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Foreword Review YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Summer of Everything

Julian Winters
Duet (Sep 8, 2020)
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In Julian Winters's perceptive young adult novel, *The Summer of Everything*, a gay teenager is afraid of loving his best friend.

In Santa Monica, Wes is an insecure, comic book-loving geek. He lives above an independent bookstore, and it has always been his haven. When he and his fellow hipster employees learn that the store is set for a buyout, they try to save it. At the same time, Wes struggles with his feelings for Nico, his best friend, and his concerns about attending UCLA when he's unsure of what he'll become. Wes's estranged but loving older brother adds to his worries. Here, "adulting" isn't an end goal: it's a series of evolving decisions.

Nico, Wes's childhood friend turned crush, is an empathetic, gentle counterpart to Wes, who, in his hesitancy, is frustrating and sweet. Wes's problems are lifelike, and he's surrounded by eccentric, supportive, and inspiring friends who challenge and encourage him. These include Ella, an iconoclast who hides her softer side, and exuberant Cooper, who embodies California's laid-back cool. They, along with wise adults, help Wes to gather his courage.

Encounters at the store, where Wes and his friends banter over music and use social media, are interspersed with scenes at Santa Monica's skate parks and beaches. Wes's hopeful longings bubble into neuroses: he composes lists about first date plans that he's too scared to implement. Mild complications and misread cues push him toward an unavoidable confession whose results are down to earth. Wes learns to risk being vulnerable, and his coming of age is endearing.

Set to a nineties alternative rock track, *The Summer of Everything* is a young adult novel about love, identity, and a close-knit community.

KAREN RIGBY (September / October 2020)

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