

A NOTE FROM LISABETH POSTHUMA

Baby & Solo is a work of fiction set in the 1990s, which is a decade that in retrospect feels fictional itself. It was a time before smartphones and social media when there was a mainstream of popular culture most everyone experienced together. If you came of age in the nineties, you likely did so while watching *Friends*, speaking fluent MTV, and spending at least one night each weekend scouring the shelves of your local video store.

Like a lot of nineties kids, I had an after-school job at such a place. Though the video department of the now-defunct Summit Ridge Pharmacy in Smalltown, Indiana, wasn't nearly as hip as ROYO Video, I still loved it for the same reason that my narrator, Joel "Solo" Teague, loves his job: the people. The ensemble cast of coworkers at my video store was completely different from those at Joel's (though, like his, we also had pretty cool nicknames), but mine was also a group of interesting misfits in their own right, who were all going through that fleeting, blurry end-of-childhood-beginning-of-adulthood stage of life together.

I have so many standout memories from that job. Like the time the stock boy held my hair while I threw up in the bushes because I didn't know you shouldn't come directly to work after having your wisdom teeth removed (lesson learned!). Or how my coworker Big Mama (who was neither big nor a mother) was convinced all movie titles could be porno titles if you said them a certain way (my favorite illustration of this was the 1950 Lucille Ball and Bob Hope classic *Fancy Pants*). We'd bond over gripes about customers not rewinding tapes and how lame it was that our manager wouldn't let us display the poster for *American Beauty* because someone's bare stomach was too risqué in our conservative town. We'd challenge one another to memorize all catalog numbers assigned to the movies in our database system. (I was undefeated. *Clueless*: 4769! *Waterworld*: 4788!) This job was *the best*. So it only made sense that when I was searching for the perfect setting to tell the tale of Joel and Nicole's unique friendship, it would turn out to be a video rental store in 1996.

There's something both terrifying and liberating about those late teen years, when the ties that have always bound us to our families begin to fray. It's the first time we realize that we have to look backward to understand the present and that we aren't who we are by chance or by choice. The relationships formed during this stage are so unique: they can be as intense as they are fragile, as completely desperate as they are entirely comfortable. *Baby & Solo* is a story of the kind of messy, passionate friendship that emerges from this crossroads, the kind of friendship that's worth the risk because of what it teaches you about love and acceptance, not just for each other but also for yourself.

