

Winona Forever

*Limerence*¹. As if someone had smeared my life lens with dewy *Vaseline*, I got this dreamy, floating feeling around Crystal. I loved that her name was Crystal. Like, her mom thought the word *crystal* was pretty so she named her that. Crystal's sister was Amber. Of course her sister was Amber. *Was*. Because Amber's boyfriend got drunk one night two years ago and drove his car into the river with Amber in it. No one
5 knew exactly what happened, but everyone knew two eighteen-year-olds shouldn't die. That kind of thing never made sense anywhere, to anyone. Crystal wore a necklace with Amber's picture in it and sometimes when it was late and we were in bed together talking and making lists with the TV on, I would touch Crystal's neck and open the locket and look at Amber staring back at me with glossy lips and those same Winona Ryder²-brown deer eyes Crystal had. [...] And we would go to her bathroom window and
10 open it, hang our heads out far enough so we could share a cigarette.

I was obsessed with Winona Ryder and got my hair cut the way she had it in *Reality Bites*³. It'd come out the year before and Crystal and I had been to see it three times already at the cheap theatre. My mom had taken us to see *Mermaids*⁴ in the theatre when it first came out. Amber went with us too and when we were walking out, my mom had told the three of us we reminded her of Winona and we told her
15 she reminded us of Cher⁵, because she did. I didn't have any siblings and Crystal and Amber were the closest things I had to sisters. When Crystal and her family lost Amber, I didn't feel *outside* of them like it was something I couldn't understand because I wasn't blood-related to them. Crystal and I had been friends since kindergarten. I'd known them both almost my entire life. It was like I lost *my* sister too. Crystal and I both got obsessed with Winona Ryder because seeing her onscreen made us feel like we'd
20 been hanging out with Amber again. [...]

Amber's death drew us closer to one another, and we were already close. But now, we never even spent a weekend apart. We watched the Winona movies in Crystal's room with the door closed because it bothered Crystal's mom the way we watched them over and over again. Crystal's mom thought Winona looked like Amber too, but it wasn't comforting for her like it was for us. Crystal had a big bedroom with
25 her own bathroom and a TV and a VCR⁶ and a stereo. We could do whatever we wanted in there, like it was our own apartment. At my place, we could watch the Winona movies in the living room because my parents didn't mind. And my dad's best friend worked at the video store, so he would hook us up⁷ and give my dad sweets when we bought the VHS tapes. I had them on a shelf in my bedroom because they were as precious to me as my books. Crystal and I shared the collection, but the movies stayed at my
30 house. We had a pact that we'd never watch the Winona movies alone, only together. And even if one of her movies happened to be playing on TV, if Crystal wasn't with me, I'd close my eyes and change the channel or leave the room completely.

Crystal and I would write WINONA FOREVER on our arms sometimes. Sometimes on our feet if it was warm enough to wear sandals. The boys we liked asked us what it meant, but we wouldn't tell them.
35 WINONA FOREVER was ours and ours only. We liked boys and we liked each other too. Crystal and I kissed when we slept in the same bed. We kissed until we couldn't kiss anymore, but that was all we did. Kissed. We kissed and kissed until our sticky-lipgloss mouths tasted exactly the same. Like cherries or strawberries or pink or grape or blueberry or lemon or *Dr Pepper*⁸ and then we rolled over on fire. Burning

¹ a feeling of intense desire for another person

² *Winona Ryder* (b. 1971): American actress

³ American movie from 1994 starring Winona Ryder

⁴ American movie from 1990 starring Winona Ryder

⁵ *Cher* (b. 1946): American singer and actress

⁶ VCR – Video Cassette Recorder. Device from which to play VHS tapes

⁷ *hook us up* (here): help us

⁸ *Dr Pepper*: soft drink

40 and burning before we fell asleep. We didn't tell the boys about this either. Not even when they were being pervs and wanting to get off on⁹ asking us if we ever made out. We were coy when we said no, stop it, no.

45 We started kissing after Amber died. It was summer and Amber and her boyfriend had been out celebrating her boyfriend's birthday. It was summer when Amber and her boyfriend went missing for two whole days until the cops found the car in the river. It was summer when Crystal's family had to bury Amber. It was summer when Crystal and I went and bought all the yellow roses we could find at the grocery store and put them on Amber's grave because yellow roses were Amber's favorite. And we each kept a yellow rose for ourselves and came back to Crystal's room and watched *Mermaids* because Crystal said she wanted to watch something cozy so I went home and got my tape and brought it back. A lot of Crystal's family was still over at her house, in the kitchen, eating and cooking. Her dad was out on the front porch, drunk with his brothers. Her mom was in the kitchen smoking and crying with Crystal's grandmother. Crystal and I went to her room and closed the door and turned the movie on. I put my head on her shoulder and I'd already cried so much I didn't think I could cry anymore, but I sobbed. Again. And Crystal was playing with my hair. I got up and went to the bathroom, blew my nose, washed my face. My eyes were all black and streaked from my makeup afterward. Crystal had taken off her black velvet dress and I took mine off too. We were in tank tops and panties and when the movie was over we got in bed. We could hear her family in the rest of the house, on the front porch, in the backyard. Everyone was being quiet, but the house was somehow loud because it was full and alive, something Amber wasn't anymore.

60 Crystal looked at me and put her hand on the side of my face and it was both of us. Both of us leaned forward and kissed and kept kissing. My stomach, our tongues – pink cotton candy, swirling. We touched feet in her cool sheets and I don't know how long we kissed with the windows open. When we were finished, we cried some more before Crystal got out of bed and went into the kitchen to steal a cigarette from her mom's pack. Her mom had drunk a lot and took some pills and passed out on the couch in her black dress; her dad was out there staring at the TV. Crystal's uncle was at the sink, sniffing and quietly doing dishes with the wet spoons clinking and catching the zappy¹⁰ kitchen light.

65 I had a headache from everything, but I smoked with Crystal anyway. She peed in front of me, put the seat down and sat there with her knees under her chin. I let my cigarette hand hang out the window whenever I was holding it. Crystal pulled a half-empty bottle of peach schnapps from underneath the sink. We'd absconded with it that morning from Crystal's parents' liquor cabinet. We'd learned the word *absconded* in English class. It was extra credit on the vocab quiz. Cherry schnapps was my favorite, but I liked the peach too. Crystal's favorite was peach. I thought it was important for her to have her favorite that sad night. And I wanted to be there for her, for whatever she needed or wanted. After we finished our cigarette, we went to Amber's abandoned bedroom, touched her stuff, hugged her stuffed animals and cried some more. We didn't sleep much that night and when we ended up in Crystal's room again she and I kissed some more, and I was genuinely surprised when the sun rose, like the night should've been extra-long since everyone was so devastated. The gravity of Amber's death was weighing us down, so why not the sun too? [...]

80 I was jealous of the boy Crystal liked, but that wasn't fair because I liked a boy too. Crystal liked Jamie and I liked Tristan. Jamie and Tristan were best friends. They lived in the same neighborhood, so we'd drive past their houses sometimes to see if they were home, to see what they were doing. Crystal's mom hadn't let Crystal get her license even though it'd been two years since Amber died. She didn't like her riding in the car with me that much either, so we didn't let her know how much we drove around. My parents had gotten me a little white hatchback¹¹ I loved and Crystal and I called it the white rabbit after

⁹ *get off on*: get sexual pleasure

¹⁰ (here) strong

¹¹ a type of car

85 one of our favorite songs. I kept flower crowns hanging around the rearview mirror and we'd put them on whenever we drove past Jamie and Tristan's houses. We thought it was good luck, that it would help us be able to see them, that they'd be out in their yards. Sometimes it worked. We went to school with Jamie and Tristan, but we got a special thrill when we saw them *outside* school. Once, we had flower crowns on and Jamie and Tristan were out in Tristan's driveway skateboarding and listening to *Nirvana*¹². The whole thing was so nineties, so grunge¹³. Jamie even had a flannel shirt tied around his waist.

90 "Hey," Jamie said, walking over to the white rabbit. He stuck his head in a little and was so close to Crystal I thought she was going to die. Her shorts were really short and [...] I looked down at her pretty legs, her purple-glittery toenails and flip-flop feet on the floor of my car.

"What are y'all doing tonight?" I leaned over and asked.

95 Tristan came over to my side so I turned to him. My car was sitting right behind the driveway, out of the road. I turned the engine off.

"Skateboarding," Tristan said.

100 "What are y'all doing?" I heard Jamie ask Crystal, but I didn't turn around. I was looking at Tristan and his big brown eyes and my sadness flipped on because I thought about Winona's Bambi eyes and Amber's Bambi eyes. Tristan asked me if I wanted to smoke with him, so I got out and leaned on the hood of my car while he lit my cigarette.

"My parents are in Florida," Tristan told me. "And I like this," he said, touching my flower crown. Would the good luck be doubled or go away completely now that Tristan had touched it? Only time would tell.

"Thank you," I said.

105 Crystal and Jamie were talking to one another quietly, almost like they were already dating. I could tell Jamie liked her by how he looked at her. I saw him reach out to touch her necklace and Crystal let him. She didn't even flinch and my jealousy ratcheted up¹⁴, but dropped down low after I pulled my car up Tristan's driveway and we went inside and Tristan kissed me for the first time up against the wall in his kitchen with Crystal and Jamie sitting right there in the living room.

110 "You're cool with this? Because I like you. I like you a lot," Tristan said with his hand pressed on the wall next to me. The ice-maker in his humming refrigerator rattled. I would've had sex with Tristan. I wanted to. But I hadn't had sex with anyone and I was waiting. For something. But I decided in the kitchen that I would lose it to Tristan whenever I was tired of waiting.

"I like you a lot, too," I said to him before he kissed me again.

115 Was Crystal jealous of Tristan kissing me? When we went back to the living room, Crystal and Jamie were making out on the couch and neither of them even noticed us, so we went to Tristan's room and closed the door.

120 That quick, I decided I was tired of waiting and I wanted to lose my virginity with Crystal in the same house, so we could talk about it later. I hoped maybe she was in the living room losing hers to Jamie. In *Mermaids*, Christina Ricci¹⁵ almost drowns while Winona Ryder is losing her virginity up in the bell tower, so before Tristan and I did it, I went to the door and opened it and peeked out at Crystal and Jamie. They were under a blanket and I could see Jamie's ass moving up and down. Underneath him, Crystal had her head thrown back, her hair hanging down the side of the couch like a waterfall, her eyes closed. Jamie looked right at me and the look on his face was *placid*. Another extra credit word from our vocab quiz.
125 Jamie looked at me and looked at me, then closed his eyes tight, let his head hang down, and kept moving under the blanket.

Tristan and I moved under his blanket too. Watching Crystal and Jamie made me so horny I felt like I'd pass out. Tristan had been looking for condoms in his dresser while I was watching them, so I didn't even

¹² American rock band

¹³ type of rock music popular in the early 1990s

¹⁴ *ratcheted up*: increased

¹⁵ *Christina Ricci* (b. 1980): American actress

130 know if he knew what I'd been doing. I liked Jamie looking at me when he was with Crystal like that,
because it made me feel close to Crystal. And even when Tristan was inside me with the condom on I was
thinking about how later Crystal and I would go back to her house or my house and watch a Winona
movie and kiss when we got in bed. I loved being with Tristan. He was sweet and gentle and kept asking
me if I was okay and I was. I was more than okay. The night was perfect and the cigarette I'd share with
135 Crystal later would be perfect and seeing Winona's brown eyes on the TV would be so comforting to both
of us. We'd talk about the boys, cry about Amber, watch Winona and write WINONA FOREVER on our
arms and kiss some more. We'd be cranky¹⁶ with lust and twinkle like sometimes-sad, crooked little lights.

(2020)

¹⁶ (here) crazy