

Summer
Camp Tumbleweed
June 2017

Out of the director's office and through the lodge, she stepped onto the grounds of Camp Tumbleweed and breathed in the fresh scent of morning and Lake Skiatook.

The first of Tumblers for the summer of 2017 arrived next week. A lot of things had changed in the eighteen years she'd been running the camp. A lot of things stayed the same.

Not long after the Seasons reconciled in '97, Levi proposed. They married six weeks later in October. When Josie offered to sell them the camp, they bought it, and Summer reopened Camp Tumbleweed in '99, as its director. These days, Camp Tumbleweed was twice the size it was in the '70s.

And so was the spirit of friendship.

Snow asked Summer to write the theme song for her new rom-com *Come Sing with Me*, so she spent peaceful fall evenings in '98 on the back porch, penning a tune with the same title, as Levi rocked their newborn, Levi Foley II—or Deuce, as they called the little guy with her husband's eyes.

In 2000, the first year of the new millennium, the Seasons and their hubbies walked the red carpet with Snow and Loudon. Greta walked on cloud nine for a year—okay, maybe for ten years—after *that* night in Hollywood. She still talks about it. She shows all of her patients the boatload of photos hanging on her office wall. A good many of them were of her photobombing the stars while they were doing interviews.

Summer's song started to get radio play. To everyone's surprise, *Come Sing with Me* was covered by several bands, ranging from pop to alternative rock. Who knew?

Levi joked, "*Maybe we should sell the ranch and move to Nashville.*"

Ha ha. No thanks.

By then, they'd given Deuce a little sister, Berkley, so Levi would have to blast Summer out of their ranch-style nest if he ever *really* wanted to move. Which he didn't. She was happy to be writing again and producing the melodies of her heart, but she was even happier to be home with her husband and babies.

Last year, 2016, a newcomer to country music, Buck Mathews, covered an obscure song of Summer's called "Golden Haze" and hit number one on the country charts and number ten on pop. Her music continued to find life through other's voices.

She updated "The Preacher" lyrics to reflect who she now knew Him to be. So much more than a Preacher. He was her Lord. She recorded her own version and sold CDs at O'Sullivan's and the Camp Tumbleweed store.

Camp Tumbleweed continued to grow. This year, they had seventy Tumblers per week. Next year, she hoped to add ten more. She had twelve counselors and ten staffers, many of whom were former Tumblers, including the daughters of all the Seasons—five in all who came back to help the girls have "the best summer of their lives," which had become the camp's unofficial catchphrase.

She also had a crew of very special helpers: Mom and her husband, John, whom she meet online!—*Really, Mom?*—and Dad and Babs.

Right now, the four of them were walking toward the cabins, carrying armloads of bedding. They'd all retired around the same time and signed up to be Camp Tumbleweed's official cooks and housekeepers and much-needed "grandparents."

Mom and John bought the Tumble Time Laundromat, installed proper air conditioning—the entire town sang the “Hallelujah!” chorus—and for a while, the four of them trucked into town every summer Saturday to wash the linens. When Summer expanded the camp, Dad and Babs bought the shop next to Tumble Time, knocked down a few walls, added more machines and a reading nook, hired full-time attendants, and surrendered the camp’s laundry duty.

Not many people needed a laundromat in 2017, but the place stayed busy, and every now and then, someone down on their luck would peek inside. Mom or John or the attendant on duty would invite them in for free wash-and-fold service and a meal voucher at O’Sullivan’s.

“The world looks a lot better when your clothes are clean and fresh,” John said. *“And when your belly is full.”*

Life seemed so sweet now. At fifty-eight, Summer Wilde Foley, had become somebody. If she was any more content with her life, she’d burst. She didn’t need fame and fortune, or a stage. She just needed to be who the Preacher made her to be.

After the summer of ’97, Summer dug a big ol’ hole in the ground and buried her hatchets. Anger. Hate. Bitterness. Resentment. Her sense of failure and self-loathing.

It wasn’t easy to forget and forgive. She struggled. Even tried to dig up a hatchet or two a few times, especially over the way she’d treated her parents, the Seasons, her failed music career, and her disregard for herself and the men she’d been with. But the Preacher always whispered some sense into her.

“Why are you trying to remember what I forgot?”

She marveled at His friendship. Marveled that He blessed her when she’d ignored Him for so long. Marveled that He blessed her with a man like Levi.

Twenty years later, she had no regrets about accepting the Preacher’s invitation to “sing for Me.”

“Hey, Mom!” Summer’s daughters Berkley and Kitty stood beside the Ford F-250 camp truck. “We’re going to pick up Aunt Snow and Aunt Autumn. Meet you at O’Sullivan’s? Five o’clock?”

“Five o’clock at O’Sullivan’s.” Oh, she was proud of her girl duo and of Deuce.

Spring arrived yesterday to spend a bit of time with Greta and her family before the craziness of camp. Greta and Darrian had two boys and a girl, the oldest a senior in high school. Tonight, they would all gather at the Yeagers’ place to reminisce and catch up with one another.

However the original four always returned for the first week of camp—just to be together, then to be with the Tumblers.

Spring never went back to practicing law. She made it as a full-time author. Her first big hit, *The Camp Girls*, was a semi-autobiographical tale of her life with the Seasons. It hit number one on the *New York Times*.

Snow became one of the biggest producers in Hollywood. She and Loudon and beautiful Olive, an entrepreneur in the internet world, joined the Foleys, Mom and John, and Dad and Babs for Christmas every other year. They were one big happy family.

Autumn sold her cosmetology school and both shops, *The Kitchen* and *The Kitchen Too*, when she met her husband, Barker, while visiting Snow in LA. She lived in Santa Barbara now and swam every morning, golfed, and volunteered at her church’s soup kitchen. Yet she still managed to “big-sister” her siblings from two thousand miles away. She and the Preacher had become good friends.

“Hey, you.” Levi waved to her as his truck bounced over the grounds toward the firepit where he’d stack firewood for this week’s camp. His smile still melted the sun—and her. He had

a touch of gray at his temples now, but time hadn't slowed him down.

"Starlight, Twilight, Moonglow, and Sunglow are all set for the Seasons." Mom walked toward her, wearing her hiking boots, khakis, and Camp Tumbleweed T-shirt. It was amazing how she transformed from high-powered business executive to nature girl in an instant.

"Berkley and Kitty went to get Snow and Autumn," Summer said.

"Good, good." Mom glanced around. "I'll never get used to this place without Moxie. Sometimes I still hear her singing in the kitchen."

Moxie worked with Mom through the '80s and came knocking on Summer's door when she heard Camp Tumbleweed would open again. At ninety-one, she helped set up the camp kitchen. Help? No, she did it by herself. She worked on staff until the summer of '04, when she went to bed one night and woke up in heaven. She was ninety-six.

Her picture was the centerpiece on the Camp Tumbleweed Wall, a pictorial retrospective of the camp dating back to the 1940s.

"Are you singing at O'Sullivan's tonight?" Mom watched her.

"Do you think the Seasons would let me *not*?"

It was her last set until camp was over. During the summer, talented acts came through town and filled the place with good music. Tank still owned the diner-slash-drugstore, but Sooner's son, Will, was set to take over in the next year.

A flicker of light from beyond the old firepit caught Summer's attention. "Excuse me, Mom."

She paused on the edge of the meadow. The Preacher stood between the shadow and light, wearing his bell-bottoms, skinny tie, and blue Oxford button-down. His eyes—oh, those eyes!—were like flames of fire.

"Hello." She kept her voice low, and she could only hope he heard the welcome. "It's been a long time."

"You're singing for Me," He said. "I hear you every day."

Summer caught the tear on the corner of her eye. "I finally got it. To sing for You means to live for You."

"Babe?" Levi's voice startled her. "The contractor sent pictures of the fixtures for the new cabins. Do you want to—Hey, are you all right?" His strong arm came around her.

"I'm more than all right." When she looked through the shadow and light again, the Preacher had disappeared. "What's this about fixtures?"

Somehow, she knew she'd never see Him in this manner again. But He was with her, and that's all she needed to know. He was the One who led her through every season.

"You wanted to approve the fixtures in the new cabins."

"Right, okay. But can you—" Summer patted her pockets for her phone. "Hold on a sec, Levi."

She dialed her father.

"Summie? Why are you calling? I'm standing in the middle of camp. I can see you over by the meadow. What did Levi do?"

She laughed. "Nothing. He's good." More than good. "I was wondering if I could ask you something about the summer of '77."

"What about it?"

"Do you remember when I called you from the phone booth at O'Sullivan's? I wanted to skip Camp Tumbleweed, come home, and pick up trash off I-10."

"Yes, and I told you to stick it out. That it would probably be the best summer of your

life.”

“Well, it was, Dad. Unexpected and painful but beautiful in a way I never imagined.”

“So your old man was right.”

“Don’t get cocky. But yeah, you were right.”

Looking back, she believed the summer of ’77 absolutely was the best of her life. It—all of it—brought her to where she was always meant to be.

THE END

“The Preacher”
By Summer Wilde
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The summer of '77 was supposed to be,
The best of my life, For my friends and me.
We were the Four Seasons, Summer, Autumn, Snow, and Spring
Till a high school prank changed everything.
We found ourselves on a Greyhound bus out of town,
To a place called Tumbleweed, where heat soaked the ground.
We were camp counselors to younger versions of ourselves,
I was reminded when we rode the old park carousel.
But our summer days were marked by death nearby
Three Girl Scouts from Camp Scott carried off in the night.

Where was the Preacher when we needed Him?
Where was the bulwark, the strong tower to run in?
Couldn't He see, couldn't he be, where and when we needed Him?

The summer of '77 was supposed to be
The best summer of our lives for my friends and me.

What about those sweet girls who had no more tomorrows?
While we complained e'ry Saturday doing laundry at the Tumbleweed Tumble.
Then one Saturday night I saw the tent and the lights
Seemed heaven and earth came to collide.
I found myself, on the sawdust floor, facedown
While the girl with the guitar sang about being heaven-bound.

Where was the Preacher when we needed Him?
Where was the bulwark, the strong tower to run in?
Couldn't He see, couldn't he be, where and when we needed Him?

The summer of '77 was supposed to be
The best summer of our lives for my friends and me.

My sawdust altar puddled with my tears.
The Preacher looked at me, his eyes my soul's mirrors.
Changed in a flash, yet still so much the same.
It's taken me years to understand why He came.

Where was the Preacher when we needed Him?
Where was the bulwark, the strong tower to run in?
Couldn't He see, couldn't He be, where and when we needed Him?

My daddy once said to me, "Hang in there, kiddo, one day you'll see,"
How the summer of '77 came to be,
The best summer of my life, and for my friends and me.

At that old camp, between nowhere and the sticks
up route twenty from old route sixty-six
I meet the Preacher who told me to sing, sing for Him.
And after all these years, I finally am.

The Preacher was there when we needed Him.
The bulwark, the strong tower to run in.
He can see, He can be, where and when we need Him.

It was the summer of '77 for Autumn, Snow, Spring, and me.
It was the best summer of our lives, now that I can clearly see.