



## Boys of Summer

By Jessica Brody

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Get swept away in this breezy beach read about love, family, and the true meaning of friendship.

*Meet the Boys of Winlock Harbor...*

Grayson Cartwright: Golden Boy. Football Prodigy. Troublemaker.

Mike Metzler: Local Heartthrob. Surfer Boy. Hopeless Romantic.

Ian Handler: Army Brat. Musician. King of Sarcasm.

Best friends since they were kids, Grayson, Mike, and Ian were hoping for another epic summer on “The Locks”, filled with clambakes, bonfires, and late-night swims in the ocean.

But that was before Ian’s dad never returned home from his last deployment. Before Mike had to take on more responsibility in order to help provide for his family. Before Grayson’s accident left him with an injured throwing arm and an uncertain future.

It’s clear this summer on the island is shaping up to be very different from those Grayson, Mike, and Ian had come to rely on. And when the sacred code of dating a friend’s sister or ex is broken, it will push their friendship to the absolute limit, testing their loyalties in a way that could either break them—or save them.

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### Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 9 Up-In this engrossing novel about friendship and tough transitions, three 18-year-olds are spending what might be their last summer together on Winlock Harbor, the island where they met building sand castles as six-year-old boys. The breezy setting of beaches and boardwalks belies the struggles each one faces in the passage between high school and adulthood. Wealthy Grayson has a way with girls and a future as a quarterback at Vanderbilt. No one suspects that his mother walked out on the family or that the supposedly healed injury to his arm threatens to end his college football career before it begins. Mike, born and raised on the island, works two jobs to help support his family and is devoted to his first love, who can't seem to make up her mind about their future. Ian is a wry songwriter and musician grieving the loss of his father while avoiding the clutches of his alcoholic mother. To complicate everything, the usual summer romances take a forbidden twist this year as the pals seem to fall for all the wrong people, and the resulting subterfuge threatens their bonds. Likable, complex characters and believable scenarios make this a juicy and satisfying read. Brody doesn't talk down to teens or resort to pat endings. VERDICT A worthy addition with engaging, well-developed male characters grappling with classic coming-of-age issues.-Suzanne LaPierre, Fairfax County Public Library, VA(c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

#### About the Author

Jessica Brody is the author of several popular books for teens, including *Unforgotten*, *Unremembered*, *52 Reasons to Hate My Father*, and *The Karma Club*, as well as two adult novels. She splits her time between California and Colorado. Visit her online at [JessicaBrody.com](http://JessicaBrody.com).

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Boys of Summer

## CHAPTER 1

GRAYSON



As soon as I spot the lighthouse rising from the rocky slope of the north-side cliffs, I start to wonder if I'm a total idiot for coming back here.

I lean against the railing of the ferry and watch the tiny island grow closer with every subtle swell and dip of the water. Winlock Harbor is like my second home. It's been a safe haven for as long as I can remember. A perfect escape.

But I'm kidding myself if I think a summer on an island could possibly erase the horror of the past few months.

My phone vibrates in my pocket, stopping the incoming flood of memories. I pull it out to find a text message.

Welcome back! First official clambake of the season tonight. See you at the club?

Mike Metzler. Winlock local and always the first one to know about a party on the island . . . official or otherwise. Also always the first one to leave the party to hang out with his wet blanket of a girlfriend.

I smile, tap out a reply, and put the phone back into my pocket, releasing a deep sigh.

Yes. This is exactly what I need. Parties and beaches and cute girls in sundresses. Mike and his laid-back attitude about everything. Ian and that acoustic guitar he drags around with him like a child with a smelly stuffed toy.

A carefree summer on an island far, far away from Bridgeport, Connecticut, and all the bullshit of the past three months.

This is the reset button I've been looking for. Something to reboot me back to the person I used to be. There's no better place to do that than in Winlock Harbor. And no better people to do it with than Mike and Ian.

The ferry docks at the pier, and as I follow the line of tourists waiting to disembark, I can just make out my father's sailboat parked a few slips away. He came early to get the house ready while I finished up senior finals and my last few rounds of physical therapy.

I step onto the dock, relishing the familiar sights and sounds of the island's tiny marina. My father is waiting at the end of the pier with the convertible. I throw my bag into the backseat and jump in without bothering to open the door. But I regret the move as soon as I land in the passenger seat and my arm screams out in pain.

"Hey, champ." My father greets me with a friendly punch. Mercifully, it's on my other arm. "How's the wing?" he asks.

I grit my teeth and smile. "Good as new."

He nods his approval. "That's my boy."

I haven't told anyone—including my doctor—that my arm still feels like someone ran over it with a semi. I don't want to give them any excuse to keep me captive in Connecticut all summer.

My dad shifts into first gear, but then thinks twice and eases back into neutral. "Wanna drive?" he asks.

I turn toward the open window and shake my head. "Not today."

I can feel him staring right through my skull, trying to dissect my thoughts in search of weaknesses.

I decide to head him off at the pass, before he can come to any conclusions about why I still refuse to get behind the wheel. "I'm exhausted from the ferry."

I hold my breath, silently pleading for him not to push it any further. Because the truth is, the ferry ride really did take a lot out of me. And I'm way too tired to come up with any more lies.



Later that night I stand barefoot in the sand in front of the Coral Bay Beach Club, with a frosty plastic cup of beer in my hand and the warm seaside breeze rustling my linen shirt.

I stare into the bonfire, breathing in the smells of the clambake. Smoke seasoned with salt from the ocean. Spices wafting up from the large pots of boiling seafood. It's exactly as I remember, and I'm hoping the familiar scents will smooth out the frayed edges of my nerves.

Everything about this scene is nostalgic. It should feel like home. Nine months ago I couldn't wait to get back here. I couldn't wait to dig my feet back into this very sand and inhale this very air.

But a lot can change in nine months.

We've been at the party for less than an hour, and already the guys are placing bets.

"I've got twenty on Miss America with the red, white, and blue top," Ian says, setting the stakes. He's tall and lanky like a ski pole, with dark hair that always looks like he went at it with a chain saw.

"No way," Mike counters. "It'll be the blonde with the seashell barrette."

Mike towers over both of us, but sometimes his expressions make him look like he's still the little kid that I met building sand castles on the beach twelve summers ago.

"Dude," I cut in, and take a sip from my drink. "Just the fact that you said the word 'barrette' scares me a little."

Usually I don't mind playing this game. Placing wagers on who I will end up leaving the party with has become a summertime staple—like midnight swims, watching *Crusade of Kings*, and the secret handshake we made up as kids—and I know I should be relieved that the guys are talking about something so normal. God knows there are so many other, less fun topics we could be discussing. But for some reason tonight the whole thing is making me antsy. I try to play it off. I don't want them to know that it's taking every ounce of strength I have not to jet down this beach like a three-hundred-pound linebacker is chasing after me.

"You see," I go on, nudging Mike with my elbow. "This is what happens when you're chained to one woman for six years. You start using words like 'barrette' without a second thought."

"What can I say?" Mike replies with his boyish grin. "I speak the language of the ladies."

Ian nearly chokes on his beer. "More like you speak like a lady. Plus, you're totally wrong. Seashell Barrette isn't leggy enough. It's the first clambake of the season. Statistics show that Grayson always goes for the longest pair of legs first and then works his way down."

"?'Statistics show'?" Mike fires back. "Seriously? Have you been scoring Grayson's scores?"

"Aren't you supposed to be working or something?" Ian asks, sounding scorned. "Isn't there a coffee cup for you to refill or a trash can for you to empty?"

Mike guffaws like this is the funniest thing he's heard all day. He's held just about every job there is to hold on the island. This summer he's doing ground maintenance at the beach club.

“I’m off tonight,” Mike explains.

“Plans with Mrs. Metzler?” I jump back into the conversation. “How is the old Harpoon, anyway?”

Mike hates when I call her that. But I’ve always found the nickname so fitting. No matter what is happening between those two, no matter how far she wanders just out of reach, Harper Jennings always seems to have one sharp spear safely impaled in Mike’s leg.

Mike scowls at me from behind his cup. I grin back, unfazed. Because this is just what we do. We bag on each other. It’s what makes us . . . us.

See, I tell myself. This is good. Nice and casual. No one is asking questions. No one is whispering. It’s just a normal summer night on Winlock Harbor.

Fake it till you make it. That’s what my father always says.

Maybe he didn’t fake it well enough. Maybe that’s why my life fell apart.

“She’s on the mainland visiting her brother. And we’re taking a little breather.”

“Another one?” I blurt out, and immediately regret it when I see Mike flinch ever so slightly. It seems like Mike and Harper are constantly taking a breather. Sure, they always get back together in the end, that’s just what they do, but the incessant up-and-down has to bother him. Even if he swears it doesn’t.

I give him a hearty slap on the back, trying to recover from my misstep. “Well, perfect timing, then. It’ll give you a chance to test the waters. See what you’ve been missing out on. Hey, I’ll even let you have non-leggy Seashell Barrette.”

Mike shakes his head at my antics. “I’m not going to cheat on my girlfriend.”

“We know,” Ian and I say flatly in unison, and then break into laughter.

“My money’s still on Red, White, and Blue,” Ian says, pushing his shaggy hair from his face. “I mean, look at her. She’s hot and patriotic. What more could you want?”

“Is that the name of your next love ballad?” Mike teases. “?‘Hot and Patriotic’?”

“You joke.” Ian points with his beer. “But that’s just the kind of song that will turn me into a YouTube sensation.”

As I listen to my friends go back and forth in their usual jeering banter, I take another sip and peer over the rim of my cup at the two girls in question—a tall redhead in an American-flag top and shorter-than-short denim cutoffs, and a medium-height blonde in a sexy white sundress with a small seashell clipping back some of her hair.

No doubt, both of them are cute. No doubt, one year ago I would have been happy to show either one of them the inside of my father’s sailboat.

But that person feels like a ghost now. A fun-house mirror reflection of myself.

Yet it's that very reflection I need so desperately to get back. A suit of armor I need to slip back on. Especially if I'm going to survive this summer in one piece.

I wince and rub my right arm. I downed four aspirin before I left the house, and my arm is still killing me. I need something stronger. Something that requires a prescription. But, unfortunately, prescriptions require honesty about how much pain you're actually in.

Seashell Barrette catches me looking and interprets it as an invitation to make her way over. Mike and Ian, still ribbing, instinctively take a few steps back, clearing the way for her like jesters at my court.

The girl sidles up and tucks a strand of hair behind her ear. The breeze immediately blows it right back into her face. "You're Grayson Cartwright, aren't you?" She bites her lip and rocks gently back and forth on her heels. Her intention for coming over is clear. It's written all over face. She's not here to sell me insurance.

My mind wants so desperately to turn her down, walk away, take off running, and not look back. But I remind myself that this is exactly why I'm here. For a distraction.

And God, does she smell good.

Just like summer.

The charm turns on automatically. Like a light bulb that responds to a double clap. I smirk back at her. "The one and only."

She giggles and sips coyly from her cup. "I've heard things about you."

"Good things, I hope?"

She tilts her head from side to side. "Just . . . things."

I flash another grin, making sure this one triggers the dimple. They all love the dimple. "Lies, I tell you. They're all lies."

She laughs again, tipping her head back. Her neck is long and slender, her skin the color of honey. When she looks back at me, her eyes actually sparkle.

"When did you get to the island?" she asks.

"Just today. You?"

"A few days ago. It's my family's first time here."

I snap my fingers. "I knew I would have remembered you."

Her smile broadens. And what do you know? She has a dimple too. "We used to summer on Nantucket, but my dad thought it was getting too mainstream."

"Well, I can tell you with authority that Winlock Harbor is anything but mainstream. We like to think of ourselves as classy but eccentric. And it's a very tiny island. The kind of place where everyone knows

everyone's name and everyone's business."

"Oh," she says, pouting a little. "That's too bad."

I frown. "Why?"

"I'm not a huge fan of tiny."

I clear my throat. "Which reminds me. I still don't know your name."

"Sorry. It's Nicole. Short for Nicolette."

"Pretty," I remark, not because I have any affinity for those particular letters, but because that's what you always say when girls tell you their name.

"Your family has that big place down by the marina, right?" she asks.

I cock an inquisitive eyebrow. "You sure know a lot about Winlock Harbor for having just arrived a few days ago."

She blushes. There's no denying she's adorable. And sexy. Her little white sundress is tight enough that the margin of error for imagining what's underneath is negligible. "Someone gave me a very extensive tour," she explains.

"Was this the same someone who was saying all those nice things about me?"

"Maybe."

"So what else did you learn on your little tour?"

She shrugs with one shoulder. "Lotsa stuff."

"Like what?"

"Like how you're attending Vanderbilt in the fall as the first African-American starting quarterback in history."

My smile collapses. "Not the first," I mumble as I grab her cup a little too brusquely. "Let me refill that for you."

"But I wasn't—" she starts to protest. I don't let her finish. I turn and plod toward the bar. She staggers after me, her wedge heels sinking into the sand with each step, making it difficult for her to keep up.

I place the nearly full cup down hard on the surface of the tiki-themed bar. Beer sloshes over the sides. "Top it off, please," I say, nodding to the cup.

The bartender gives me a strange look. Not because I'm only eighteen—the Coral Bay Beach Club seems to operate by its own set of rules—but because there's barely enough room in the cup for more than a few drops.

He decides not to argue, though, and squeezes a dribble of beer from the keg's faucet until the cup is full again. I hand it to Nicole, who is now standing behind me. "Here you go."

The charm is gone. My tone straddles the line between hostile and annoyed. I need to rein it in, get back to the easy breezy guy I seemed to have such a solid handle on just a few seconds ago.

She forces a smile. Totally fake. "Thanks," she murmurs, but doesn't drink.

"You know," I begin in a measured voice, trying to regain control of the situation. "It's really getting crowded out here. Do you wanna go someplace quieter? My boat is just a few minutes down the beach."

She nods, her expression brightening. "Sure!"

I wonder if her extensive tour of the island included commentary on Grayson Cartwright's boat. If it did, she certainly isn't dissuaded by the implications of the invitation.

She sets down her untouched beer and reaches for my right hand. I flinch at the pain that shoots up my arm and quickly switch to her other side, hiding my grimace with a smile as I entangle my large dark fingers with her slender pale ones.

As I lead her away from the party, I can't help but notice how wrong and unnatural the whole thing feels, like I'm walking in a stranger's shoes. A stranger who just happens to look like me.

Fake it till you make it.

That's the plan, anyway.

When we pass the bonfire, out of the corner of my eye, I see Ian begrudgingly hand a twenty-dollar bill to Mike. Mike holds up his winnings to me like he's toasting my send-off.

I make a mental note to pay Ian back later.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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