are back," Ben offered. He had no idea if they would actually be willing to, but it didn't really matter. He would find some way of making it work.

"So much for parental consent," Dr. Baker said with a sigh. He consulted the clipboard. "The good news is that we managed to track down your insurance information. However, with your parents out of town, I would feel better if you stayed overnight."

Ben's stomach grumbled, prompting him to look at his watch. It was well past eight and he had promised to be back in half an hour when he had left to check on Tim. He wasn't likely to get in trouble, but he didn't want to raise suspicion that something was up. And what was up exactly? Ben felt he was on the verge of something big. In front of him was a guy who needed his help, with no friends or family in the area to look out for him, except Ben. As dubious as the methods had been, he now stood a good chance of getting close to Tim. He didn't want anyone intruding on that now. If his mom found out what was going on, she would probably hire a nurse to take care of Tim, but Ben had a different plan in mind.

"I have to get home," he said. "But I can pick him up tomorrow?"

"I suppose," Dr. Baker said. "Could you please bring the number of his parents' hotel with you? Or better yet, phone it in tonight?"

"Absolutely," Ben lied.

"Wait, you're taking my car?" Tim sounded panicked.

"It's not like you can use it," Ben said, happily patting the pocket that held the keys. "See you tomorrow, tiger."

A few minutes later Ben was sitting in the something-or-other 3000GT with a big smile on his face. The next few weeks were going to be very interesting indeed.

That's it for the sample chapters! Is Ben setting himself up to get hurt? Will his obsession with Tim lead anywhere? An addition twenty-four chapters await you in the full version, available in paperback and eBook formats.

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