



# Best Friends For Now

WRITTEN BY

Sarah Phillips

ILLUSTRATION

Carmen Lew

## Editor's Note

“Women, I believe, search for fellow beings who have faced similar struggles, conveyed them in ways a reader can transform into her own life, confirmed desires the reader had hardly acknowledged — desires that now seem possible. Women catch courage from the women whose lives and writings they read, and women call the bearer of that courage *friend*.”

— **Carolyn Heilbrun**, *The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty*

When I was writing my first book, *Portraits*, I remember thinking, in the wee hours of the night, *this is embarrassing*. I was a young woman writing about heartbreak, desire, and becoming unhinged from unresolved feelings. I thought, *how cliché*. But *Portraits* was the book I had in me to write. These were the themes that stirred me, and there came a point where my longing to tell these stories became more powerful than the shame I felt for needing to.

When our editorial team received Sarah and Carmen's submission of “Best Friends For Now,” we were immediately taken with it. These vignettes, based on real-life stories Sarah Phillips has collected with care, demonstrate the kind of courage that we look for in the work we publish. Our editorial team knows, from experience, that it takes an immense amount of emotional energy, self reflection, and intention to tell stories like this.

In her introduction, when Sarah tell us about “D.,” her emotions are tangible and honest; the dissolution of a friendship often leaves us with unanswered questions and a tangle of messy feelings to sort through. Sarah's own

motivation to understand this kind of loss informs this project; each story is made more empathetic and real with an author who can relate to her subjects. At *With/out Pretend* we believe that *feelings can be art*, and there is no better exploration of that belief than this collection of stories about tender feelings; stories that are, as Sarah warns us, “deceptively simple.” It’s said that time heals all wounds, but I want stories, instead, to mend mine. I want books, poems, plays, lyrics, art, and zines like “Best Friends For Now.” When I see my experiences in the lives I read, I am comforted. I catch courage.

**Erin Klassen**  
Editor-in-Chief

## Best Friends For Now

“There are people who leave and people  
who know how to be left.”

— **Elena Ferrante**, *The Story of a New Name*

A decade-long friendship of mine recently came to an end. It wasn't really an *ending* — more like a series of encounters that left each of us unsatisfied, discontent, and feeling more alone together than when we were apart. Soon after these shifts began, D. left the city. Whenever anyone asked if we'd kept in touch, I'd just shrug and say that long distance friendships were hard. For a while I convinced myself that we hadn't really stopped being friends — we had just drifted. I blamed the emotional distance I felt on our changing interests, the busy-ness of life, and a lack of mutual friends. Eventually I had to admit we weren't friends anymore. Part of me had wanted it this way, but I was also mad about it. And I missed her.

D. isn't the only friend who has let me go, and I've ended my share of friendships, too. I try to see the end of these relationships as a way to connect with new people who seem to understand me better, or who support and delight me in the ways I need at this point in my life. Walking away has never been a decision I've made lightly. Each friend “break-up” was painful in varying degrees; any attempts to avoid or justify my feelings would often give way to cascading doubt, guilt, and mourning.

I knew I couldn't be the only one with this experience.

I began asking those I knew to tell me their stories of friendship break-ups. The conversation would start the same way each time: a pause, a blank stare, and then the often still-fresh stories would pour out. Why is it that when sex and romance are involved, we pay so much attention to the state of our relationships? We mark the passage of time; we analyze and examine and ask how things are going. An ending is often seen as a possibility. Meanwhile, friendships are thought to be organic and meant to last — it's what makes the entire idea of a friendship break-up so complicated, or hard for people to hold space for. And yet, it seems that wherever there are friends, inevitably, there are friends who are no longer.

What follows are just a few of the stories I've heard recently. They are deceptively simple. Each undoing is bittersweet, a little unsettling, and slightly unsatisfying — just like the experience of losing a friend.

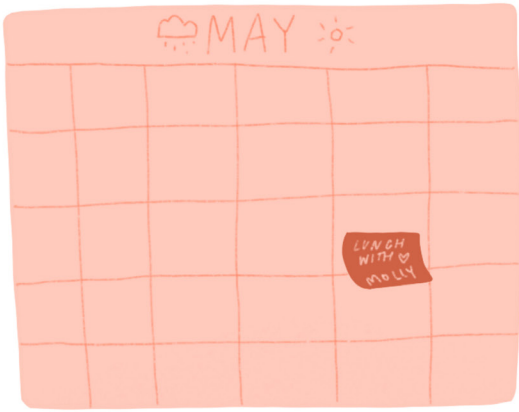
**Sarah Phillips**  
Author

## Molly and Anna

Molly and Anna worked together at an advertising agency. Molly hated her job and neither of them liked their boss, Caitlin. Molly was an ambitious account coordinator who resented how Caitlin treated her. She used her juniors like personal assistants, and was condescending to them in front of clients. If they made a mistake, even just a typo, she would make sure senior leadership knew it was a junior's slip-up, not hers.

Molly and Anna applied to new jobs regularly, and when Molly finally found an escape, she quit. They continued to get together for drinks, where Anna would share new horror stories about the boss. Molly begged her friend to finally *get out of that hopeless situation*, but Anna always found something wrong with any opportunity that came her way. Molly found it frustrating to watch her friend struggle in a world that she'd long left behind. Whenever she changed the subject, though, she found that neither of them had much to say. Their monthly dates were pushed to every two months, and then dwindled to just twice a year.

Molly and Anna haven't seen each other in two years. Apparently, Anna has a new friend at work now.



## Claire and Margot

Margot transferred to Claire's school in grade eight, half-way through the school year. She was different than most of the other kids — she was half-Scottish, half-Vietnamese, and she lived with her divorced dad who smoked pot and let her do basically whatever she wanted. She listened to 70s rock music, said whatever came to mind, and dyed her dark black hair bright red. She had swagger and Claire liked her immediately. It seemed like Margot was free to be whoever she wanted. Claire, meanwhile, didn't know who she wanted to be. She *did* know that she didn't want to be like the “other girls” who dressed in the same Roots sweatpants tucked into their wool socks, even on the hottest days, wore pastel-coloured t-shirts, matching Mountain Equipment Co-op backpacks, and thick, sticky lip gloss. The “other girls” were pretty, prissy, and prudish. The “other girls” were boring.

Margot, Claire, and their friends dressed like ravers. They wore super wide-leg pants, dark eyeliner, strappy tank tops, and hemp chokers with mushroom charms. Margot wore a pacifier around her neck because she did E once. And even though they'd never gone to a rave, soon everyone at school was afraid of them. They smoked weed and cigarettes on the field at the back of the school property. When other kids had to walk by them on their way home they'd avoid eye contact, huddle together, and make sure they didn't come too close to the 14-year-old girl gang puffing away, practicing their O-rings to show off in front of the older kids, likely at some park party later that evening. One of the girls in their group was transferred to another school at the beginning of grade nine when her mother realized the kind of girls her daughter was hanging around.





As junior high was coming to a close and the start of high school loomed, Claire wondered just how different she really was. Didn't she mostly do whatever Margot did? She made a few new friends and spent a little less time with Margot. When she went shopping with her mom one weekend and saw a pair of green straight-leg cargo pants, she realized she actually liked them and brought them home. On the second last day of junior high she wore them to school. She got on the bus to go home with Margot and another friend from the group. "What's with the pants?" the other friend asked, gesturing towards Claire's tapered trousers with her chin. "I like them?" Claire seemed unsure. Margot exploded, "Claire! Where the fuck have you been? We don't even see you anymore. You've *really* changed. I mean, cargo pants?! Who are you?" The girls argued the rest of the way home. It was Claire who got the last word: "They're just fucking pants," she yelled as she rushed off the bus at her stop.

Margot now lives in Scotland where she's a veterinarian. Claire is a teacher, living in Toronto with her family. They haven't seen each other since high school graduation. To this day neither of them has been to a rave.

## Steph and Alana

Steph met Alana when she started dating Alana's colleague. They quickly became friends in their own right. In their 20s, their group of friends got together every weekend. They partied at sweaty bars and went out in large packs for dinner on everyone's birthday. At a table of 15 people, Steph and Alana could often be found huddled in the corner, discussing how much they hated their jobs and their plans for whatever creative project they were thinking up next.

In their 30s, most of the couples around them got married, and soon many of them were having children. Alana had a boy and a girl. Her husband got a well-paying job and they bought a house in a desirable neighbourhood. Alana decided to quit her job to stay home with her children. Some of their friends did the same. They traded sweaty bars for intimate dinner parties, and their conversations turned from art and



ideas to talk of nannies, all-inclusive vacations, and renovations. At this point, unlike almost everyone else, Steph and her partner were still living paycheque to paycheque and didn't have any children. At the dinner parties they had little to add to the conversation, but no one seemed to notice. Steph started to decline invites, coming up with a convenient excuse each time. Feeling her absence after some time, Alana called to ask why she hadn't seen her friend in so long. Steph didn't know how to say "I feel invisible when I'm with you," so she said she was busy with work and "just had a lot going on." Alana didn't know how to say "I'm lonely, too," so she just said "Ok, talk soon."

Alana's conversations these days consist mostly of the lullabies she sings to her kids. Steph is still unhappy at work. None of their side projects ever really got off the ground.

## Fran and Michelle

Michelle broke up with Fran because she was "too into her."



## **Adriana and Cheryl, Sophia, Rebecca, Sam, and Lindsay**

Adriana, Cheryl, Sophia, Rebecca, Sam, and Lindsay were best friends. Over March break, Adriana's family went out of town. When she came back to school, no one would speak to her.



## Shelley and Liz

Shelley and Liz met at overnight camp when they were 10 years old. Each summer, they would share a bunk — Shelley would take the bottom bed, and Liz would take the top.

By the time Shelley and Liz were 14, Shelley wasn't necessarily a "good girl" — she had gotten drunk and had tried smoking weed, but she took very calculated risks when she broke the rules. Shelley's parents were divorced and although they were separated, they still fought a lot. Shelley saw how stressed her mom always seemed to be and felt that the best thing she could do was to make sure she didn't cause any extra trouble. She shared her deepest thoughts only with Liz, who kept all her secrets. With Liz, Shelley felt brave. Only with her could she sneak out without getting caught, steal the counsellor's alcohol without her noticing, or smoke a joint in the woods without anyone smelling it. And everything was funnier when Liz was around.

After high school, Shelley moved away for university and Liz stayed home. For that first year apart, they talked on the phone every day. Then, as school picked up and new friends were made, they spoke less often. Shelley met a new guy — someone *complicated* — and hooked up with a few others. Liz told her friend she didn't like how she was letting these guys treat her. Shelley was frustrated and felt she never really got her friend's approval anymore.

"No one is good enough for you," Shelley cried out one night. Liz, meanwhile, had a boyfriend of her own, someone who seemed sweet and caring and willing to take it slow. "We said 'I love you,'" she told her friend. "Cool, will

you sleep with him already?” Shelley half-joked. “I don’t know,” Liz murmured. Shelley was exasperated and imagined her friend was judging her, too. They argued more and more and soon their phone calls stopped altogether. Shelley figured it was just a “break.”

Three months later, Liz came out to a few close friends and her family, all of whom accepted her immediately. Shelley found out about this later, from a distant acquaintance, who shared the news like a piece of gossip. Her heart sank as she thought, *I’m a terrible friend*. She wanted to call Liz, to tell her she loved her, that she wished she’d been there for her and that she wished she’d known, but she didn’t know what to say, especially over the phone.

That summer, when Shelley came home from school, she asked Liz to go for a drink. Over a beer, they kept things light. They laughed a lot and neither of them acknowledged the break in their friendship or Liz’s coming out. When they got up to leave, Liz stopped at the door and said, “Thanks for not bringing up the pink elephant in the room.” Shelley thought she had done the right thing, but just a few days later, she wasn’t exactly sure. They got together a few more times, but to Shelley, it wasn’t the same — even though Liz talked a lot when they were together, it always felt like she was holding something back. Or maybe it was Shelley who was.

Eventually, Liz moved to New York City. A few years later, Shelley got married and invited Liz to the wedding. They danced together most of the night, requesting songs from their childhood and singing along — they remembered all the words. Liz was Shelley’s most important guest. But she’s been married for five years now and hasn’t seen Liz since



ROGERS

8:00

LTE

< Shelley\_100



Looks like you are in town-  
want to grab a drink?

I'd love that! But  
I leave tomorrow.

Too bad, next time?

Im always so rushed.  
But I'd really love a  
catch up with you.  
Talk soon.♥

Message...



her wedding night. She watches all of Liz’s Instagram stories and sometimes they DM. They always message each other on their birthdays. Whenever Liz comes back home, Shelley reaches out to see her. But Liz never seems to have enough time. Shelley still feels like a bad friend. She still wants to tell Liz how sorry she is and that she really misses her. For now, at least she can “see” and “talk” to her online.

“Best friends” forever.





**SARAH PHILLIPS**

Sarah Phillips is a writer, brand strategist, and lecturer. Her writing has appeared in *WORN Fashion Journal*, *Ephemera Magazine*, *Miss Grass*, *strategy magazine*, *WIPP* and *Invisibilities Zine*. She is the co-founder and curator of Queenstown Seminars, a Toronto-based monthly salon series. She usually writes about women, culture, the workplace, and weed. She has a M.A. in English Literature and has taught at Humber College and Miami Ad School.

**CARMEN LEW**

Carmen Lew is a Toronto based illustrator. Her work primarily explores the connection between one's self and their surrounding environment. Having travelled thoroughly throughout Europe, Lew draws from her memory, feelings of unfamiliarity, and perpetual movement. In response, rather than fixating on naming those feelings, Carmen illustrates characters who are seemingly indifferent; characters who subtly contemplate the wonder and discomfort of the unfamiliar, a refreshing rebuke against our desire to control the unknown. Carmen's use of a strong colour palette and textured elements in her art speaks to the depth of these experiences. As an emerging illustrator she is constantly trying to push her work and try new things to better her practice.

**@carmenjanelew**

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## **This Story**

### **WRITING**

Sarah Phillips

### **ILLUSTRATION**

Carmen Lew



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