

CAROLYN MACKLER

BLOOMSBURY

The Universe Is Expanding and So Am I

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Froggy Welsh the Fourth is trying to get inside my jeans.

That should be fine because he's my boyfriend and we've been publicly and officially together for five months and we were privately together for two months last fall and we've already made out and he's gone up my shirt and right now we're locked in my bedroom on a sunny Wednesday afternoon in early June while my parents are at work and my brother is at the gym and my sister is thousands of miles from New York City, finishing her two-year stint in Africa.

But there's a big problem.

The problem is that I've fallen out of like with Froggy. It was never love, but Froggy is my first boyfriend, and the fact that he wanted to be with me, publicly and officially, seemed like a miracle. So I was okay with like. I could deal with like.

To be clear, I'm not saying that *Froggy* is the miracle. He's a

dorky-in-a-good-way sixteen-year-old guy. He's medium height and skinny with fluffy hair, pinkish skin, and a stubby nose. He's talented at trombone and graphic design, and not altogether unpopular in our tenth-grade class. That's where the miracle comes in. While I'm not altogether unpopular either and I have some attributes of my own, I'm definitely not skinny. On good days, I consider myself curvy. On regular days, more like chunky. On bad days, I'm plain old fat. In my prestigious private school on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, there aren't a lot of fat girls. And the few plus-size girls who amble apologetically around the hallways never score boyfriends.

So, yeah, I've been super grateful to have Froggy, and I've also liked the making-out and up-my-shirt aspects, especially kissing until our lips are numb and various quadrants of our bodies are wriggling with desire. But then yesterday, as we were making out on a bench in Central Park, a few blocks from school, I had this weird feeling that I was kissing a golden retriever. This was new. Not the kissing part, because we've done a lot of that. But the new sensation was that his tongue felt slobbery and long, like it was trying to retrieve a dog treat from behind my molars. After a few minutes, I wiped my face with my hand and made an excuse about how I forgot a final exam review sheet and had to run back to Brewster before our Global Studies teacher left for the day.

All last night I was stressed. I kept wondering why kissing Froggy had grossed me out. Was I not into him anymore? But how can that happen when nothing between us changed from Monday when we had a perfectly fine good-bye kiss in the

empty stairwell near the computer cluster to Tuesday's slobberfest on the bench? Also, if I truly wasn't into Froggy anymore, what was I supposed to do about that? Is canine-kissing grounds for a breakup?

As I was tossing in bed I decided that the slobbery kiss had to be a fluke. And the fluke had to be because Froggy was stressed about the end of school and therefore not exercising proper tongue control. Mom is an adolescent psychologist, and she frequently says that academic stress hits everyone in different ways. In our case, there are six days left of sophomore year and teachers are slamming us with homework. I decided I needed to forget yesterday and give Froggy and his tongue another shot.

That's why I invited him to my apartment today, and that's how we ended up making out in my room. But as soon as we closed my door, we sat on my bed and pressed our lips together and . . . nope. No chemistry. Not even a spark of physics or just plain human biology. And that's when I knew that—gasp, gulp, crap—I'm not into Froggy anymore.

This is a bad thing to realize as we're on my bed and he's sliding his hand across my stomach to the waistband of my jeans.

"Virginia." Froggy sighs, pushing up my shirt.

I used to cringe at the thought of him seeing my belly region. That was back when we were secretly hooking up. Once we publicly and officially got together, fooling around felt so good that I didn't stop him. But now that I've fallen out of like, I don't want to be doing this anymore. I glance longingly at my

bedside table, at the cover of *Fates and Furies*. I wish I could be reading right now. Not only are the main characters, Lotto and Mathilde, the cutest couple ever, but they met at Vassar, which is where I want to go to college.

Froggy sweeps his hand south and starts fiddling with the button on my jeans.

"Uhhhh," I mumble. I clasp my hand over his and drag him back up north. Froggy and I have never been inside each other's jeans before, and I'm definitely not ready to start now.

"Hmmm?" he asks.

I cough and, for lack of a more imaginative word, repeat my brilliant earlier statement. "Uhhhh."

Despite the fact that Froggy and I have been together, on and off, since the beginning of sophomore year, we still suck at talking to each other about what our hands are doing.

"Is everything . . . ?" Froggy pushes his hair out of his eyes.

I know he's asking if I'm okay, if *we're* okay. I don't know what to say because even though I've fallen out of like with Froggy, I can't break up with him. That exact item is at the top of my current list. I often create lists in my head about important things in my life, and sometimes I even write them down. Here's rule number one of a list that I've been thinking about this spring:

HOW TO MAKE SURE SKINNY GIRLS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE BOYFRIENDS, RULE #1:

It's no secret that the skinny girls score the bulk of the guys. It's not that I have anything against skinny girls as long as

they're not bitchy and they don't make fat girls feel like slovenly slobs. But it's still not fair that skinny girls get first, second, third, fourth, and hundredth dibs on the pool of available guys. So if you're a chunky chick and you managed to get a nice boyfriend, don't ever let him go.

I know my lists tend toward the harsh, but whatever. There are very few places that girls, especially teen girls, especially fat teen girls, can be brutally honest. And my imagination is one of them.

Also, maybe it seems harsh when I call myself fat. The truth is that sometimes I *feel* harsh about it and I wish I were born into a skinny body with a kickass metabolism. The list I made up when Froggy and I first got together was called The Fat Girl Code of Conduct, and it smacked of low self-esteem. I've come a long way since then. In general I don't hate my body as much as I used to. I'll never be a twig, but I've learned to embrace my curves. Most days. Okay, some days.

"I have to pee," I say to Froggy.

That will buy me five minutes to figure out what to do. Maybe I can come back with a cold shower and push his horndog self into it.

But then, just as I'm standing up, I hear the front door unlock.

"Anyone home?" my brother shouts.

Froggy yanks down his shirt, rolls off my bed, and stands up so quickly he knocks into my lamp, which topples onto the floor. My door is locked, but I'm freaking out so much I can't

hook my bra. And it's not like my boobs are cooperating. By the time I rein them in, my hands are sticky with sweat.

It's not that Byron doesn't know about Froggy. My family is aware I have a boyfriend. Froggy comes over to watch movies, though usually we go to his apartment.

"I didn't think . . . your brother . . ." Froggy picks up the lamp and adjusts the shade.

"Me neither," I say. "He's always at the gym until dinner."

My chest is tight, making it hard to take a good breath. The last thing I want is to be caught midhookup by my *brother*. It's bad enough that Byron smirks when I mention Froggy, like the fact that I have a boyfriend is a joke to him.

I consider suggesting we hide in my room until Froggy has to leave for jazz ensemble. Usually I walk him uptown and then I grab dumplings or scallion pancakes at Pearls on the way home. Not that Upper West Side dumplings compare to the ones in Chinatown. On the weekends that I'm not forced to go to our country house in Connecticut, my friend Alyssa Wu, whose grandparents live in Chinatown, takes me to insider dim sum places.

"What should we do?" Froggy asks. He peers out my window like he's contemplating alternate exit routes. Not an option. My family lives on the top floor of a fifteen-story building on the Upper West Side of New York City. We face west, which means we can see the sunset and the Hudson River and New Jersey stretching out to the horizon.

I shouldn't be blindsided that my brother is here. Now that Columbia has let out for the semester he's living at home, but

he's mostly at the gym or hanging out in Brooklyn with old high school friends. In a few weeks he's flying to Paris for an international relations program at the Sorbonne where he'll make up credits that he lost when he got suspended from college last semester. Byron's suspension, in our family, is referred to as "the ordeal."

Translation: It happened, it's over, and now we're not supposed to talk about it.

My summer plans do not involve eating baguettes and strolling along the Seine. My parents wanted me to go on Outward Bound. That's a mountain-climbing, character-building, pooping-in-the-woods expedition. Both my older sister, Anaïs, and then Byron did Outward Bound after their sophomore year of high school. I flat out refused. Even if it didn't involve pooping into a hole and wiping with a leaf, it didn't sound like my idea of a good time. My parents finally agreed to let me stay Inward Bound as long as I agreed to two terms.

1. I get a college-application-enhancing internship.
2. I get my driver's license.

Term one is going to be awesome. Dad is lining up an internship at the company where he's the chief operating officer. Not just for me, but for my best friend, Shannon, who's been on the West Coast since last August but is coming home soon. Dad works in the music industry, creating streaming software. His company is called Ciel Media. *Ciel* means sky in French, my least favorite language, but I try not to hold that

fact against the company. There's a pool table in the lounge area and a stocked fridge, and they sometimes receive free concert tickets and get to meet celebrities.

Fantasy: A hot celebrity guy, like a seventeen-year-old shaggy-haired drummer, notices me in the Ciel office and we fall madly in love and I drop out of Brewster and travel the country with him, the envy of drooling groupies.

Reality: I get a selfie with a hot celebrity guy's shaggy hair in the background.

The driver's license term is all sucky reality. I got my learner's permit when I turned sixteen in March, and every weekend since then my parents have forced me to take a driver's ed class at a driving school near our country house in Connecticut. Even with all that driver's ed, I still panic and forget what side of the road I'm supposed to drive on. Dad is determined to help me get my required forty hours behind the wheel, and he's already signed me up for my road test on July tenth.

So, yeah, that's the less-than-ideal part of my summer plan.

While Froggy is lacing his sneakers, I grab my phone and send a group text to Shannon and Alyssa. They don't know each other because Alyssa and I became friends while Shannon was in Washington State this year. But this is an emergency, and I need both of their advice as quickly as possible.

My brother just walked in on Froggy and me, I tell them. **Well, not IN-in. We're hiding in my bedroom, and he's in the living room. Help! What should we do?**

Nothing from Shannon, but Alyssa writes almost immediately.

Too much info, she texts. **Spare me.**

"Let's get out of here," I say to Froggy as I slide my phone in my bag. "We'll wave and make a quick exit. No time for questions."

"What if your brother asks what I'm doing here?"

"We won't engage," I tell him, borrowing some of Mom's TherapistSpeak. Mom is always peppering her language with phrases from the world of psychology like "don't engage" and "comfort zone."

"Uh, okay. Okay." Froggy tweaks his nose and grabs his trombone case. He's nervous about seeing my brother. I wish I could tell him about "the ordeal," about how Byron isn't actually that cool after all. I told Shannon about it. She was already away in Washington State so I texted the drama to her as it unfolded. But with my New York City people, like Froggy and Alyssa, I didn't say a word about the trouble my brother was in. For one, I didn't want either of them to dump me as a girlfriend/friend if they found out the horrible thing he did. But also my family is private about anything that doesn't make us look perfect. I'm already on the low end of the Shreves Family Totem Pole, and blabbering our business would plummet me to subterranean levels.

I open the door, hoping Byron has decided to shower or lift weights in his room, but nope. He's strolling out of the kitchen with a bottle of Vitaminwater in his hand. And not Vitaminwater Zero. The full 120 calories.

My brother is twenty and tall with a lean athletic build, and he doesn't even have to work for it. He can consume a box

of Nutter Butters, three cheeseburgers, and a gallon of Vitaminwater and not gain a pound. He has tousled brown hair, maple-syrup eyes, and a confident jaw. He plays rugby and wants to be an international lawyer someday. He's fluent in French, and even though he graduated from Brewster two years ago, his smile is still on the cover of their promotional brochures.

I didn't get his gene pool, but I'm okay with that. Most days.

"What's up, Gin?" Byron takes a sip of his Vitaminwater. Then he notices Froggy slinking out of my room behind me and says, "Okay . . . uh . . . *wow*."

I head quickly toward the front door, hoping Froggy is behind me.

Byron leans against the foyer wall. "Do you know when Mom and Dad are getting home?"

"I don't know," I say.

My fingers are trembling as I twist the lock. When I finally open the door, Byron reaches over to fist-bump Froggy. In my brother's cool-people world, people fist-bump with ease. But Froggy thinks a high five is coming, so he presents an open palm.

"It's a fist bump," I offer.

Froggy lowers his hand and mumbles, "Sorry."

Byron laughs. "It's not like you need to apologize."

Froggy starts blinking fast. I catch his eye and motion him through the door, letting it slam behind us. In the elevator he rubs at his nose and I stare at the descending numbers. On the ninth floor, ancient Mrs. Myers hobbles on. She's about ninety and

always thinks I'm my sister, then seems shocked that I'm no longer gorgeous and skinny like Anaïs. Yes, Mrs. Myers, with her thinning hair and raisin face, feels entitled to critique my appearance.

Sure enough, Mrs. Myers fastens her milky eyes on me, shifts her gaze over to Froggy, and then veers back to me.

"Be careful not to let yourself go, Anaïs," she warbles. "Men like their bank accounts big, not their women."

I stare at the ground, hoping we can pretend that comment never happened. But then Mrs. Myers clutches Froggy's arm and says, "Don't you agree with me, son, about the bank accounts?"

Froggy shrugs. No one says another word for the rest of the ride down.

On the street, the air is warm and green leaves are unfurling on the trees.

"Want to get dumplings?" Froggy says, clearing his throat. "There's this place called Pearls . . . my parents and I went last weekend. It's good."

"Pearls?" I ask innocently, like I have no clue what he's talking about, like it's not my favorite non-Chinatown place to indulge.

HOW TO MAKE SURE SKINNY GIRLS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE BOYFRIENDS, RULE #2:

Don't act like you're intimately acquainted with all the restaurants within a twenty-block radius of your apartment. That's between you and your slow-as-a-sloth metabolism.

"It's over on Amsterdam," Froggy says.

"I'm not hungry," I lie. "But I'll go with you."

HOW TO MAKE SURE SKINNY GIRLS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE BOYFRIENDS, RULE #2.5: Duh. Of course you want dumplings. Fried pork dumplings! But he CAN'T see you chowing down and think, "So that's why she's big like a rich person's bank account." Even though you're not in like with him anymore, he's still your boyfriend and you still need him to think you live on kale and raw fruit.

"Are you sure?" Froggy asks. "You just had a plum at lunch."

"I'm fine," I say, smiling stiffly. "I'm great."

HOW TO MAKE SURE SKINNY GIRLS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO HAVE BOYFRIENDS, RULE #3: You are always fine and great (and grateful he's with you). Moody and demanding? That's the domain of skinny girlfriends and nasty old ladies. Which you are neither.

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I'm a girl who likes to itemize things, so here's what's going through my head as I'm walking home from not eating dumplings:

BRAIN FARTS, COURTESY OF VIRGINIA SHREVES, AGE 16 ¼

1. I hate that Byron saw me with Froggy. Ever since "the ordeal," I've felt icky around my brother when it comes to anything having to do with sex or, in Froggy's and my case, all the stuff leading up to the act.
2. "The ordeal." One evening last October, Dad got a call from the dean of students at Columbia explaining that a woman, who I later found out was a Canadian college junior named Annie Mills, had accused Byron of date

rape. They'd gone to a party together. My brother got blackout drunk and says he doesn't remember anything. A committee assembled by the Office of Sexual Misconduct voted to suspend him for the semester. Yes, my brother who, for the first decade and a half of my life, I considered a god to be worshiped and idolized.

3. Byron's nosedive from the pedestal made me reassess everything—how I've always compared myself to the rest of my family and haven't measured up, how maybe that assessment was wrong, how I actually don't need my brother's approval, how maybe my family's negative comments about my body were their problem and not mine. Somewhere along the way I started having fun with my body instead of hating it. I even had the confidence to turn Froggy from a secret hookup to a public and official boyfriend.
4. Oh. Crap. Froggy.

I'm angsting over item number four when I step into the crosswalk.

"Cool hair," a hipster guy says as he's coming toward me.

I catch his eye and smile. As I do, I notice him checking me out. I have on a tank top that reveals some cleavage. Recently I ditched my tan grandma bras and bought hot pinks and multi-colored tie-dyes. Sometimes, like now, I even flaunt the bra straps through my tank top.

Last year, I NEVER would have shown off my bra straps. Last year, I hated girls who did that. Or maybe I hated myself because I didn't.

As I reach the west side of Broadway, I run my fingers through my shoulder-length hair. I dyed it purple back in December, mostly to piss Mom off. Since then, I tried pink for a while but eventually returned to purple. I added streaks of green bangs last week, a process that involved bleach and tinfoil and a plastic bag over my head.

"Hello, Virginia," the doorman says when I come into my lobby. His name is Alberto, and he works most afternoons. "You have a package."

"From Walla Walla?"

He nods and hands it to me. As I step into the elevator I sniff the parcel. It would be *so* like Shannon to send onions. She's random that way. Shannon and I have been best friends since we started Brewster in sixth grade. She has a stutter and I was the fat girl, so it was a match made in outcast heaven. For this whole school year, Shannon has been in Washington State while her dad researches the Walla Walla onion for his latest oddball coffee-table book.

As the elevator lifts, I think about how when Shannon left last August we both bawled. I doubted I would survive the first week. But I made it through the year and I even made new friends. In early July Shannon will be back and we're going to rock our summer internship together.

I tear open the package and pull out a homemade rainbow

pot holder and an index card on which she's written in green marker:

V— Text as soon as you get this! I have big crazy news. xxS

I pull out my phone and text Shannon, **Big crazy news? And what's up with the pot holder??**

Shannon doesn't write back, so I walk down the hall and unlock the front door to the apartment. Mom and Byron are in the kitchen drinking iced tea and laughing. Panic creeps over me. What if Byron told her about Froggy and me, and now they're having a hearty chuckle at my expense? I stuff Shannon's pot holder in my pocket and slip my phone into my bag. I'm about to reverse back out the door when I hear my sister's voice.

Anaïs has been in the Peace Corps for the past two years, doing health-care work in a rural village in a country in western Africa called Burkina Faso. No cell phones, no Wi-Fi, just letters that take a month to arrive and rare crackly phone calls.

"Virginia!" Mom says, gesturing me into the kitchen. "You've got to see Anaïs!"

"Is Virginia home?" I hear my sister saying.

I freeze in the doorway. I was fourteen the last time I saw Anaïs in person *or* on a screen. I hadn't started high school yet. I hadn't been kissed. I still worshiped Byron.

"Come quick." Mom points to the laptop on the counter. "She's in a hotel lobby and only has a few minutes."

I tentatively approach the screen. There's my sister, her eyes dark, her long brown hair hanging around her shoulders. Anaïs is brilliant and willowy and so beautiful that back when she was in New York City, people would come up to her on the street and ask if she was a model. She's eight years older than me, which is a good thing because I've never felt competitive with her. Which is a good thing because I'd lose whatever competition we were in.

"Oh my God . . . you're so old!" Anaïs says to me. "And look at your hair. I love it!"

I smile shyly. I'm not great at accepting compliments, especially when my family is four inches away. I glance behind my sister, at her hotel lobby, at the wall painted in bright blue and yellow.

"What about that eyebrow ring you told me about?" Anaïs asks. "Is it still in?"

I lean closer to the screen and show my sister. Mom clears her throat, no doubt remembering how last Thanksgiving I flew to Seattle to visit Shannon and we both got illegal underage piercings. Shannon pierced her tongue and I did my eyebrow. Mom flipped out and called it barbaric. Eventually, like with my hair, she got used to the eyebrow ring. She recently finished a book proposal about embracing your teenagers' rebellions, and she's calling it "Purple Hair and Piercings." I've read the proposal. It explains how her book would be about teenage behavior in general, but she's including stories about how she resisted her daughter's purple hair and eyebrow piercing, but now she's come to accept them. My secret hope is that her

agent will sell the proposal and she will write the book and it will become a bestseller and Mom will go on a book tour and I'll tag along and they'll hire a stylist to color my hair instead of my mediocre home jobs.

"Where are you, anyway?" I ask my sister.

"I'm in Ouagadougou," she says. "The capital. I finished the Peace Corps a few days ago."

"Then you're flying home through London?" Mom asks.

"I'm staying in London for a little bit." Anaïs pauses and glances to one side, out of the frame of the screen. It looks like there's something else she wants to say, but then she shrugs. "I land in New York City on June twenty-third."

"We'll be there to pick you up," Mom says. "I've already registered you for an MCAT course that starts in July. It's time to start preparing for medical school."

My sister was premed at Brown, and someday she's going to become a big-time doctor, like a heart surgeon or the surgeon general.

"I'd better go," Anaïs says after a second. "I love you guys."

When Byron says good-bye, I watch Anaïs's face to see if her expression changes. I wonder how she feels about our brother. When "the ordeal" first happened, I couldn't be in the same room as him without feeling nauseated. Nine months later, it's still confusing. Being blackout drunk is no excuse, ever. I remain mad at him for what he did to Annie Mills. But every so often Byron mentions an inside joke or does something unexpectedly kind, like charge my phone when it's dying. Then I forget to be mad. Then I feel guilty for not being mad.

I'm frowning about this when my brother touches my arm and gestures me across the kitchen.

"We're cool about this afternoon," he whispers. "You and Froggy. Let's just say I didn't see a thing. No one needs to know."

I give him a grateful smile. "Thanks."

As I said: totally confusing.

"Hey, Gin," Mom says when Byron goes into the living room and turns on the TV. "Wasn't that great to see Anaïs? How was your day?"

Before I can answer, Mom flips her honey-colored hair over her shoulder and scrolls through restaurant menu options on her phone. While Dad and my siblings are tall with brown hair and brown eyes, Mom and I are shorter with light hair and grayish-blue eyes. Supposedly when Mom was younger she used to struggle with her weight, but for as long as I've been around she's slim, she lives on leafy greens, and she works out seven days a week.

"Did you eat yet?" Mom asks me. "Dad's getting home in a half hour, so I'm about to order delivery."

My parents stopped cooking when my sister went to college six years ago. In our house, dinner is delivery or a restaurant.

"No," I say.

"I'll order us salads," Mom says. "After dinner, Dad and Byron are watching the baseball game and I'm going to the gym. Want to join? Get some exercise?"

"I've got a lot of homework. I have a final on Monday, two on Tuesday, one on Wednesday, and a big Humanities essay to

finish by Thursday. Can you proofread my essay before I turn it in?"

I'll admit that was a pivot. But I'd do anything to avoid her gym. Mom and Dad belong to a private gym around the corner called Whole Fitness. In my head I call it Whole Fakeness. I hate trudging along the treadmill while Mom attacks the machines like she's doing battle with her bony thighs. When it comes to exercise, I used to believe the concept should be abolished. But then I discovered kickboxing. Or, more specifically, my kickboxing class with Tisha. My pediatrician gave me Tisha's name over the winter when I was hating my body and doing too many things to hurt it. Even though I was skeptical about joining an exercise class, it's turned out to be awesome. For an hour and a half every Friday afternoon, Tisha leads a bunch of girls as we kick and punch and groove to music. The other girls in the class are from different schools around the city so it's a break from Brewster bitchiness. Also, unlike Whole Fakeness, the walls of the studio aren't lined with mirrors, which makes the class more about feeling good than scowling at your cellulite.

I lug my backpack into my room. We don't have school tomorrow because the teachers have a clerical day, but we're overloaded with review sheets due Friday. I come out for a quick dinner and then dive back into studying. I'm deep in my chemistry review when there's a knock at my door.

"Come in!" I shout.

It's Dad, which is weird. He rarely drops by my room for a chat. With Dad, it's more like we have Things We Do Together: he brings me to see the Knicks or the Yankees, we eat Chinese

food and watch games on TV, he takes me to driver's ed. But as far as cozying up in my bedroom and having spontaneous chats, that never happens. When I was younger I thought it was because he was too busy being a chief operating officer and competing in golf tournaments. But as I got older I realized that Dad doesn't have much to say to me. He can't show me off to his friends like he did with gorgeous Anaïs, and he can't male bond like he does with Byron. At least he's not as critical of my body as he used to be. He finally chilled on that when I worked up the nerve to tell him that my body wasn't his to discuss. But that doesn't mean we're going to win any father-daughter-relationship prizes.

"Aren't you watching the game?" I ask.

"Commercial break. Yankees are up two."

I blink a few times. Did he really come here to tell me the Yankee score?

"Mom mentioned there's no school tomorrow," Dad says. "I'm taking the afternoon off to head to Connecticut and meet with a tree guy at the house. You can come along, and we'll get in some driving practice."

My heart drops into that place in my stomach that dreads and fears driving. I completed driver's ed last weekend and even had to suffer through the required two-hour parent-teen safety class. Dad was so pumped about it he took notes and raised his hand in class and later had us both sign a contract about safe practices for once I have my license. I didn't tell him that it's optimistic to imagine I'll actually get a license out of all this.

"I have to study," I say. "I have a bunch of things due Friday."

"Your road test is a month away, Gin. You can study in the morning, and even while I'm walking the property with the tree guy. Plus, as we talked about in the safety class, you need forty hours of practice before you're allowed to take your road test. I would guess we're only at thirty-one hours. And that's being generous."

When Dad uses his chief-operating-officer voice, there's no use arguing with him. I'm a lowly employee in his executive universe.

"Meet me at the garage at noon," Dad says. "Tomorrow will be our day of three-point turns."

In three-point-three seconds he's going to remind me that no Shreves has ever failed their road test.

"You know," Dad says, clearing his throat. "No Shreves has ever failed their road test."

Boom.

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