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# The traveling pants take their last magical journey

Reviewed by Emily Wilson

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Forever in Blue

The Fourth Summer of the Sisterhood

By Ann Brashares

DELACORTE; 384 PAGES; \$18.99

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It's been a little more than five years since Ann Brashares published her charming and unfortunately titled "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants." In that book Brashares introduced us to four girls who have been friends since they were babies (their mothers met in an aerobics class for pregnant women). In the fourth and final book of the series, "Forever in Blue," Brashares brings back the four girls -- Tibby, Carmen, Lena and Bridget -- now young women who have finished their freshman year at college. That means they aren't just apart for the summers but all year long, and they still share the pants that magically fit them all.

The lively and intelligent Carmen feels invisible at Williams College, where she hangs out with a beautiful girl who seems to need Carmen to live in her shadow. Lena, the artist, is studying painting at the Rhode Island School of Design and is finally attracted to someone other than Kostos, her Greek boyfriend who married another woman when the woman told him she was pregnant. Moody Tibby, studying film at New York University and working at a video store, is worried that things are too perfect with her boyfriend, Brian, whom she met in the first book. "She couldn't dislodge her worldview that things balanced out. You paid for what you got. In happiness terms, this always felt like a spending spree." Beautiful, athletic Bridget goes to Turkey on an archaeological dig. Her boyfriend, Eric, whom she met in the first book when he was a counselor at a soccer camp and seduced before she was ready, is in Mexico, and Bridget is vaguely unsettled by their separation.

Brashares is a light and funny writer. "Never had Tibby imagined pure torture in the guise of Effie Kaligaris in a wrap dress sucking on a pink drink." And the story lines of the four girls, as in the three other books, are rich, interesting and believable. One of the best things is that the young women act as individuals, and each has her own voice. It's easy to imagine Tibby in her dorm room at NYU or being snarky about her customers' video choices -- "She wanted to tell him that his movie was all right, but the ending stank and the sequel was an insult to your brain, but she made herself think the comment and not say it" -- or Lena trading poses with another art student; Bridget in Turkey, fearless about spiders and snakes; or Carmen sneaking candy at night and feeling lonely.

What makes the books so wonderful is the main characters. How often do we get to read books about friendship -- especially uncontrived friendship, where the friends treat one another with kindness and respect? These characters seem like real people and ones you'd want to know, not cardboard cutouts that Brashares moves around to make a point about something.

These young women have families, love interests (two of the characters lose their virginity in this book), school and work -- but their friendship defines and comforts them. The girls are moving on with college and their lives, but you feel that their friendship will always be important, always be something that will sustain them.

Not that everything is always perfect -- not the girls or their friendships. Tibby is downright mean to her doting boyfriend; Bridget has a serious flirtation with a married man; Carmen shuts out her friends because she feels bad about herself.

The premise of the books, that the pants fit all four girls, and so link them, might kindly be called hokey. Sometimes all the talk about the pants as wise and magical is a little tiresome. The real magic of the book is one that is available to all of us -- the magic of friendship.

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