

Dear reader,

The story between your hands is one I've always wanted to tell. I guess you could say that it started way back when I was filling my journals with the complicated feelings I juggled as a teen—feelings that followed me into my twenties and beyond.

This isn't your typical fat-girl story—not that fat-girl stories are ever considered typical since there are so few to begin with. Baylee is strong, very into fashion and makeup, and in many ways, fearless. But she's struggling with some internalized negative feelings about her body, and these feelings affect nearly every moment of her day. It has always been important to me to tell that story, the story about a confident fat girl who is constantly judging herself, living by these rules she's created based on the fatphobia she's experienced her whole life. I want us to be seen, the girls who are simultaneously confident as hell *and* next-level self-conscious. I want it to be known that these two states of being are not mutually exclusive.

At the start of the story, Baylee is living in her head, consumed by one-sided crushes, dreaming of the day she'll experience connecting with another person for real. But then everything starts happening at once and Baylee finds herself in a sort of triangle with two people. The experience of connecting with Freddie and Alex in very different ways leads to self-discovery and learning—a whole lot of learning about romance, sex, and desire. It was vital to me to tell a sex-positive story that talks about teen-girl pleasure

and the fact that sexuality can sometimes be linked to romance, sometimes not, and that is perfectly okay and healthy. My hope is that girls who read about Baylee's journey may become a little more comfortable with owning their feelings and desires, letting go of the shame that's put on all of us girls when it comes to sex.

While I ultimately wrote my debut novel *Girl Mans Up* for my partner, I wrote *Then Everything Happens at Once* for myself. Had I come across this book as a teen—had I seen a fat girl forging ahead to go after what she wants despite the negative voices within and around herself, acknowledging her desires and having agency over her sexuality—this would've felt radically empowering to my sixteen-year-old self. I'm way past the age of sixteen, but young girls are still out there, managing very similar struggles, waiting to feel empowered. My hope is that this book will contribute to that empowerment.

One last thing: Why is the pandemic in here, you might ask? The earlier drafts of this story were set in the prepandemic world, so I could've just left it at that. But as a writer, I couldn't help but imagine how a pandemic would affect Baylee's world and her current struggles. Risk taking has always been a prominent teenage struggle, but in this COVID-19 climate, it became something else entirely.

I thank you for taking the time to read *Then Everything Happens at Once* and following Baylee along on her journey.

With gratitude,
M-E Girard