

A young man and woman are lying on their stomachs on a wooden pier. The man is in the foreground, wearing a blue t-shirt with 'ROMANCE' and 'PLAN B' printed on it, and sunglasses. The woman is behind him, wearing a bikini top and denim shorts. They are both smiling and appear to be enjoying a sunny day by the water.

There's no "how to"  
guide for love.

# the book of luke

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National bestselling  
author of *Plan B*

the  
**book of LUKE**

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# prologue

My parents waited in the cab with TJ while Sean and I stood together on our front walk. It was the same front walk where we'd shared innumerable good-night kisses, held hands, and even taken a tumble in the bushes once after I jumped on him for a piggyback ride. So it wasn't like we'd never stood on the flagstone path before. But this time it was totally different. And not just because it was barely eight o'clock on a Saturday morning.

"I'm going to miss you," I told Sean, my chin tucked into my neck as I attempted to keep from freezing to death right there in the middle of our good-bye. It was maybe twenty degrees out and a few snowflakes were falling. I watched as the wet flecks landed on Sean's jacket and melted, leaving small dark brown spots on the khaki coat—a coat I had gotten him for Christmas, I might add. Actually, the color was called "saddle" in the L.L.Bean catalog,

and it took me a week to decide whether Sean would look better in the light brown (to match his hair) or mallard blue (to match his eyes). I ended up going with the saddle field coat with the Primasoft liner (comfort rated to minus-25 below, something I thought would come in handy in Chicago)—size large.

“Me, too,” Sean answered and then licked the last remaining smears of cream cheese off his fingers before digging his hands deep into his coat pockets. I’d made sure the toaster oven wasn’t packed until this morning so I could make Sean one last sesame bagel with cream cheese. His favorite. “But it will be fine.”

Fine? Was he kidding me? Moving right after Christmas was bad enough. That my father had decided at the last minute to stay behind in Chicago to “tie up some loose ends” made it even worse. Add in the fact that it was my senior year, and the situation truly sucked.

I glanced over at the idling cab, where my mom was tapping on the backseat window and pointing to her watch.

“I’d better go.” I wiggled my toes and tried to get feeling back in my left foot. “If we miss the plane, my mom will kill me.”

Sean dug his hands deeper into his Primasoft-lined pockets. “Sure.”

Still, I didn’t make a move. There was the small lingering matter of a conspicuous bulge in Sean’s right coat pocket, a bulge that I was sure contained some sort of going-away present—nothing huge, just *something* he’d want to give me as a little reminder of him, a memento of our four months together.

“You know, Emily, I was thinking about it, and we should probably end this right here.”

Great idea. I was all for ending the waiting. I practically held out my hands waiting for the little gift box that meant Sean was going to miss me as much as I was going to miss him. “Okay.”

Sean moved his arm, pulling his hand out of his left pocket for the first time since he arrived to say good-bye. Only he wasn't holding a beautifully wrapped velvet box with satin ribbon, but a wad of Taco Bell napkins!

"It's better this way—it'd just be too hard to keep things going with you all the way in Boston," he continued, and all I could think was, *What is he talking about?*

"So you're okay with that?" Sean asked. "With breaking up?"

Wait. A. Minute. Breaking up? He was breaking up with me? On my front walk? With my parents and brother watching us from a yellow taxi? At eight o'clock on a Saturday morning—the very morning I was moving to Boston?

"You want to break up?" I repeated, but my words were drowned out by the honk of the cab's horn reminding me we had a plane to catch.

"I think you'd better go." Sean wiped a crusty smudge of left-over cream cheese from his cheek and stuffed the napkins back in his pocket.

He stepped aside so I could pass, and even though I wanted to drop to the frozen ground right there and cry, what could I do? Cling to his leg, begging him not to leave me? I may have just lost my boyfriend, but I still had my pride. There was no way I'd let Sean see me with frozen tears hanging from my lashes like icicles.

As I walked past Sean—brushing against the sleeve of the coat that I paid for with my own hard-earned money (okay, so working behind the desk of a public library wasn't exactly hard, but it was still earned)—I wanted to tell him he was making a mistake. I wanted to remind him that we'd been together for four months, four *amazing* months. I wanted to put him in his place, to tell him I was better off without him. I wanted to tell Sean to go fuck himself.

But when I turned back to face him, the words that escaped from my chapped lips weren't the ultimate put-down—they were the ultimate in humiliation.

"I love you," I told him, my breath creating puffs around the words in the cold morning air.

"I love you," for God's sake! *This* was when I chose to tell the guy I loved him? When he's breaking up with me and holding a wad of shredded paper napkins imploring him to "run for the border"?

What was wrong with me? Even when my boyfriend's breaking up with me I don't have what it takes to be mean, to say what I really think. It made me want to scream.

But I didn't scream. Instead, I crawled into the backseat of the cab next to my fourteen-year-old brother, who just happened to be wearing my Brown University sweatshirt, rubbing yet another failure in my face. Reminding me of yet another guy—this one with gold wire-rim glasses and a name badge that read RONALD PARKER, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS—who lured me into a false sense of security only to crush me in less time than it took to read a letter that began: *On behalf of the admissions committee, I regret to inform you . . .*

"All set?" My dad looked over his shoulder into the backseat, the third guy in my triple play of devastation. My trifecta of mortification and disappointment. The Bermuda triangle that in the past two weeks had become my life.

"All set," I answered, and then sat back in the pine-scented cab and attempted to smile. Not because I was "all set." Or because I was thrilled with the idea of moving to Boston. Or because the scene on my now-former front walk of my now-former house was just dandy with me. Or because the damn letter from Direc-

tor of Admissions Ronald Parker was a lovely piece of correspondence.

No, I smiled because that's what nice girls do. I smiled and fixed my eyes on the reflection in the rearview mirror, because the girl staring back at me really did look like she was "all set." Even though I knew that beneath the red nose and wind-burned cheeks, everything was all wrong.





## **The Guy's Guide Tip #1:**

**Forget everything you thought you knew about girls.**

**You don't know anything.**

# chapter one

There are two problems with being the daughter of a best-selling etiquette guru. The first one is that everyone assumes you know how to do everything right. The second is that 99 percent of the time, you live with the fear you're doing everything wrong.

"You can't be serious!" I yelled when my parents broke the news to me. From the look on my mother's face, there was no doubt that yelling was the wrong thing to do in this situation. I did, however, resist the urge to fold my arms defiantly across my chest. It was one thing to stand my ground. It was another to look like a spoiled brat doing it. "There's no way I'm going."

My dad sat on the edge of my bed rubbing his knees while my mom waited for me to calm down so she could continue.

"We realize this isn't the best timing," she tried again, but I wasn't going for it.

“It’s not just bad timing, it’s halfway through my senior year. You can’t expect me to leave my friends and everything right before graduation. I’m supposed to be the class valedictorian, for God’s sake!”

Apparently my academic achievements weren’t as important as the fact that my father’s company was transferring him back to Boston, because my mother didn’t even skip a beat. It almost made me wonder if she’d written a chapter on this in one of her books: *Breaking Big News without Breaking a Sweat*.

“I think you’re making this out to be worse than it is,” she went on, and then started rattling off all the wonderful, exciting things about moving “back to Boston.” She kept saying “back to Boston” instead of “leaving Chicago,” like somehow her choice of words would make it better. As if the fact that we used to live there made it easier.

“It’s like going home,” my mother insisted.

“No, it’s like moving,” I told her, and then added, “It’s even worse than moving.” At least if you moved somewhere new, you had an excuse for people not liking you—they didn’t know you. But when you were moving back to the same town you lived in for most of your life, going back to the same school you once attended, the possibility that people you once liked, and who once liked *you*, might not want anything to do with you anymore, was slightly horrifying to say the least.

I glanced over at my dad, who was still sitting on my bed staring at his khaki-covered knees as if they were infinitely more fascinating than the conversation taking place around him.

“This isn’t fair,” I told him, and he looked up at me with an expression of total innocence. Like none of this was his fault, and yet, he was the reason we were having this conversation in the first

place. He was the reason the rest of my senior year was going to suck.

“Can’t you tell them you’ll move in May after graduation?” I pleaded, and for the first time since he came into my room my dad decided to speak.

Only instead of telling me what I wanted to hear, he shook his head. “Can’t do that, Em.”

“Look, it’s all decided. We’ll move right after Christmas.” My mom laid a hand on my shoulder and squeezed lightly. I’m sure it was supposed to reassure me, but it just made me even angrier. While my mother said all the right things as usual, my father just sat there like none of this was fault. But it was. All of it.

“Maybe I could stay with Jackie or Lauren until school’s out,” I suggested in an attempt to try and rectify what was left of my senior year. “It’s just a few months.”

“Absolutely not.” My mom shook her head and didn’t even bother looking to my dad for agreement. She was handling this because obviously Patricia Abbott knew the right way to handle every awful, unpleasant situation. “Come on,” she chided, giving me a smile that I knew I was expected to reciprocate. “Everything’s going to be fine. Promise.”

She “promised,” as if that was supposed to make me feel better. It didn’t. And looking back on it, it just goes to show that even America’s number one syndicated etiquette columnist isn’t always right.

Six weeks later, our cab pulled up to the sidewalk in front of the United Airlines terminal. We probably looked totally normal, a family of four heading off on some warm tropical vacation right after Christmas. But even though four people exited the taxi, only

three of us had our luggage. And the person who was responsible for ruining my senior year wasn't holding a plane ticket.

"Looks like that's everything," my dad told us as he placed two suitcases and TJ's Nike duffel bag on the sidewalk.

The cabdriver must have known this wasn't going to be a typical heartwarming family moment, and was smart enough to slip back into the driver's seat after closing the trunk.

"Bye, Dad." TJ was the first to say it, which figured. He seemed to be totally unscathed by all of this, completely oblivious to the fact that my father had single-handedly wrecked everything. My younger brother was always the problem child, so how did I end up being the difficult one in this situation? "I'll miss you."

While they shared a touching father-son moment, complete with hugs and manly pats on the back, I hung back by the sliding glass doors, grateful for the bursts of warm air that escaped every time a passenger entered.

There was no way my father would be getting a hug from me. And I wasn't about to tell him he was going to be missed.

When my dad told my mom he'd decided to stay behind in Chicago for a while, she actually thought he meant he'd decided we should *all* stay behind in Chicago for a while. Forget that we'd already sold our house, bought a new home in Branford, sent our transcripts back to Heywood Academy, and had a moving truck scheduled to haul all of our earthly possessions away in less than fifteen days. What bothered my mother the most about his news was that she'd already mailed the *We're Moving!* announcements to everyone on the Abbott family's Christmas card list. Apparently my dad had cleared it with his company and was going to stay in Chicago for a few months before making the transition. Too bad he hadn't cleared that with the rest of us.

"Emily?" My mom gave me a look that meant I was next in line

for this Hallmark moment. I was expected to wrap my arms around my dad and act like all was forgiven. And I just couldn't do that. I couldn't pretend that the three of us were simply taking a trip instead of acknowledging what was really going on—my father was ditching us.

"It's cold, I'm ready to head inside," I told them and then grabbed the handle of my suitcase and picked it up before my dad could reach for a hug. My dad didn't deserve hugs and teary good-byes. "Bye, Dad."

Maybe he felt guilty about leaving us or maybe my mom had trained him well enough to avoid a scene in front of the skycaps, but whatever the reason my dad didn't force the issue. TJ, on the other hand, looked like he wanted to kill me. It had been that way ever since the second big announcement—TJ just didn't get it.

Finally my mom stepped forward and I waited for the explosion, the argument, or pointing of fingers that I knew was supposed to happen in a situation like this, but that, for some reason, never seemed to happen. Instead I watched two people have a conversation that seemed as civilized and rational as every other conversation they'd had over the past six weeks. And it annoyed me to no end. Was I the only one who wasn't willing to act like this was okay?

"Call me when you get in," my dad instructed us one last time before opening the cab's back door to get in. And then he looked directly at me. "Have a safe flight."

My mom, TJ, and I watched as my father pulled away and waved to us from the backseat of the cab. And because I'm nice, because I am my mother's daughter, instead of telling him what a shitty thing he was doing, I did the polite thing and waved back.



Our flight was delayed—of course. Was it too much to ask that at least one thing go right this morning? Wasn't it enough that I had to be frisked by a stranger wielding a beeping black wand after I set off the security alarm? Or that the female security officer waved the wand around my right boob so many times the line of passengers behind me must have thought she was casting a magic spell on my 34Bs? If I'd have known my underwire would be mistaken for a national security threat I would have worn a running bra and saved myself the humiliation.

"Want a mint?" my mom asked, holding out a roll of peppermint LifeSavers. My mother was strictly old school when it came to fresh breath. No tins of atomic Altoids for her.

She probably assumed the frown on my lips was due to a mild case of bad breath. Unfortunately, peppermint wasn't going to help my situation. Besides, with a lump in my throat, I wasn't sure I'd be able to swallow.

I shook my head slowly, fearing any vigorous movement would release the tears that were currently blurring my vision.

"I know this is hard on you, all of it, but we'll get through this," she assured me. Just like she did when our cat, Snickers, got hit by a car and we discovered her on our front steps whimpering and licking a broken leg. Or when TJ needed stitches after falling off his bike and I was convinced he was going to die (I was eight at the time and still relished my role as the big sister—I was over that by the time I was ten). Or even when I received the deferral letter from Brown and thought I might hyperventilate right there in the kitchen. My mom was always assuring me. Maybe that's a mother's job, but I had to wonder how, after all that had happened, she still managed to believe we'd get through this. Or maybe she didn't. Maybe she was trying to convince me as much as she was trying to convince herself.

“Come on, don’t look so sad.” My mom pushed my bangs off my forehead so she could look straight into my watery eyes. “You might actually discover you like being back in Boston.”

I highly doubted it, but I didn’t tell her that. I also didn’t tell her about Sean.

One of the reasons I didn’t tell my mother about Sean’s driveway confession is that I knew what she’d say: “That boy needs to learn some manners.” It was pretty much her cure-all for all societal unpleasantries, from people who tried to cut in front of her at the grocery store to children who cry in restaurants while their parents pretend they can’t hear them. She truly believed that we’d all get along just fine if everyone knew the proper way to behave. So, while I knew she would have felt bad for me and offered a sympathetic hug after finding out about Sean, I also knew that she’d be planning to write about the correct way to break off a relationship for her next column, perhaps adding that a cotton hanky should be on hand (Polite Patty, as TJ and I once nicknamed her, hated paper tissues). It was just easier to let her believe that I was a mess because we were leaving Chicago.

My mother’s nationally syndicated etiquette column runs in newspapers all over the country, which means no matter where I am, I can always get advice from my mom. I used to wish she wrote under a pseudonym instead of her real name, Patricia Abbott. That way, nobody would expect me to know the right way to eat an artichoke or ask me which fork to use for the endive salad (just for the record, you start with the utensil on the outside and work your way in). But, having a mother who knows exactly when you can wear white, who can teach you how to deposit a lemon pit discreetly in your napkin so nobody notices, and who gives you monogrammed stationery every year for your birthday (for thank-you cards, of course) does rub off on you. Which is why, instead



of sobbing into a snot-soaked Dunkin Donuts napkin at gate B13, I used small puffs and folded it in half after each discreet blow.

The middle seat. In the last row. The row that doesn't recline, but does put you up close and intimate with every single flush taking place in the lavatory on the other side of the cardboard-thin wall. Not to mention the postlavatory smells emanating from passengers who sat in the gate area for two hours wolfing down bratwurst and burritos with a Cinnabon chaser while the woman behind the United Airlines desk announced yet another delay due to the snowstorm in Boston.

Yes, the middle seat in the last row was the perfect ending to a perfectly crappy morning. The fact that I was stuffed between TJ and a woman who had obviously never been taught to share the armrest, but *had* learned that chewing Big Red gum as loudly and rapidly as possible will reduce the effects of cabin pressure, was just the icing on the cake.

"Why do you insist on wearing that?" I asked TJ, my eyes not actually looking at him. You'd think that we would have become allies through this ordeal with my dad, but instead the opposite had happened. It almost seemed like the angrier I felt, the harder TJ tried to see my dad's side in all of this, almost protective of him. TJ didn't get it at all.

"What?" he asked.

I couldn't bring myself to say "my sweatshirt." But it was my sweatshirt, emblazoned with BROWN in capital letters across the front. Only now it should say FAILURE, or LOSER. Or maybe IDIOT, since I'd believed the guy in the admissions office when he'd told me I was a shoo-in (okay, those weren't his exact words,