

Book Club Kit



ANNABEL
MONAGHAN

Author of
NORA GOES OFF SCRIPT

SAME TIME NEXT SUMMER

"Bursting with the magic of
first love, it's everything I want
in a summer romance."

—CARLEY FORTUNE, author of
Every Summer After

a novel

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A Conversation with **ANNABEL MONAGHAN**

What inspired you to write *Same Time Next Summer*?

The Philadelphia Story has always been one of my favorite movies. At the highest level, it's the story of Tracy Lord (Katharine Hepburn) who comes home to get married and finds her ex-husband C. K. Dexter Haven (Cary Grant) living next door. When I was a kid, I loved it for the funny dialogue and the scandalous way the adults were always making bad choices. When I was older, it made me think about how we move through heartbreak—both in our own relationships and within our families—and often reinvent ourselves to keep our hearts safe in the future.

I wanted to write a story that explores how heartbreak shapes identity. I find that when people are about nine years old, they know exactly who they are. But, of course, life happens. We grow, we rub up against the world, we get our hearts broken, and we might even be let down by the people we trust the most. And all of that friction shapes who we are as adults. I am fascinated by the lengths we go to in order to reframe our life stories and reimagine ourselves. Some people can do this for their whole lives and safely inhabit a new, false persona. But I think the truth usually surfaces, and the happiest people are living their most authentic lives.

In your debut novel, *Nora Goes Off Script*, the main characters fall in love later in life as adults. Why did you decide for the relationship in *Same Time Next Summer* to be about first love? What was your favorite part of writing this dynamic?

The great thing about first love is that we don't know enough to protect ourselves from it. We dive in heart-first, and it feels endless until it ends. In my memory, you don't even go looking for first love, it just sort of finds you, and once it gathers momentum, it feels inevi-



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table. While I loved writing about adults later in life because of all of the complications Nora and Leo brought into their relationship, I also loved writing about first love because of its singularity of purpose. First love is a highly focused freight train of emotions, and I wanted to write about those very real feelings with the respect they deserve. Sometimes first love lasts; mostly it doesn't. But it informs how we approach love in the future.

Sam's family home on Long Island, New York, feels like the perfect oasis to escape to for the summer. Is this beach town based on a real place?

Oak Shore is a made-up Long Island town. Long Island felt like a perfect place to set this story because of its natural beauty and its proximity to Manhattan. When I think of Long Island in the summer, I think of hydrangea growing like weeds and the dunes moving with the breeze on the beach. I imagined a lot of sensory memories being stored on those beaches, and it felt like a good place to fall in love.

When we return to where our childhoods happened, it's hard not to slip back in time. I grew up in Los Angeles and went to the beach most days. The ocean was not right outside my door—I drove there—but the anticipation that I felt driving to the beach became part of the experience. Sam walks through the dunes that give way to the sand and the ocean in the same way I drove down the California Incline onto the Pacific Coast Highway. There is so much sensory memory tied up in this for me. When I am at that beach, the smell of the air and the rough feel of dried salt on my skin whispers at me about who I used to be.

When we return to where our childhoods happened, it's hard not to slip back in time.

Music plays an important role in Sam and Wyatt's love story. Do you have a connection to music or the arts, and why did you choose to include this aspect in *Same Time Next Summer*?

I love music as a listener (and as an awkward but enthusiastic dancer), but I have no talent for it and don't play an instrument. But still, I find that certain songs contain full years of my life, and others can take me back to a single moment. This is particularly true of summer music, songs that played over and over on the radio on long, lazy days can bring back the smell of Coppertone and the feel of hot sand under my feet. There are studies that show that the music we listened to during our teenage years actually attaches itself to our emotional memory in a much deeper way than music we hear for the first time as adults. If anything was going to unlock the fortress around Sam's heart, it would be music.

Who was your favorite character to write, and why?

Probably Wyatt. He's a bit introverted like I am, and I liked watching him bide his time with Sam, both as a kid and as an adult. He keeps his feelings hidden for a lot of the novel, but I could always tell where he was emotionally. Also, it was fun writing about a person with a secret, who isn't exactly lying but isn't exactly being forthcoming either.

Why did you decide to structure the novel between the past and the present, and from Sam and Wyatt's perspectives in the past? How do you think this storytelling technique adds to the reading experience?

Memory is such a subjective thing. If I told you the story of an old summer romance of mine, I'd give you the general idea of when it was and where we were, but I wouldn't do it justice because I can't quite see the details from this far away. I might tell you that I really liked him, but I would trivialize the whole thing because I don't remember exactly the way it felt when he looked at me or what it was like when we broke up. This is especially true for this story because of how much work Sam has done to dismiss the importance of her relationship with Wyatt. I thought it was important for the reader to experience what falling in love was like for Sam and Wyatt in real time so they could understand why it still mattered.

Although this is a story about Sam and Wyatt, *Same Time Next Summer* also feels like a story of the complicated nature of family. Why is it important that family be represented in this story? How does it inform Sam's and Wyatt's choices and behaviors?

I grew up in a family and I'm now raising one, and I can tell you one thing for sure: a family is a complex living organism. Everything that happens to any family member affects the others. Our moods, our victories, and our horrible mistakes shape how everyone else in the family grows. We are limited by one another's beliefs and thrust forward by one another's successes. This is why family stories intrigue me so much. Human beings who are woven together by proximity, genetics, and love have a lot to sort out.

A family is a complex living organism.

Without giving anything away, did you always know how the story would end?

No. I never do. I knew tonally how it was going to end, but I did not know how I'd get there. But once I got to know Wyatt a little better and saw where he was a tiny bit wounded, I knew what he had to do to find his voice.

What do you want readers to take away from *Same Time Next Summer*?

We are all great survivors, and we have endless ways that we adapt to protect ourselves. There's a balance between being safe and truly living, and it's our job to determine how much risk our hearts can take and how deeply we are willing to love. This is a story about returning to your truest, bravest self. And it's an exploration of whether the safety that comes with loving someone at arm's length is worth giving up the joy of loving someone with your whole heart.

What's next for you?

I'm writing a love story that involves a skateboarder who is pretending to be a divorce attorney. And, no, I don't know how it's going to end.

This is a story about
**RETURNING TO
YOUR TRUEST,
BRAVEST SELF.**

Discussion Questions

1.

Did you and your family have a place you would visit for the summer when you were growing up? Or possibly a special vacation you went on? What is your fondest memory from that time?

2.

Who was your first love? How much of an impact did that relationship have on your life, and what did you learn from it?

3.

Compare and contrast the feelings Sam has for Wyatt and Jack. Why is Sam drawn to each of them? What do you think is the most important quality a romantic relationship should have?

4.

Is there a song that makes you think about your first love or another relationship? Why?

5.

What was your favorite scene? Why?

6.

When you are stressed or need to clear your head, what activity do you turn to? Why?

7.

When Sam and Wyatt are teenagers, each reflects on how different their families are from one another. How do you think their family dynamics shaped who each became?

8.

Were you surprised to learn the truth behind Sam and Wyatt's breakup? If you were in their shoes, how would you have reacted?

9.

If Sam hadn't gone to therapy, do you think she would have gone down a different path in life?

10.

What are your thoughts about the ending?



SAME TIME NEXT SUMMER

Playlist

I don't listen to music while I write because I find it very distracting. I can't seem to concentrate on the words in my head when there are other words spinning around the room. But when I'm not writing, I am walking and listening to music and thinking about my story. There are a handful of songs that always took me to the beach or that felt like something Wyatt might write. And, yes, you'll find the selection a bit eclectic—who, besides me, remembers Little River Band?

SONGS THAT FELT LIKE WYATT:

"Iris" by Goo Goo Dolls

"A Murder of One"

by Counting Crows

"Take It Easy On Me" by Little River Band

"Hold You in My Arms"

by Ray LaMontagne

"Wild Horses" by the Rolling Stones

"Thinking Out Loud" by Ed Sheeran

"Yellow" by Coldplay

SONGS THAT TOOK ME TO THE BEACH:

"Watermelon Sugar" by Harry Styles

"Sunshine on My Shoulder"

by John Denver

"Wouldn't It Be Nice" by the Beach Boys

SONGS TO MAKE SAM CRY:

"Who Knew" by P!nk

"Wrecking Ball" by Miley Cyrus

"1 step forward, 3 steps back"

by Olivia Rodrigo

"So Far Away" by Carole King

"Romeo and Juliet" by Dire Straits

"Stay" by Rihanna

"Sam, I Am" by Missy McGee

