

I have a habit of writing epilogues and then not including them, which is why so many of them wind up here on the website. In the case of *That Summer*, my editor felt strongly that it was best to leave things open-ended, so the epilogue wound up on the chopping block.

For all of you who asked if there would be more of these characters, voila! The Lost Epilogue of *That Summer* is below.... Happy reading!

Epilogue

New York, 2013

“Bubbly for you—and fake bubbly for you.”

Nick handed around the champagne in mismatched crystal glasses, Tattinger for the adults, sparkling apple juice for Jamie and Robbie.

“There is really no happier sound than the popping of a champagne cork,” said Helen, taking her glass from Nick. She turned to Julia. “Congratulations, Julia.”

“Congratulations!” the others echoed.

“Do you have any soda?” asked Robbie, making a face at the apple juice. Robbie was thirteen now, at the awkward stage of breakouts and a voice that sometimes went up and sometimes went down.

Jamie, sixteen, regarded his sparkling apple juice disdainfully, as though to indicate that he, as the superior and more sophisticated party, ought to have been offered champagne.

Nick winked at Julia and went off to dig up some coke from the battered fridge in the galley kitchen.

They were clustered around Julia’s Ikea kitchen table, celebrating her successful completion of her oral exams, the first stage of her art history degree. With the inclusion of her father, Helen, Jamie and Robbie, her apartment was straining at the seams, the junior one bedroom made all the more junior by the jumble of her overdue library books and Nick’s auction catalogs and the general debris caused by two people living in a space meant for one.

“I don’t see why they call it an MPhil,” said her father, carving himself a slice of the Congratulations, Julia cake that Helen had brought from Whole Foods.

“That’s Columbia for you,” said Julia flippantly. “Hey, it could be worse. Harvard calls their undergrad degree an AB rather than a BA. How’s that for pretension for you?”

“The important thing,” said Helen, in her conciliatory way, “is that you made it through. Thank you.” She smiled gratefully at Nick as he topped up her glass.

It was rather amazing to Julia, even now, how natural it felt to have them all together in the same place, crammed into her tiny living room. It had been almost four years now that she had Nick had been together, two since he had come to join her in New York.

The first year, she had technically been living in the house at Herne Hill, although by the time Christmas had rolled around, her clothes had occupied two drawers at Nick’s flat and the house at Herne Hill had become more of a country house, a place to go on weekends to get away from the bustle of the city. That spring had been bittersweet. She’d felt incredibly lucky at making it into the PhD program at Columbia, but it also meant leaving Nick. They’d spent a year long distance, racking up long distance phone bills and frequent flier miles on British Airlines.

Bizarrely, it was Helen who had come up with the solution, at the end of that first, miserable year apart: why didn’t Nick open a branch of his shop in New York? The recession had driven down the price of store rentals, but the superrich were still buying luxury goods. And, as Nick had agreed, having “London and New York” on his business cards did look rather snazzy.

The sale of the house on Herne Hill had helped finance the second shop. Julia had watched the house go with fondness, but without regret. What she really needed from the house, she carried with her. The old secrets were out in the open at last, Gavin had been buried next to Imogen (not without some protest from Cousin Caroline), and whatever ghosts that might have haunted the old house had been put to rest.

After all, Imogen and Gavin had always intended to make their new life in New York. It seemed rather fitting that the old house should provide a means for their descendant to do the same.

Helen had mustered her Ladies who Lunch, garnering Nick’s new shop coverage in New York Social Diary and New York Magazine, making it a mild fad among the Carnegie Hill crowd. Thanks to her efforts, the shop was in the black from day one. It didn’t hurt that the rumor had gone around the Upper East Side that the proprietor maybe, sort of, could have, would have, should have been a viscount. It leant an air of piquancy to their purchases.

Of course, by the time the rumor mill was done, Nick had been inflated to a minor member of the royal family and a distinct threat to Prince William’s claim to the throne, but as long as it kept the shop door jingling, they were all prepared to treat it as a joke.

There were, as her father had noted before, advantages to being an Englishman in New York.

Nick and her father still had a slightly wary air around one another, but Nick and Helen, to Julia's surprise, had immediately taken to one another. Nick's attempts to teach Jamie and Robbie cricket had been an abject failure, but other than that....

This, Julia realized, was what it was like to be part of a family.

Not just one, but two. She'd met Nick's father several times now, a genial man with unabashedly gray hair, sagging jowls, and a roguish glint in his eye, usually with a different woman on his arm each time. Charming, but not exactly reliable. Sometimes, it seemed like Nick was more the parent than his father was. It made Julia feel rather protective of Nick.

Of Nick's mother, there had been no sign, but he was just as overly endowed with aunts as he had claimed; there were four of them, as well as their numerous offspring, some scattered in far-flung places from Brussels to Dubai, but there were many in and around London. Julia had found herself investing in two good suits and several large hats for what felt like a perpetual round of weddings, christenings, and silver anniversaries.

Their own wedding was slated for August.

They'd originally intended something small, but between Helen and Nick's aunts (whom Julia had begun to refer to, collectively, as "the Big Hat Brigade"), their small wedding had turned into a reception for a hundred and fifty at the Pratt Mansion on Fifth Avenue. Fortunately, Helen and the Big Hat Brigade had also been more than willing to take over the nitty gritty of planning, so Julia considered it a fair deal. In the build-up to her Oral Exams, Julia had been too busy pacing and drinking coffee and muttering facts and dates to do much of anything else, although Helen had managed to extract her from the library long enough to find a dress.

Now that her Orals were finally over, she was actually rather looking forward to the wedding. She felt like she'd crawled out of the end of a long, dark tunnel into sunlight.

Which was, in general, the way she felt about the transition from her old life to her new one. Sometimes she thought about her life four years before, the dull grind at Sterling Bates, her sterile business and social relationships, her brittle relationship with her father and Helen, and wondered how she had stood it.

Not that grad school—and life with Nick—was all champagne and cake, but she was happier now than she could recall having been before.

“Do you have to teach next year?” asked her father.

“In the fall term. I’m TA-ing Intro to Art History.” Julia made a face. “It’s one of those department rites of passage— but, in the spring, I’m all set to go back to London and start work on the dissertation.”

She and Nick exchanged a look of satisfaction. They were still trying to figure out a final landing place, but she knew he had missed London. And, truth be told, she did, too.

“Do you have a topic yet?” asked Helen.

Julia toyed with the stem of her champagne glass. “Yes, I think I do.” She glanced up at Nick. “Desire, Adultery and Arthurian Legendry in the Works of Gavin Thorne.”

“It seemed appropriate,” commented Nick blandly. “Given that it was Thorne’s painting that brought us together.”

It had really been Natalie who had brought them together, albeit accidentally, but Julia didn’t like to quibble. Particularly since she liked Nick’s version better.

“Don’t forget Imogen Grantham,” Julia said. “It’s her story, too.”

Looping an arm around Julia’s shoulders, Nick raised his glass. “To Gavin and Imogen, for providing Julia with a dissertation topic—and for providing me with Julia.”

Gingerly, her father got into the game. “To your Aunt Regina, for leaving you that blasted house. I thought it was a terrible idea at the time—but I’m happy to have been proved wrong.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Julia said. She waved her glass in the general direction of the ceiling. “And Aunt Regina.”

Leaning back into the circle of Nick’s arm, Julia saw her father and stepmother stealthily link hands under the table.

Helen smiled mistily at Julia and Nick. “To happy endings,” she said. “However they happen.”

And they all drank to that.