

siobhan vivian

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE LIST*

STAY SWEET



STAY SWEET

ALSO BY SIOBHAN VIVIAN

The Last Boy and Girl in the World

The List

Not That Kind of Girl

Same Difference

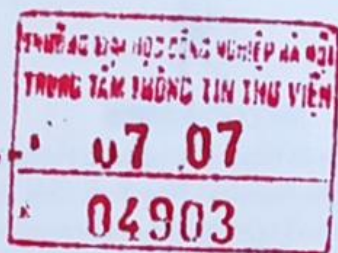
A Little Friendly Advice

COWRITTEN WITH JENNY HAN

Burn for Burn

Fire with Fire

Ashes to Ashes



STAY SWEET

siobhan vivian



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And lastly, to my love, Nick Caruso, for supporting me every step of the way—I'll stop the world and melt with you.

May 3, 1945

Nineteen girls came to the lake tonight and each one brought her very own spoon. Up from the sixteen girls last week, and the eleven who showed up the week before. A month ago, there were only four of us.

I climbed off my bicycle and, for a moment, stood back by the trees and watched them. Most of the girls I knew well, some less so, and a few weren't even from Sand Lake. Not that it mattered. They had spread their blankets out edge to edge on the sand to make a huge patchwork quilt, kicked their shoes and sandals off in one big pile. They passed around Life and the latest Seventeen, fussed with each other's hair, chitchatted while the last of the sun disappeared and they waited for me to show.

I could feel my heart pounding underneath my blouse.

I might have tried to slink away if Tiggy hadn't spotted me and rushed over, grinning ear to ear. For her, more girls meant less time she'd have to crank the ice cream maker. Tiggy complains her arm hurts after about a minute of churning, though

she sure does recover once the ice cream is ready. But I saw more girls I'd be disappointing tonight.

Tiggy lifted my bag out of my bicycle basket and I followed her, apologizing to everyone for being late. I tried to temper their expectations as I poured my ingredients into the bucket of my ice cream maker. The girls had been so keen on last week's vanilla, and I would have loved to make them another batch of it. But sugar rations had been cut yet again and my mother forbade me to even open her pantry.

So I'd spent the whole afternoon trying to sweeten the cream with something other than sugar. I tried raw honey, apple juice, even shavings from one of our victory garden carrots. I'll admit, I enjoyed the challenge, experimenting, churning and tasting small batches, each one a step closer. That is, until time ran out and I needed to get to the lake. I wasn't sure the concoction I'd settled on would even be edible.

The girls didn't seem to care one way or the other, which would have been a relief, had I not cared so deeply. More than I ever expected to.

Normally, those of us who got letters from our boys read them aloud while we took turns on the crank, though I casually suggested skipping them this week, knowing Marcy's family hadn't heard from her brother Earl in nearly a month. Marcy insisted, even managing a weak smile. It amazes me how good we're all getting at pretending to be strong even when we're close to hanging it up.

Luckily, Dot went first and had us in stitches. I honestly can't get over how fresh James Pearson is. His mother would turn red as a beet if she knew how James begged Dot to send him a picture of her in her slip.

I read Wayne's latest letter. In it, he promised that the boys in his unit are as heartsick as we girls are back home. And he's glad to know we're keeping busy with our ice cream nights because being miserable and lonely will make the time we're apart pass more slowly.

I felt sorry as I folded his letter back up. Though I kiss each one I send to him and spray the envelope with what I hope is enough of his favorite of my perfumes to

last a trip across the world—I go through a \$7.50 bottle of Beau Catcher every few weeks—I do write Wayne such boring things. About my ice cream recipes or complaints about Mother, who is intent on turning our wedding into the social event of Sand Lake the minute the war ends.

Maybe I should send Wayne a picture of me. Not in my slip. For that, he'll have to wait until our wedding night. But it might lift his spirits to have a photo of me in my bathing suit. With my hair curled and pinned like Betty Grable.

Anyway, after the letters, and after we'd aired our dirty laundry for the week—fights with parents, the scarcity of pretty dresses in stores, the latest newsreels—Tiggy brought up the idea of my selling ice cream at the Red Cross fund-raiser her mother was organizing. I shot her a look because I had already told her it wasn't a good idea. It wasn't just that sugar rations were getting smaller and smaller. I liked that our ice cream nights were just for us. Ignoring me, she asked the girls to suggest ideas for what I might put on a banner, since each food table needed one, and that went on until the ice cream was ready to eat.

I wasn't listening. My stomach was in a knot as I unscrewed the cap and pulled off the crank. Though the thought did occur to me that if this batch of ice cream tasted terrible, Tiggy's idea of my selling it might disappear.

Tiggy crawled over and dipped her spoon right in, helping herself to the first taste. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head and she made "mmMmm" sounds that had the girls squealing and huddling up for a taste. They'd never had anything like it, they said. What was in it? What was this flavor? Their eyes were wide, smiles big.

I figured they were being polite until the ice cream finally came back around to me.

But it really was terrific.

The best I've ever made!

The girls were clamoring for seconds and thirds and fourths, telling me that I just had to sell this. I'd make a fortune, guaranteed. And it would be such a help to our boys.

Tiggy made a joke then, reaching for yet another taste. "Boys? What boys? I've got

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