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Opening extract from

Forever

Written by

Judy Blume

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FOREVER

Judy Blume says . . . 'When I wrote *Forever* in the mid-seventies, sexual responsibility mainly meant preventing unwanted pregnancy. Today sexual responsibility also means preventing sexually transmitted diseases, especially AIDS. In the book, Katherine visits a clinic and is given a prescription for the Pill. Today she would be told it is essential to use a condom, along with any other method of birth control. If you are going to become sexually active, then you MUST take responsibility for your own actions and your own life. You can get more advice and information from your doctor, family planning clinic or Brook Advisory Centre.'

Judy Blume spent her childhood in Elizabeth, New Jersey, making up stories inside her head. She has spent her adult years in many places, doing the same thing, only now she writes her stories down on paper. Over 75 million copies of her books have been sold, and her work has been translated into twenty-eight languages.

In 1996 Judy was honoured by the American Library Association with the Margaret A. Edwards Award for Lifetime Achievement. In 2004 she received the National Book Foundation's Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Literature.

Judy lives on islands up and down the east coast of America with her husband.

A *Forever* reading guide is available to download from: www.macmillanreadingguides.com



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Sybil Davison has a genius I.Q. and has been laid by at least six different guys. She told me herself, the last time she was visiting her cousin, Erica, who is my good friend. Erica says this is because of Sybil's fat problem and her need to feel loved – the getting laid part, that is. The genius I.Q. is just luck or genes or something. I'm not sure that either explanation is 100 percent right but generally Erica is very good at analyzing people.

I don't know Sybil that well since she lives in Summit and we live in Westfield. Erica and I decided to go to her New Year's party at the last minute for two reasons – one, because that's when she invited us, and two, we had nothing better to do.

It turned out to be a fondue party. There were maybe twenty of us sitting on the floor around a low table in Sybil's family room. On the table were a couple of big pots of steaming liquid Swiss cheese and baskets of bread chunks. Each of us had a long two-pronged fork, to spear the bread, then dip it into the cheese. It tasted pretty good. I had gotten about two bites when this guy said, 'You've got some on your chin.'

He was on Erica's other side, sort of leaning across her. 'You want me to wipe it off?' He held out his napkin.

I couldn't tell if he was putting me on or what. So I told him, 'I can wipe my own chin,' and I tried to swallow the bread that was still in my mouth.

'I'm Michael Wagner,' he said.

'So?' I answered, and Erica shot me a look.

She introduced herself to Michael, then tapped me on the head and said, 'This idiot is my friend, Katherine. Don't mind her . . . she's a little strange.'

'I noticed,' Michael said. He wore glasses, had a lot of reddish-blond hair and a small mole on his left cheek. For some crazy reason I thought about touching it.

I looked away and went back to spearing chunks of bread. The guy on my other side said, 'My name's Fred. I live next door to Sybil. I'm a freshman at Dartmouth.' Unfortunately he was also a creep.

After a while I tuned him out but he didn't know and kept blabbing away. I was more interested in what Michael was saying to Erica. I wondered where he went to school and hoped it was some place close, like Rutgers. Erica told him that we're from Westfield, that we're seniors, and that we're spending the night at Sybil's. Then Michael introduced her to somebody named Elizabeth and I turned around in time to see him put his arm around this pale dark-haired girl sitting next to him. I pretended to be interested in Fred the Creep after all.

At midnight Sybil flashed the lights on and off and Fred wished me a Happy New Year, then tried to stuff his tongue in my mouth. I kept my lips shut tight; while he was kissing me I was watching Michael kiss Elizabeth. He was much taller than I first thought and thin, but not skinny.

After the party we helped Sybil and her parents clean up and somewhere around 3:00 a.m. we trudged upstairs to bed. Sybil conked out as soon as her head hit the pillow but Erica and I had trouble getting to sleep, maybe because we were on the floor in sleeping bags, or maybe because Sybil was snoring so loud.

Erica whispered, 'Michael's a nice guy . . . don't you think so?'

'He's much too tall for you,' I told her. 'You'd only come up to his belly button.'

'He might enjoy that.'

'Oh, Erica!'

She propped herself up on an elbow and said, 'You like him, don't you?'

'Don't be silly . . . we barely met.' I rolled over, facing the wall.

'Yeah . . . but I can tell anyway.'

'Go to sleep!'

'He asked me for your last name and your phone number.'

I turned around. 'He did?'

'Uh huh . . . but I guess you don't care about that.' She buried herself inside her sleeping bag.

I gave her a half-hearted kick. Then we both laughed and fell asleep.

Erica and I have been friends since ninth grade. We're a good pair because she is outspoken and uninhibited and I'm not. She says she has to be that way to compensate for her size. She's just four-feet-ten – so when I said that she would come up to Michael's belly button I wasn't kidding. Everyone in her family

is tiny. That's how her great-grand-father got their last name. He came to this country from Russia, not speaking a word of English. So when he stepped off the boat and the man in charge asked him his name, he didn't understand. Instead of just calling him Cohen or Goldberg, the way the immigration officers did with so many Jewish refugees, this man sized him up and wrote down *Mr. Small*. Erica swears if she ever marries she will choose someone huge so that if they decide to have children the kids will at least have a chance to grow to normal size.

Not that being little has hurt anyone in her family. Her mother is Juliette Small, the film critic. You can read her reviews in three national magazines. Because of her Erica is positive she's going to get into Radcliffe, even though her grades aren't that hot. I have a 92 average so I almost died when I saw my college board scores. They were below average. Erica scored much higher than I did. She doesn't fall apart over really important things and I'm always afraid I might. That's another difference between us.

The phone rang at noon the next day and woke me. Sybil jumped up and ran to answer it. When she came back she said, 'That was Michael Wagner. He's coming over to get his records.' She yawned and flopped back on her bed. Erica was still out cold.

I asked Sybil, 'Does he go with that girl, Elizabeth?'

'Not that I know of . . . why, are you interested?'

'No . . . just curious.'

' . . . because I could drop a hint if you want me to . . .'

'No . . . don't.'

'I've known him since kindergarten.'

'He's in your class?'

'My homeroom.'

'Oh . . . I thought he was older.'

'He's a senior . . . same as us.'

'Oh . . .' He seemed older. 'Well . . . as long as I'm awake I might as well get dressed,' I said, heading for the bathroom.

Sybil and I were in the kitchen when the bell rang. I was picking raisins out of a breakfast bun, piling them in the corner of my plate. Sybil leaned against the refrigerator, spooning strawberry yoghurt out of the carton.

She answered the front door and showed Michael into the kitchen. 'You remember Katherine, don't you?' she asked him.

'Sure . . . hi . . .' Michael said.

'Oh . . . hi,' I said back.

'Your records are still downstairs,' Sybil told him. 'I'll get them for you.'

'That's okay,' Michael said. 'I'll get them myself.'

A few seconds later he called, 'Who's K.D.?'

'Me,' I answered. 'Some of those albums are mine.' I went downstairs and started going through the pile. 'Are yours marked?'

'No.'

I was making a stack of K.D.s when he said, 'Look . . .' and grabbed my wrist. 'I came over here because I wanted to see you again.'

'Oh, well . . .' I saw my reflection in his glasses.

'Is that all you can say?'

'What am I supposed to say?'

'Do I have to write the script?'

'Okay . . . I'm glad you came over.'

He smiled. 'That's better. How about a ride? My car's out front.'

'My father's coming to pick me up at 3:00. I have to be back by then.'

'That's okay.' He was still holding my wrist.