

# **The Boyfriend List: (15 Guys, 11 Shrink Appointments, 4 Ceramic Frogs,... Study Guide**

**The Boyfriend List: (15 Guys, 11 Shrink Appointments, 4 Ceramic Frogs,... by E. Lockhart**

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# Plot Summary

The Boyfriend List is the humorous story of fifteen-year-old Ruby Oliver's quest to discover what about her love life has driven her to debilitating panic attacks.

After being dumped by her boyfriend and becoming "a leper" in school, fifteen-year-old Ruby Oliver has begun suffering from panic attacks that leave her heart racing, her brow sweaty, and her legs shaking. Her parents, worried that she might be becoming anorexic, order her to the care of Doctor Z, a neighborhood psychologist. Figuring that Ruby's panic attacks might have something to do with the plethora of romantic relationships she's been having, Doctor Z gives Ruby the assignment of chronicling her love life, from the moment she felt her first romantic flutter, until now. Although she's initially reluctant of the task, Ruby wracks her brain and comes up with a list of the top fifteen guys she thinks have had the strongest impact on her life.

The first boyfriend Ruby remembers having is Adam Cox in preschool. When they first started playing together, the two were inseparable. When they got older, however, they split up to attend different schools and Ruby didn't see Adam again until she was in high school and their schools met up for an interschool dance. Adam was embarrassed to be seen with her and wanted nothing to do with her, even insulting her glasses, calling her "Four Eyes," in front of everyone. Ruby realizes that she's not as popular as she thinks and suddenly, she cares about whether boys like her or not.

Through each of the fifteen reminiscences, Ruby draws the reader back to her current situation and pieces of the puzzle eventually fit together, giving the reader a firm grasp of what Ruby truly is going through. Ruby's first real boyfriend, Jackson Clarke, has just broken up with her after six blissful months together and Ruby didn't even see it coming. A week before Jackson broke up with her, he invited Ruby to the Spring Fling and she had already purchased an expensive dress. The day after Jackson broke up with her, Ruby found out that he was dating her best friend Kim. Since Ruby and Kim had told each other everything about their romantic hopes and dreams, Ruby was especially devastated, feeling that Kim had betrayed her. After hearing about Kim and Jackson, Ruby had her first panic attack. It certainly wouldn't be her last. A few days before Spring Fling, Jackson called to say that Kim was going to be out of town for the weekend and would Ruby still like to attend the dance with him? Even though she knew it was a bad idea, Ruby agreed, secretly hoping that once Jackson saw her in her silver dress, he'd realize that he made a terrible mistake.

On the day of the dance, Ruby's heart fluttered with excitement. She and Jackson had a great time together and at least in Ruby's eyes, it became clear that Jackson still had feelings for her. When she thought no one else was looking, Ruby leaned in and kissed Jackson. He definitely kissed her back. Unfortunately, they weren't alone and the biggest gossip in school, Heidi, told everyone that Ruby was throwing herself at Jackson and that he turned her down. Word got back to Kim and when she returned home from vacation with her family, she began writing nasty messages about Ruby all



over the school. Soon, no one - not even the biggest geeks in school - would talk to Ruby.

After going through the list with Doctor Z, Ruby realizes that rarely speaks her mind with boys and as a result, she is walked over. She decides to make a change and for the first time in her life, feels free.



# Prologue

## Prologue Summary

The novel opens with fifteen-year-old Ruby Oliver's plea to the reader, where she says, "Before anyone reading this thinks to call me a slut - or even just imagines that I'm incredibly popular - let me point out that this list includes absolutely every single boy I've ever had the slightest any-kind-of-anything with" (p. 1).

Ruby has been sent to a shrink, Doctor Z, to help battle the unknown emotions leading to her panic attacks. Doctor Z has given Ruby the assignment of writing down every guy who has ever meant something to her, because Doctor Z believes Ruby's romantic life is the leading cause of her anxiety. As far as Ruby is concerned, only three types of people need shrinks: lunatics, tragics, and neurotics, and she is none of these. Ruby acknowledges that she's been through a lot in the past few weeks, including losing her boyfriend, losing all her close friends, drinking her first beer, getting in fights and sexually questionable activities with strange boys, losing a lacrosse game, and failing a math test. After her fifth panic attack, Ruby's overly-involved parents insist she see a psychiatrist.

## Prologue Analysis

The reader learns a lot about Ruby Oliver and the many relationships in her life in this opening chapter of the novel. Straight away, the reader learns that Ruby and her boyfriend Jackson have just broken up. Something about the break-up has triggered a falling out with Ruby's close circle of friends: Cricket, Nora, and Kim. In the wake of her break-up, Ruby has become an outcast in school and has been labeled "a slut." The other main relationship adding stress to Ruby's life is her relationship with her humorously overbearing parents. It's clear that Ruby's parents love her desperately, but they hover over every move she makes in their constant quest for safety.

Immediately, the format of the novel becomes apparent. The book is written as the actual boyfriend list Ruby has created for Doctor Z. Therefore, it is written in a journalistic style, and the reader often feels as if they are reading a diary rather than a novel. There are multiple footnotes scattered through Ruby's initial entries as she adds information, changes her opinions, and retraces thoughts. The structure is a bit clunky and difficult to follow at times, but once the reader gets into the flow of the writing, the footnotes actually add a bit of humor to the text and give a deeper analysis of Ruby's thought.



# Chapter One (Adam)

## Chapter One (Adam) Summary

Adam Cox was the first boy Ruby had a crush on in preschool. She stared at him for months and even named her stuffed bunny after him, before mustering enough courage to ask him over to play. They were best friends for most of preschool but after that, Ruby went one way for kindergarten and Adam went another. Ruby didn't see Adam again until freshman year of high school, when Tate Prep organized a mixer with another local high school. Ruby attended her best friends - Cricket, Nora, and Kim. When Nora and Cricket went off to dance together, Ruby and Kim amused themselves by rating the new guys on a scale-of-hotness. Kim seemed particularly interested in one guy with dark eyebrows and shaggy hair. Upon closer inspection, Ruby realized that she knew him. It was Adam Cox. Ruby dragged Kim across the dance floor to talk to him, but when she introduced herself, Adam swore he didn't know her. After Ruby insisted that they were best friends in preschool, Adam turned his back on her and to his friends, called her "Four-Eyes." When she heard this, Kim went absolutely ballistic, calling Adam every name in the book before their principal came to escort the girls away. Kim and Ruby began writing in a joint notebook, detailing everything they learned about boys, including how to attract them, how to embarrass them, and how to make them fall in love with you.

## Chapter One (Adam) Analysis

Ruby does not want to discuss Adam with Doctor Z for many reasons, the main being that the story of Adam isn't as much a story of romance as it is a story of friendship. To Ruby, this story represents her relationship with Kim before everything went belly-up. Kim is a fiercely loyal friend, proving her dedication to Ruby to berating Adam in public, and being escorted out of a school dance to protect Ruby's honor. At the time, it seemed like nothing could tear apart the bond between these two girls. Thinking about her friendship with Kim makes Ruby feel extremely depressed, as if everything good in her life has been taken away from her.

The story with Adam also highlights Ruby's place in high school. She is pretty and well liked, but not one of the most popular girls in school. She has (had) her best friends, and that is enough. The reader learns that Ruby is on the swim team and that she wears glasses, which she is somewhat self-conscious of. Despite the fact that they are pretty, Ruby and her friends struggle to find boyfriends. This prompts them to start writing *The Boy Book: A Study of Habits and Behaviors, Plus Techniques for Taming Them*.



## Chapter Two (Finn)

### Chapter Two (Finn) Summary

Ruby has been broken up with Jackson for sixteen days and counting. Even though it's only her third meeting with Doctor Z, she is sick of talking about the boyfriend list and doesn't want to discuss her second boyfriend, Finn. When Doctor Z says they can talk about her most current boyfriend (Jackson), Ruby clams up before begrudgingly saying she'd rather talk about Finn.

Finn Murphy was in Ruby's second grade class. He was kind of nerdy and shy, but Ruby still liked him. They bonded over a wildcat book in the library, and as the two were excitedly discussing the book together, fellow classmates began teasing them: "Ruby and Finn, sitting in a tree! K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" This taunt went on for the rest of the year, and while Finn never seemed to mind (and even seemed to enjoy it), Ruby was mortified. She went out of her way to avoid Finn, refusing to sit next to him at lunch or even near him on the swing set at school. Yet when she did make eye contact with him, Finn would always give her a sweet, shrimp smile suggesting that he wished it were true.

By sophomore year, Finn had matured into a very tall, very handsome young man, and Ruby's friends began to take notice. A week into classes, Kim and Finn started dating. It was like habit that even after Finn began dating her best friend, Ruby still avoided him, shying away from speaking to him and avoiding being near him. After a few weeks of this, Kim confronted Ruby to ask why she hated him. Rather than say, "Oh, it's nothing" and start treating Finn like a normal human being, Ruby told Kim all about second grade and how she thought Finn might still be in love with her. Now sitting in Doctor Z's chair, Ruby realizes that it might have been a mistake. She shouldn't have said anything so selfish and self-centered to her best friend.

### Chapter Two (Finn) Analysis

This chapter highlights Ruby's insecurity. Even in the third grade, Ruby was extremely concerned about what others thought of her, and she went out of her way to avoid being teased for befriending a nerd. As children, it's clear that Ruby and Finn got along well and might have been great friends, but she backed away from the relationship under peer pressure. Ruby cares greatly how others perceive her. The reader has seen this many times throughout the novel. First, in the way she believes Doctor Z is interpreting her stories. Again during the dance when she over-analyzed the way she looked to the boys, and multiple times as she gets ready for dates with various boys.

Each of the stories on the boyfriend list highlights a different aspect of Ruby's personality, giving small clues about her panic attacks and how she will grow as a character as the story progresses. It's clear in Finn's story that Ruby will have to overcome her crippling insecurities if she ever wants to build a true relationship, one in





which she finds value in herself, not just in her partner's compliments. The closest she has come to this is with Jackson, and she admits she was surprised that he was attracted to her without make-up on, or sweaty after swim practice. Yet she placed too high a value on Jackson's opinion of their relationship and not enough on her own.

It is also interesting to note that Kim and Finn's relationship stretches on through many more chapters of the novel, forcing Ruby to analyze her insecurities about Finn from multiple angles.



## Chapter Three (Hutch)

### Chapter Three (Hutch) Summary

When Ruby was writing the boyfriend list, she almost didn't include Hutch. It's not that anything terrible happened between them, but that Hutch has become "a leper" at Tate High. Hutch wasn't always unpopular. In fact, in fourth grade, he was one of the most popular kids in class, so Ruby was over the moon with excitement when Hutch put a bag of gummy bears in her locker one morning. When she pulled them out, she looked around and saw Hutch grinning at her from the corner. The two never talked about the gift, and certainly never held hands, but Ruby hid the gummy bears under her pillow and ate them slowly at night, thinking about how she kind-of had a boyfriend, and how nice it felt to be loved. A few weeks later, however, Ruby was mortified to see Ariel, the most popular girl in school, walking around with a giant bag of gummy bears and Hutch standing in the corner, grinning dopily at her, too.

During the same appointment, Ruby also discusses how none of her friends had spoken to her since Spring Fling when "the terrible thing" happened. But today, Nora accidentally bumped into Ruby at the cafeteria and had to acknowledge her presence. Ruby, desperate to reconnect with her best friends, tried to play nice, but Nora wasn't having it: "You can't make out with someone else's boyfriend, Roo. It's against the rules" (p. 48). It's revealed that Ruby kissed Jackson at the Spring Fling, after they had broken up, and while Jackson was dating Kim, Ruby's other best friend. Ruby is outraged that her friends are angry with her. After all, hadn't Kim broken the rules too by hooking up with Ruby's ex-boyfriend minutes after they broke up? Unfortunately, as far as Ruby's friends are concerned, Kim stuck to the rules and Ruby broke them. Now she can't be trusted.

During the time that everyone was giving Ruby the silent treatment, only Meghan, the girl who drives Ruby to school each morning, would talk to her. Although she plays along, this annoys Ruby because she isn't friends with Meghan. Two weeks later, not even Meghan would join Ruby at the lunch table.

### Chapter Three (Hutch) Analysis

Becoming "a leper" is what Ruby fears more than anything else in her teenage life. Hutch eats alone during lunch, has no real friends, and no one to laugh at his terrible jokes. Everything about Hutch seems to push him further outside of "normal" bounds. He has scraggly heavy-metal hair, grey teeth, and a sense of humor no one understands because his punch lines are usually quotes from heavy-metal songs no one has ever heard of. Ruby pities Hutch and is terrified of being like him. To the reader, however, it appears that Hutch enjoys who he is. He's comfortable in his own skin and probably enjoys his life a lot more than Ruby does, at least right now.



Ruby's relationship with Meghan is interesting. Meghan is in Ruby's grade but she's dating a senior, so she rarely spends time with girls her own age. Ruby doesn't like Meghan because she thinks Meghan is too sexy, and she's clearly jealous of the attention Meghan gets from boys. Ruby's disdain for Meghan is fascinating because to the reader, Meghan seems like a really nice girl. She drives Ruby to and from school every day, invites her to eat lunch when it's clear no one else is talking to her, and says nice things about Ruby in front of her boyfriend. Ruby also admits that, "We'd sing along to the radio and make up stupid lyrics, mostly. Sometimes we'd try on each other's lip gloss or copy each other's math homework" (p. 55). To the reader, it definitely sounds like Meghan and Ruby are friends, but Ruby refuses to admit it to herself, just as she refused to admit that Finn was her friend in the previous chapter.



## Chapter Four (Gideon)

### Chapter Four (Gideon) Summary

Gideon Van Deusen was Nora's older brother, but that didn't stop sixth-grade Ruby from falling madly in love with him. She realized her crush when Gideon came home from a church function where the minister had talked to the teenagers about abstinence. He had baked two different loaves of banana bread - one where he added the ingredients in the proper order, and one where he had added the same ingredients, but out of order. The first loaf turned out beautifully. The second loaf was dense and sunken and generally unappetizing. The minister told the kids that the bread was symbolic of sex and marriage. If you do everything in the right order (wait to have sex until after you're married), your relationship will turn out beautifully. If you do things out of order, you'll be condemned to a messed-up life. When Gideon came home, he said it didn't really matter whether or not he agreed with the minister's message, he hated the delivery: "You have to think for yourself," he told Ruby (p. 58). From then on, Ruby decided Gideon was the most fascinating person she'd ever met, and she even wrote Ruby loves GVD on the sole of her shoe. When Gideon found out about the crush, he was very sweet and told Ruby that he was flattered. Nothing else happened.

In this chapter, Ruby also describes the evolution of her relationship with Jackson. They met during eighth grade, when Jackson mistakenly put a dead frog in Ruby's locker (he had meant to drop the frog in Ariel's locker). The next year, Jackson moved to Tokyo with his family, but returned to Seattle during their sophomore year at Tate High. He recognized Ruby immediately and began leaving notes in her locker. The first note he wrote to her was an apology for the dead frog. The second note was asking if she needed a ride home from school. On the first day Ruby rode home with Jackson, he took her out for French fries and kissed her with a mouth full of mayonnaise. When Jackson kissed her, Ruby says she no longer felt like a loser.

### Chapter Four (Gideon) Analysis

Gideon's message to Ruby, that she has to think for herself, will prove to be the most important lesson Ruby still has to learn. In nearly every chapter, Ruby has been given the message that she needs to think for herself, that she shouldn't care what other's think about her, but she has yet to realize the value of this herself.

The story of how Ruby and Jackson met serves solely for plot. The dead frog Jackson leaves in Ruby's locker is foreshadowing for the four ceramic frogs he will leave in her locker during the first four weeks of their relationship. The fact that the first frog Jackson leaves is dead, even if it is mistakenly left for Ruby, should be seen as a bad omen: clearly their relationship will turn out poorly. Despite the fact that they've now broken up and Jackson is dating her best friend, Ruby still clings to the hope that she and Jackson will get back together, like couples in the movies do. This is just a "dramatic crisis"

before Jackson realizes how much he loves her. Jackson's family trip to Tokyo, and the fact that he speaks Japanese, serves as foreshadowing for his relationship with Kim, who is Japanese.



## Chapter Five (Ben)

### Chapter Five (Ben) Summary

Ben Moi was the most popular guy at summer camp, and Ruby desperately wanted him to notice her. He never did. Ben Moi had a lot of girlfriends, but Ruby was never one of them. In a way, Ruby lives out her Ben Moi fantasy by dating Jackson, another guy who's had a lot of girlfriends. Ruby couldn't believe that popular Jackson had a crush on her, and she also couldn't believe how comfortable she felt around him. She didn't have to wear make-up and high heels every time they went out, and she enjoyed his company eating at home just as much as she did at a restaurant. Jackson showed Ruby what a relationship truly should be like, but unfortunately for her, the euphoria only lasted a few weeks. Ruby was extremely jealous of all Jackson's ex-girlfriends and regularly avoided them at school. One day while she was at Jackson's house, his most recent ex-girlfriend, Heidi, called in tears begging to know why he had broken up with her. Ruby was mortified, but Jackson shrugged the call off and immediately went back to playing his video games. When Ruby realized that Jackson had broken up with Heidi the day before he started dating her, she politely asked Jackson to clear the air with Heidi. She didn't want Heidi spreading rumors that Ruby had stolen Jackson from her. Jackson agreed and told Ruby that he'd meet Heidi for coffee the next day.

The next day, Ruby's dad asked if she'd like to have coffee with him at the same coffee shop where Jackson was supposed to be meeting Heidi. Ruby agreed because it was a good excuse to spy on Jackson. When Ruby and her father showed up, however, neither Heidi nor Jackson was there. Ruby repeatedly tried to phone Jackson, but he didn't pick up. The next day, Jackson swore that nothing had happened between him and Heidi; they had only talked. He apologized and told Ruby that even though Heidi was super beautiful and fun, he didn't feel that they were well matched. He swore that he had never felt the connection he felt with Ruby with anyone before. Even though she didn't quite believe him, Ruby forgave Jackson because she wanted what he said to be true.

### Chapter Five (Ben) Analysis

Some readers might question why Ruby included Ben Moi on her list of boyfriends, particularly because they never actually had a relationship: she had a crush on him but he was never interested in her. Doctor Z's questions give some insight in to this. She asks whether Ruby had ever spoken to Ben (No), whether Ben made Ruby laugh (No), and whether he made her feel good about herself (No, he made her feel nervous and ugly). When Doctor Z asks why Ruby would want to date someone who makes her feel badly about herself, Ruby answers, "Can't you just want someone? Does there have to be a reason? (p. 71). Although Ruby claims there was no reason for her wanting Ben, it's clear that she wanted him because he was popular, because so many other girls wanted him and she wanted to be the one who actually claimed him.



The story of Ben Moi perfectly parallels the story Ruby shares about Jackson. She stayed with him even though he didn't make her feel good about herself. He made her doubt their relationship and his fidelity, but Ruby forgave him because she wanted his promises to be true. The reader should also note that the way Jackson broke up with Heidi is exactly the same way he will break up with Ruby: he finds another girl he feels "connected" to, starts a relationship with her, breaks up with his ex-girlfriend, and makes his new relationship official the next day. Ruby should have seen this coming, but once again, she turned a blind eye to Jackson's bad behaviors.



## Chapter Six (Tommy)

### Chapter Six (Tommy) Summary

Tommy Hazard is the imaginary boyfriend Kim and Ruby invented while they were on a class trip in the seventh grade. During their hike, the girls ran out of things to talk about, so they started discussing the perfect guy. For Ruby, the perfect guy was a blond-haired surfer with slightly crooked teeth and a voice so low it felt as if she was the only person in the room who could hear him when he spoke. He smelled of chlorine from his family's swimming pool and raced Ruby on the handlebars of his blue, ten-speed bicycle. In eighth grade, Ruby's Tommy was an electric guitar playing punk rocker with a sensitive side. In ninth grade, he was old enough to drive and developed black-and-white photos in his personal darkroom. For the girls, Tommy represented perfection: he never acted obnoxiously or said the wrong thing. He always called when he said he would and loved the girls perfectly. For both Ruby and Kim, Tommy Hazard represented a perfect ideal and although they shared him, they personalized their fantasies.

Whereas Ruby's Tommy changed drastically from year to year, Kim's Tommy always stayed the same: he was a world traveler, an adventurous eater, an excellent student, a film buff, and he was tall. For years, the girls idolized Tommy Hazard and used him as a measuring stick for the boys they dated.

During sophomore year, after Kim confronted Ruby about her avoidance of Finn, the teenagers all went to a school costume party together. Ruby and Finn were sent to work at the face-painting table together, forcing them to have a real conversation for the first time since they shared the wildcat book in the third-grade library. Ruby worried that Finn was still in love with her, especially since Finn came to the party dressed as a panther - one of the cats they had read about in the book all those years ago. Surprisingly, Finn and Ruby got along really well, laughing and joking at the table until Ruby caught Kim's eye across the room. Kim narrowed her eyes and mouthed "Mine!" suggesting that now, Ruby was too talkative with Finn.

### Chapter Six (Tommy) Analysis

The invention of Tommy Hazard is an interesting parallel to both Ruby's and Kim's real-life relationships with Jackson Clarke. The girls shared Tommy Hazard, but they each had different views of what perfection was like. For Ruby, Tommy's persona changed from year-to-year, highlighting that she hadn't totally defined who she was, and therefore hadn't totally defined what her perfect partner was. The reader sees Ruby's indecision, changing moods, and confusion throughout the novel. For Kim, however, Tommy always remained the same, highlighting Kim's self-confidence and her easy ability to define what she was looking for in her life. She even says, "He's out there, somewhere...I don't mean Tommy Hazard, like he looks the way I think he looks. I mean someone who's the one for me, and I'm the one for him" (p. 88). Even at a young age,



Kim understood what it meant to have a perfect partner, and now, she thinks she has found that perfect match in Ruby's ex-boyfriend, Jackson.



# Chapter Seven (Chase)

## Chapter Seven (Chase) Summary

Chapter Seven is a story about gifts. Ruby reckons that she's an excellent gift giver. All her gifts reflect the way she feels about a person, and she spends a lot of time researching what gift will mean the most to the recipient. She only wishes guys like Chase gave gifts the same way.

After Hutch's gummy bears, the next gift a guy ever bought her was a beautiful necklace from Chase Williams in seventh grade. At the time, Chase was on the swim team with Ruby but the two rarely spoke. Chase was shy and only hung out with a redheaded swimmer named Josh. Ruby was shocked one afternoon when Josh called saying that Chase had something to ask her. Chase refused to get on the phone, but Ruby could hear him whispering in the background, so Josh asked Ruby out on Chase's behalf. She was so startled and confused by the entire conversation that Ruby agreed to think about it. The next day at school, Josh presented Ruby with a beautiful bead necklace, from Chase, saying she could have it if she agreed to go to the dance with Chase. He said she could keep the necklace even if she went to the dance with Chase as a friend, and even if she just agreed to meet him for a meal at McDonalds. Ruby is horrified by the entire exchange and turns him down flat, even if it breaks his heart.

Throughout her relationship with Jackson, he never once gave her a thoughtful gift. When they first started dating, Jackson hid a ceramic frog in Ruby's locker every Monday. She looked forward to the gift each week, even if she didn't fully understand it. Why frogs? Then one week, the gifts just stopped. No explanation, no fight, no nothing. When Ruby finally mustered the courage to ask Jackson why, he laughed, saying that there were only four frogs in the pack he bought. On Valentine's Day that year, the school ran a flower sale so students could send floral Valentines to one another. Of course, students used the flowers as a show of their popularity, and all the girls wished hopefully for flowers from their boyfriends. Ruby ordered a dozen red roses for Jackson and waited excitedly for his flowers to her. Surely they would be the talk of the town. She even heard through the grapevine that her flowers were "a special order." At the end of the day, however, the only flower that showed up for her was half a carnation - the cheapest flower on the order form, and not even a full flower at that. Jackson had "special ordered" the droopy carnation to be cut in half, making it unique, and therefore unlike the flowers "regular girls" got. Ruby was devastated but pretended to love her wilted carnation. She told Jackson she adored his creativity, even though her heart was broken.

## Chapter Seven (Chase) Analysis

Ruby's interaction with Chase is significant because for the first time in the novel, the reader sees Ruby standing up for herself and speaking her mind regardless of who gets



hurt. Turning Chase down flat might seem a bit cruel, but it's an important step in Ruby's character development. She recognized that accepting the necklace from Chase would have signified something - a promise and an illusion of a relationship that would never be. There are also a variety of reasons why Ruby wasn't interested in Chase, one of the main reasons being that he didn't have the courage to actually converse with Ruby face-to-face, opting instead to have his friend Josh mediate. Once again, this highlights the message that teenagers should be able to stand on their own two feet, and have the confidence to speak their mind if they hope to be respected. Ruby turning Chase down shows that she recognizes the importance of confidence; now she just needs to find it in herself.

Ruby also recognizes the significance of gifts: that gifts symbolize and emotion shared between two people, which is another reason why she couldn't accept the thoughtful, romantic gift from Chase. This is also why she was disappointed in the gifts Jackson did - or often didn't - give her. She knew that Jackson should have reciprocated the time and effort she put into her gifts to him. The fact that Jackson bought Ruby half a carnation not only portrays him as a cheapskate, it also highlights that Jackson didn't understand what Ruby truly wanted. He wasn't in tune with her desires, and that is a disastrous relationship. Ruby's lie about loving the carnation only perpetuates the problem. Once again, Ruby puts other's emotions before her own and worries about Jackson's reaction to the truth. This chapter functions to show the reader that Jackson and Ruby truly were mismatched, in the second half of the novel, the reader can expect Ruby to make the same realization.



# Chapter Eight (Sky)

## Chapter Eight (Sky) Summary

Doctor Z thinks Ruby suffers from panic attacks because she is unable to speak the truth. As an exercise, Doctor Z asks Ruby to write down all the things she lied to Jackson about during their relationship. Ruby comes up with eleven lies. When she gets to eleven, she realizes she could write down forty, or eighty, or one hundred. Doctor Z also asks Ruby who has been lying to her. Ruby practically shouts "Jackson and Kim." Jackson and Kim became friends around Thanksgiving. Ruby and Jackson went to Kim's house for dinner one night, and suddenly, the two were joking back-and-forth in Japanese. From then on, they were best friends, talking about Japan, speaking Japanese, and practicing their lettering together. Ruby was slightly jealous when she saw notes from Kim poking out of Jackson's back pocket, or when Jackson insisted on inviting Kim to Japanese dinners with them, but she refused to entertain her jealousies. After all, Jackson still held her hand, and kissed her, and made her feel special. So when Jackson broke up with her, seemingly out of the blue, Ruby was blindsided. He said, just as he had said to Heidi in Chapter Five, that he didn't feel that they were properly matched, and that he felt a connection to someone else. Of course, Ruby wasn't expecting that person to be Kim. So when Kim called Ruby to say that she'd broken up with Finn, and that, after a long pause, she was now going out with Jackson, Ruby could barely breathe.

## Chapter Eight (Sky) Analysis

In this chapter, the reader hears the full story of how Ruby's relationship with Jackson ended. Keen readers would have seen this break-up coming from a mile away, but Ruby was absolutely blindsided. She trusted that Kim's intentions with Jackson were pure, and that she would never backstab her best friend. Technically, however, Kim has not broken any of the friendship rules, which is where the girl's conflict comes from. Kim swears that nothing happened between them until Jackson had already broken up with Ruby, and that Jackson was her "Tommy Hazard," her perfect match. Ruby is understandably shocked by Kim's admission, so shocked, in fact, that she cannot speak, and this shock will boil over into outrage the coming chapters. After Ruby's phone call with Kim, she has her first panic attack, which is clearly symbolic of the emotions Ruby holds inside her. Doctor Z has theorized that Ruby suffers from panic attacks because of her inability to speak the truth, and that is clearly illustrated in this chapter. However, when Ruby collapses on her bed after the call, she notices black spots of mildew on her ceiling. This is symbolic of the ugliness Ruby now sees in what were previously seen as perfect relationships with Kim and Jackson.



# Chapter Nine (Michael)

## Chapter Nine (Michael) Summary

Technically, Michael Malone was Ruby's first kiss. In eighth grade, Ruby returned to Camp Ranier, where the kids had a new fascination with playing Spin-the-Bottle. When the bottle landed on a certain girl, the guy would take her into the woods and make-out with her for seven minutes - the rest of the group kept count on a stopwatch. Michael Malone's bottle landed on Ruby during the last days of camp, and nervously, she followed him into the woods. In the woods, Michael kissed her hard, wagging his head back-and-forth like he must have seen in the movies. After what felt like hours, someone yelled "Time's up" and it was over. Ruby didn't kiss anyone else for a year-and-a-half, when she began kissing Jackson and it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

Because Ruby was relatively inexperienced when it came to boys, she and Jackson never went any further than kissing, except that she occasionally let him feel her boobs. At school, a few days after Ruby learns that Jackson is now dating Kim, Katarina, the school gossip, tells Ruby that someone walked in on Jackson and Kim naked at a party over the weekend. Even though they had been caught, the pair wasn't embarrassed, and didn't come out of the room for at least an hour. Furious, Ruby shouts at Katarina to keep her gossip to herself. Why on earth would Katarina think Ruby wanted to know that? After shouting at Katarina, Ruby feels a panic attack coming on, but for the first time in her life, she knows she can stop it. She breathes deeply and eventually, the sensation passes.

## Chapter Nine (Michael) Analysis

This chapter once again highlights Ruby's inability to stand up for herself. In eighth grade, she was terrified of playing Spin-the-Bottle but she played anyway, citing peer pressure. During the first few weeks of camp, the kids wasted most of their time saying that the bottle wasn't straight, that it was pointing at a girl (when a girl spun), or vice versa. Very few couples actually made it into the woods to make-out. Interestingly, it isn't until a fellow camper betrays Ruby's trust that she is forced into the woods with Michael Malone. Ruby isn't attracted to Michael in the slightest, but on some level, she enjoys her time in the woods with him, perhaps because he compliments her skill when it's over.

It's interesting to note that at the end of this chapter, Ruby is able to stop a panic attack from overtaking her. Right before this happens, Ruby shouts at Katarina, telling her to keep her gossip to herself. It's clear that Katarina told Ruby the story about Jackson and Kim simply to get a rise out of her, so the verbal beating Ruby put on her was justified. For the first time in her life, Ruby has spoken her mind and told the truth, regardless of how it made someone else feel. Doctor Z hopes that if Ruby embraces her true

emotions, rather than valuing what other's think of her, she'll be able to have healthy, happy relationships. On a minor level, it spears that Doctor Z's suggestion will work.



# Chapter Ten (Angelo)

## Chapter Ten (Angelo) Summary

Before the Spring Fling, the only formal dance Ruby ever attended was the Homecoming Dance at Garfield Park, the public school her friend Angelo attended. In truth, Ruby and Angelo weren't really friends, their mothers were, so when Angelo was dateless for homecoming, his mother called to see if Ruby would like to go. She said yes not because she was interested in Angelo, but because she wanted to experience a formal dance. On the day of the dance, Angelo showed up with a corsage of yellow roses. He took her out to dinner. They danced. They had a good time. It was nothing like this year's Spring Fling. Even though Ruby and Jackson were dating when the dance was announced, Jackson didn't ask Ruby to go with him. She waited and waited, but Jackson kept quiet. It wasn't until Jackson started planning an after party on Ruby's houseboat that she even knew he wanted to go. Immediately, Ruby ran out and bought a gorgeous silver dress that cost way more than she could afford. A week later, Jackson dumped her.

In the wake of Jackson's break-up, Ruby went to dinner at Angelo's house with her mother. Her Ruby's mom told everyone that Jackson had just broken up with Ruby and that now she didn't have a date to the Spring Fling. Of course, Angelo's mom suggested, in front of everyone, that he take her, and that was that. Ruby and Angelo didn't even have to talk. With no friends at school and a broken heart, a date with Angelo, whether she had expected it or not, is a lovely change of pace for Ruby. A few days later, however, Jackson pops back into her life to say that Kim is going to be out of town for Spring Fling and would Ruby like to go with him, just as friends, of course. Ruby immediately agrees, hoping that the moment Jackson sees her in her new dress, he'll realize what a mistake he's made.

## Chapter Ten (Angelo) Analysis

This chapter functions to set-up the novel's main conflict: Ruby attending the Spring Fling with Jackson. Jackson asked Ruby to the dance under the ruse of "being worried about her," as if he was doing her a huge favor by taking her. It's clear to the reader, however, that Jackson is manipulating the situation with Ruby, probably because he still has feelings for her but is too proud to admit them. Kim has agreed that Jackson taking Ruby to the dance is a good idea, but keen readers will remember Ruby's emotional state when she learned about Jackson and Heidi, and how she thought it would be a good idea for Jackson to meet up with Heidi for coffee. Of course it wasn't a good idea and Jackson likely cheated on Ruby that day, just as he certainly plans to cheat on Kim at the dance. Jackson is an extremely unlikable character, yet because of Lockhart's careful construction, the reader understands why these teenage girls swoon over him. Ruby hopes that if Jackson sees her in the new silver dress, he'll realize that he's made a huge mistake and that he's still in love with Ruby. It's a painful hope for the audience



to read because it clearly isn't going to happen, and everyone expects that this dance is going to have a negative impact on Ruby's life.

When Ruby decides to accept Jackson's offer, she calls Angelo to say that she can't go with him any more, but says that if he's interested, he can still come to the after party at her house, but she doesn't think he'll actually show up.





# Chapter Eleven (Shiv)

## Chapter Eleven (Shiv) Summary

Shiv Neel was Ruby's first official boyfriend, but it was a short-lived title. Shiv was the most popular boy in school, and when Ruby was assigned to perform a scene with him in their drama elective, she didn't waste the opportunity to flirt with him. For a few joyous weeks, the two shared flirty banter and jokes. A few weeks later, Shiv asked Ruby to be his girlfriend. When she said yes, he kissed her long and hard, pressing her body up against the classroom door so no one would walk in on them. Right after class, Ruby raced to the commons to tell her friends what had happened. They laughed and squealed as Ruby recounted every second of their passionate exchange, enhancing details for comedic effect. She told him everything - what he smelled like (nutmeg) and how she wouldn't let him kiss her ears (gross!) The next day, however, Shiv wouldn't even look at her. He ignored her in the hallways and didn't acknowledge when she called his name. Even though everyone in school now knew that Ruby and Shiv were an item, it was clear to Ruby that it was over before it had even begun. When Ruby tells Doctor Z this story, Doctor Z suggests that Ruby ask Shiv what really happened. Ruby says she'll think about it.

In the next scene, Ruby and Jackson head to the Spring Fling together, and Ruby is full of hope: surely Jackson is going to fall back in love with her. At the dance, Jackson tells Ruby that she looks pretty, and even rests his hand gently on hers while they're on the dancefloor. When the couple is outside getting some air, Ruby boldly leans in to kiss Jackson. He kisses her back, deeply. But the couple isn't alone: Heidi and Finn walk in on and Jackson quickly pushes Ruby off him. "What are you doing?" he shouts. "That's not how it is now. We're here as friends. You know I'm with Kim" (p. 165). With that, Jackson abandons Ruby at the dance and she has another panic attack.

After Jackson leaves, a kid from Ruby's art class, Noel, offers to drive Ruby to the party at her house. When Ruby gets there, someone hands her a beer and she's slightly drunk by the time Angelo unexpectedly shows up. He hands Ruby the yellow rose corsage he pre-ordered and kisses her on the cheek. Surprisingly, Ruby kisses him back, and enjoys it. Just then, Jackson shows up saying he wants to talk. When he sees Ruby kissing Angelo, he freaks out and starts yelling "I thought you cared about me!" When Ruby turns back around, Angelo is long gone. Meghan arrives and asks why Ruby didn't bother to invite her to the party. Ruby walks to the bathroom and has another panic attack. The next day, Noel asks Ruby if she'd like him to say that they're a couple now. Noel is the only person at Tate High who doesn't care about being popular, and Ruby is touched that he'd lie to make life easier for her. When he suggests that Ruby's friends aren't really her friends, however, Ruby snaps and tells Noel to leave her alone.

A few days later, everyone at Tate High knows what happened at the Spring Fling. Ruby has started seeing Doctor Z and has written the first few drafts of her boyfriend list. She



wrote the first draft during study hall and stupidly threw it away where anyone could find it. Someone - clearly Kim - fished the draft out of the trashcan, Xeroxed it, and hung it up all over school. On top of everything, Kim has begun writing horrible messages about Ruby in the school bathroom. When Ruby finally confronts Kim about her actions, Kim says that Ruby has always been selfish and always wanted men that weren't hers - from Finn to Jackson.

## Chapter Eleven (Shiv) Analysis

In the longest chapter of the novel, the reader reaches the novel's climax: Jackson and Ruby kiss at the Spring Fling, and Ruby's social life explodes. It's no surprise to the reader that Jackson has taken advantage of Ruby's emotions for some cheap action. He passionately kisses Ruby back until he realizes that they're not alone. In the footnotes, Ruby admits that Jackson was cheating on Kim at the dance because even she understands that he still had feelings for her: "He slow-danced with Roo and made her feel all sexy. He took her out for a moonlit walk on the deck of the boat. He put his arm around her, not like friends at all. He was being romantic, dammit! And he kissed back when she kissed him, because the whole kissing thing was what he'd wanted all along" (p. 168). Ruby knows that Jackson was taking advantage of her, but she still can't bring herself to hate him for it. In fact, she still loves him, even at the novel's close. This love is frustrating for readers who see great boyfriend-material surrounding Ruby at the dance, particularly Noel and Angelo. Readers are also likely frustrated by Ruby's steadfast devotion to her friends, even saying she loves them, after their treatment of her. Noel is right: Ruby's friends are not her friends, but she doesn't see it. In a way, this conflict makes the novel, and Ruby's character, more believable. She is lovable but flawed. The reader will also be frustrated to know that the storylines with Finn, Noel, and Angelo are all left incomplete. It is possible that Lockhart will return to these stories later in the Ruby Oliver series.



## Chapter Twelve (Billy)

### Chapter Twelve (Billy) Summary

At a party one weekend, before Ruby was dating Jackson, she met a guy named Billy, whom she let squeeze her boob through eight layers of toga. He asked for her number and Ruby gave it, but then he never called. Ruby waited by the phone for two weeks, rushing home from school each day to sit and wait, but he never called. Clearly exasperated when she hears this story, Doctor Z says, "It's time to be frank. From my observation, you have a lot of passive patterns in place right now that aren't making you happy" (Page 190). Then, out of the blue, Doctor Z suggests that Ruby's passive behavior is a learned pattern from watching her mother interact with her father. At first, Ruby isn't buying this theory - her mother is a super confident stage actress, after all - but the more she thinks about it, the more Ruby sees her mother as a person who speaks her mind but waits for her father's approval: "My mom, always "expressing her rage," but never really getting her way" (p. 192).

To combat her own crippling insecurities, Ruby decides to confront Shiv, as Doctor Z suggested in Chapter Eleven. Nervously, Ruby waits outside of Shiv's classroom and asks to speak to him outside. Stumbling over her words - she isn't used to fully expressing herself - Ruby asks why Shiv suddenly stopped talking to her after their kiss in drama class. Shiv says that he overheard Ruby talking about him with her friends in the commons. He heard her say, "Gross!" and that he smelled like nutmeg. He thought Ruby was grossed out by kissing an Indian.

### Chapter Twelve (Billy) Analysis

When Doctor Z suggests that Ruby has passive patterns in place, something clicks in her mind. Suddenly, Ruby sees all the opportunities she could have embraced if she had the courage. She could have asked Jackson to Spring Fling while they were dating rather than waiting for him to ask her, she could have called Cricket and Nora to talk to them rather than waiting for them to talk to her, she could have been her own person during her relationship with Jackson rather than being the person he wanted her to be. Maybe if she had done that, she would have a sense of control over her own life and wouldn't be having these panic attacks. The first step Ruby takes to reclaiming her life is to ask Shiv why he ended things with her. Although he stopped talking to Ruby because of a misunderstanding, Shiv's reasoning highlights that everyone at Tate High, regardless of how popular they are, feel insecure. It also highlights the conclusions teenagers jump to. Rather than discussing issues like adults, they make up their own minds and, sometimes, like in Kim's case, act out terribly because of it.



# Chapter Thirteen (Jackson)

## Chapter Thirteen (Jackson) Summary

Even though Jackson has dumped her and started going out with (and possibly having sex with) her best friend, Ruby is still desperately in love with him. She thinks about him every day and knows that if he showed up at her doorstep tomorrow, she would take him back. When Ruby comes home after her talk with Shiv, she sits on the dock with Hutch - who is still working on the garden with Ruby's dad - and they talk about Jackson. Hutch says Jackson is a mean person undeserving of Ruby's love. When he was in sixth grade, he and Jackson were best friends. The next year, however, Jackson had become more popular than Hutch and started freezing him out. When Hutch tried to reignite an old inside joke, Jackson laughed in his face and said, "Joke's long over, loser" (p. 201). Ruby can't believe that Jackson would ever treat someone like that, but deep down, she knows Hutch isn't lying. The next day, Ruby reaches out to Meghan, asking if she'd like to see a movie sometime.

## Chapter Thirteen (Jackson) Analysis

Hutch's story highlights the fact that Jackson is a jerk, even though most readers already knew this. Although Ruby doesn't want to believe it's true, deep down she knows that Hutch isn't lying. She knows that Jackson is a jerk by the way he treated her, but she's too scared to admit it to herself: she's not ready to admit that Jackson isn't her Tommy Hazard. Yet she admits that maybe she didn't know Jackson as well as she thought she did. At the end of the chapter, Ruby reaches out to Meghan and asks if she'd like to see a movie sometime. Meghan hadn't been speaking to Ruby since Ruby failed to invite her to the houseboat party, so this is a big step. It shows that Ruby is capable of apologizing and of re-building friendships, which may foreshadow a reconciliation with Kim.



# Chapter Fourteen (Noel)

## Chapter Fourteen (Noel) Summary

Ruby's mom has been asked to go on tour with her one-woman show, but her parents are fighting terribly about it. Ruby's dad doesn't want her to go, but Ruby's mom desperately wants to embrace this opportunity in her career. The couple use Ruby as an excuse: Ruby's dad says his wife can't abandon Ruby for the entire summer, and Ruby's mom says that Ruby can come on the road with her. At school the next day, Ruby bumps into Gideon Van Deusen, Nora's older brother, who has stopped by the school for a visit. He's a peace-loving hippie now, traveling the world and having mind-expanding experiences. He tells Ruby that Nora really misses her, even if she won't admit it, and now that both Cricket and Kim have steady boyfriends, she spends most of her time alone.

In this chapter, Ruby also apologizes to Noel for cursing him out after he suggested that Kim was not her real friend. In the lunchroom later that day, Noel rests his hand on Ruby's and gives it a squeeze, showing that he accepts her apology. Ruby walks out of the room feeling like she's walking on air.

## Chapter Fourteen (Noel) Analysis

Gideon gives Ruby a lot of advice during their short conversation at school. He tells her that the world's a big place, much bigger than the halls of Tate High, and that she should embrace what makes her happiest without worrying what other people think. He has moved to San Francisco, California, where he sang at an open mike night and ate authentic Chinese food, things he said he never would have done while at Tate. At the end of the novel, Ruby decides to go on tour with her mother (even though she initially said she wanted nothing to do with it) likely as a direct result of this conversation with Gideon. She wants to see what the world has to offer her, even if that means leaving her friends at Tate High behind.

Noel accepts Ruby's apology at the end of the chapter and Ruby leaves the room feeling like she's walking on air. There are two ways of interpreting this reaction. First, Ruby could be "walking on air" because Noel held her hand in public, signaling to the reader that she might, in fact, be getting over Jackson. Earlier in the chapter, however, Ruby says that she thinks Noel is gay and so her feeling of elation is probably coming from her delight in having a friend, rather than a new crush. Noel's acceptance shows that Ruby is capable of taking situations into her own hands, apologizing for what she's done, and being forgiven, which to Ruby, symbolizes hope for her social leprosy.



# Chapter Fifteen (Cabbie)

## Chapter Fifteen (Cabbie) Summary

After Kim hung the Boyfriend List all over school, Ruby began getting a lot of attention from all the wrong guys, including Cabbie, a junior-year rugby player. When he asks Ruby out on a date, however, she says yes because she doesn't want to be alone on a Friday night. Cabbie takes Ruby to the movies and spends the entire time fondling her breasts. After, he takes her out for pizza and invites her to come watch his rugby game later that week. At first, Ruby accepts, but a few days later, decides that she's not ready for a new relationship, so she phones him up and turns him down. Later that week, Ruby runs into Nora at the shopping mall and tries to speak with her. It's clear that Nora misses her, and the two have a civil conversation, but don't make any further plans. At the end of the novel, Ruby is on tour with her mother who has taken the job even though her husband didn't fully support it. Ruby spends her days writing, watching Woody Allen movies, and thinking about her life.

## Chapter Fifteen (Cabbie) Analysis

A lot of major events happen in the final chapter of the novel. First, Ruby goes on her first date since Jackson broke up with her. It's clear to everyone, especially Ruby, that Cabbie only asked her out because he thought he could make out with her, and in a way, he gets exactly what he's after. The date is important for Ruby because it shows her two things. First of all, she strangely enjoys Cabbie fondling her boob in the movie theatre, which tells her that she will find pleasure away from Jackson. Second, when Ruby decides that she doesn't want to date Cabbie anymore, she calls him on the phone and tells him that directly. This shows that Ruby is maturing and is working on telling the truth rather than lying.

Ruby also makes great strides in her relationship with Nora. Although the two don't make plans as friends, their conversation gives Ruby great insight into her friends. She never thought about Nora's feelings when she, Cricket, and Kim all had boyfriends. She never considered the fact that Nora might be lonely or insecure. So when Nora suggests that she feels like a leper, Ruby realizes that everyone, regardless of their popularity, feels insecure. At the end of the novel, Ruby's mother has done some maturing as well, and has taken the job she wants even though her husband didn't fully support it. She is setting a great example for Ruby by identifying what is important to her (her career) and embracing it. Due to this, the reader can expect Ruby will be a successful, independent woman herself.



# Characters

## Ruby Oliver

Ruby Oliver is the main character and narrator of the story. She is fifteen years old with blonde hair and glasses. She describes herself as neither pretty nor ugly, but constantly questions her ability to attract boys. Ruby is on the swim team, plays lacrosse, and lives in a houseboat with her eccentric parents. Until the start of the novel, Ruby felt confident in her life: she had a circle of great friends, an awesome boyfriend, and she was making great grades. Over the span of a few days, however, all that crumbles. Ruby's boyfriend breaks up with her to start dating her best friend, Kim, but as a goodwill offering, agrees to take Ruby to the Spring Fling. At the school dance, the two are caught kissing, and the rumor spreads that Ruby threw herself at Jackson, who, according to the gossip, pushed her away. Of course this isn't entirely true, but all of Ruby's friends believe the lies and shun her. With no friends, no boyfriend, and mounting struggles in school, Ruby begins having panic attacks. When her parents witness one of these attacks, they insist that Ruby begin seeing a psychiatrist, Doctor Z. As soon as Doctor Z meets Ruby, she knows the panic attacks must have something to do with her romantic life. To get to the bottom of the problem, Doctor Z gives Ruby the assignment of listing all the boys who have impacted her romantic life, on both a large and small scale. Each week, they discuss one of the relationships on the list. At the end of the novel, Ruby has a stronger grasp of what she's looking for in her relationship, romantic and platonic, and for the first time in her young life, she feels free.

## Jackson Clarke

Jackson Clarke is Ruby Oliver's first boyfriend and, according to her, true love. Jackson is one of the most popular and sought after guys at Tate High, but it wasn't always that way. When he was in middle school, he was only semi-popular, and some people thought he was weird because his family frequently traveled back and forth to Tokyo. When he returns to America during sophomore year of high school, however, he has grown tall and handsome, and suddenly, all the girls are interested in him. He goes through a string of girlfriends during sophomore year: Heidi, Ruby, and Kim. He has a tendency of breaking up with girls, blindsiding them, and immediately starting relationships with someone else, leaving the girls confused and angry. Throughout the novel, it's clear that Jackson is extremely self-centered and that he rarely gives thought to how his actions are affecting others, particularly the girls he meets. When he and Ruby are caught kissing at the Spring Fling, he does nothing to stop the rumors and likely even encouraged them. He is a bully, but a handsome bully, who will likely have many more girlfriends long after he's finished with Kim.



## Doctor Z

Doctor Z is Ruby's psychiatrist. Doctor Z is African-American, collects aboriginal art, and frequently asks open-ended questions, which drives Ruby nuts. Doctor Z gives Ruby the assignment of creating the Boyfriend List in the hopes that it will help her understand why her relationships fail, and why she is suffering from panic attacks.

## Meghan Flack

Meghan Flack drives Ruby to and from school everyday even though Ruby can't stand her. In truth, Ruby is jealous of Meghan's sex appeal, and the fact that she looks sexy even when she's wearing an old flannel shirt. Meghan is the only other person Ruby knows who sees a shrink, but Meghan has a good reason: her dad died when she was twelve.

## Greg

Greg is Ruby's father's friend from work. He's an avid gardener and a neurotic hermit. He doesn't leave the house for anything, and only eats take-away food. Ruby fears that if she starts seeing a shrink, she'll turn into a lunatic like Greg.

## Cricket

Cricket is one of Ruby's best friends. She is described as having blonde hair and always wearing pastels, which Ruby says is "a fake out" because Cricket is actually the most cynical, sarcastic person she's ever met.

## Nora Van Deusen

Nora Van Deusen is one of Ruby's best friends. Nora's character is the least developed of all Ruby's friends which leads the reader to believe that she is somewhat of a follower, whereas the other girls are leaders. The reader does know that Nora has enormous breasts, and that makes her the envy of the entire school. At the end of the novel, Ruby considers reaching out to Nora, who may be the only one from her group to forgive her, but decides against it.

## Kim Yamamoto

Kim is one of Ruby's best friends. She is of Japanese descent, with long black hair and gorgeous eyes. Ruby describes Kim as being a beautiful Bohemian, even when she's wearing no make up. When Ruby and Jackson break up, Jackson rebounds with Kim, which causes a huge strain in the girls' relationship. After Ruby kisses Jackson (while he





is dating Kim), the wedge spreads to include the rest of their best friends who all side with Kim, saying that Ruby's actions broke the code of friendship.

## **Adam Cox**

Adam Cox is the first boy the Ruby ever had a crush on. She was drawn to his quiet personality and shaggy hair, even in preschool. When Ruby is reunited with Adam during a high school mixer, Adam is a complete jerk, calling Ruby "Four-Eyes" in front of his friends. Ruby's interaction with Adam prompts her to start writing *The Boy Book*, detailing everything she's learned about boys.

## **Finn Murphy**

Finn Murphy had a crush on Ruby in the second grade, after they bonded over a book about wildcats. As a result of horrendous teasing about their relationship in elementary school, Ruby has avoided Finn throughout high school, even when he starts dating her best friend, Kim. When Kim asks why Ruby ignores Finn, she tells her that she thinks Finn is still in love with her.

## **John Hutchinson (Hutch)**

John Hutchinson (Hutch) was the first boy to give Ruby a gift when they were in fourth grade. He gave her a bag of gummy bears, which she savored at night imagining she had a boyfriend. Her heart was broken a few days later, however, she saw that Hutch had also given a bag of gummy bears to Ariel, the most popular girl in school. In high school, Hutch is considered "a leper." He has no friends, is obsessed with heavy metal, and has been hired to work on the garden on Ruby's family's houseboat.

## **Tommy Hazard**

Tommy Hazard is the imaginary boyfriend Kim and Ruby invented. For the girls, Tommy represented perfection: he never acted obnoxiously or said the wrong thing. He always called when he said he would and loved the girls perfectly. For both Ruby and Kim, Tommy Hazard represented a perfect ideal and although they shared him, they personalized their fantasies. For years, the girls idolized Tommy Hazard and used him as a measuring stick for the boys they dated.

## **Chase Williams**

Chase Williams is the boy who tries to bribe Ruby into attending the school dance with him by gifting her with a beautiful, beaded necklace. Strangely, Chase is too shy to converse with Ruby face-to-face, and constantly asks his obnoxious friend Josh to



mediate. In the end, Ruby turns Chase down because she doesn't want to encourage his romantic feelings toward her.

## **Michael Malone**

Michael Malone is Ruby's first kiss. The two kissed while playing Spin-the-Bottle at summer camp, even though Ruby was not remotely attracted to Michael. Ruby played the game because she was sucked in by peer pressure, but found herself strangely enjoying Michael's kiss, perhaps because he complimented her skill when it was over.

## **Shiv Neel**

Shiv Neel is Ruby's first boyfriend. He is an extremely popular Indian-American athlete who kissed Ruby after weeks of flirting in their drama elective. After their first kiss, Ruby immediately runs to her friends in the commons to tell them the juicy details. Shiv overhears the conversation, misunderstands what Ruby is saying, and stops talking to her.

## **Angelo**

Angelo is the son of Ruby's mother's best friend. When the teenagers are in eighth grade, Angelo asks Ruby to his homecoming dance because he doesn't have another date. After Jackson breaks up with Ruby, Angelo's mother insists he return the favor by taking Ruby to her Spring Fling. At the end of the novel, Ruby and Angelo share a kiss, but he runs away when Jackson arrives to confront Ruby about what happened at the dance.

## **Shep Cabbot (Cabbie)**

Shep Cabbot (Cabbie) is the first guy to ask Ruby out after Jackson breaks up with her. Cabbie is a junior-year rugby player and it's clear he's only asked Ruby out so he can make-out with her. He takes Ruby to the movies and spends the entire time fondling her boob, but she strangely enjoys it. When she decides that she doesn't want to date Cabbie anymore, she calls him and tells him herself, embracing truth over lies for the first time in her life.



# Objects/Places

## Panic Attacks

Panic Attacks are "episodes where a person feels a sense of massive anxiety" (p. 4). Ruby suffers from panic attacks that leave her feeling unable to breathe and as if her heart is going to beat out of her chest. These panic attacks are the reason why Ruby's parents force her to see Doctor Z.

## Doctor Z's Office

Doctor Z's office is in a blank building, like a strip mall in downtown Seattle. The office is surrounded by dermatologists and orthodontists, but the office itself isn't nearly as nondescript as Ruby expected: Doctor Z has hung African art on the walls and laid a fluffy red rug on the floor.

## Tate Prep

Tate Prep is the school that Ruby and most of the other teenage characters attend. Tate Prep is for rich kids, mainly, and most of the kids have extremely wealthy parents, BMWs, and houses with hot tubs and cleaning ladies.

## The Boyfriend List

The Boyfriend List is the assignment Doctor Z gives to Ruby during their first psychiatry appointment. Doctor Z hopes that going over the list of ex-boyfriends, ex-lovers, and ex-crushes will help her come to terms with her emotions and hopefully quell her anxiety. This is also the list Kim Xeroxes and hangs all over school when she finds it in a trashcan.

## The Boy Book: A Study of Habits and Behaviors, Plus Techniqu

The Boy Book: A Study of Habits and Behaviors, Plus Techniques for Taming Them is the book written by Ruby and Kim. The pair started this shared notebook after Ruby's horrific incident with Adam Cox at the school mixer. From then on, the girls decided to detail everything they learned about boys through every interaction, hoping their shared knowledge would help save girls everywhere from sharing in their humiliated fate.



## **The Beaded Necklace**

The Beaded Necklace is the gift Chase Williams purchases for Ruby with the hopes of bribing her into attending the school dance with him in seventh grade. Chase tells Ruby she can keep the necklace if she goes to the dance with him, even if they just go as friends. Feeling desperate, he also says she can keep the necklace if Ruby just agrees to meet him for a meal at McDonalds. In the end, Ruby turns Chase down on all his offers.

## **Spin the Bottle**

Spin the Bottle is the kissing game Ruby and her friends play while at summer camp. The premise of the game is that the kids sit in a circle with an empty bottle in the middle. One by one, the kids spin the bottle and whomever it ends up pointing to, must join the spinner in the woods for seven minutes of kissing. It is while playing this game that Ruby receives her first kiss.

## **Camp Ranier**

Camp Ranier is the summer camp Ruby attended while in middle school. At this camp, Ruby developed her first real crush and had her first kiss while playing spin the bottle.

## **The B&O Coffee Shop**

The B&O Coffee Shop is the choice hangout for the kids at Tate High. Ruby spends a lot of time there with her friends, and even her father on occasion. Finn Murphy works at the B&O because he needs to make money, which leads Ruby realizes that not everyone at Tate High is rich.

## **The Spring Fling**

The Spring Fling is the school dance Ruby attends with Jackson after they broke up. Ruby goes with Jackson because Kim is on vacation, and deep down, she's hoping that when Jackson sees her in her silver dress, he'll realize he made a terrible mistake. It's at the Spring Fling that Ruby and Jackson are caught kissing, leading to Ruby becoming "a leper."



# Themes

## Loyalty

The relationships in the novel are based on loyalty. Loyalty is especially important in the relationship between Ruby and her friends. They went through great lengths to write up a list of rules for dating in a small school. As long as the girls stick strictly to that list, they promise each other that they won't have problems. Unfortunately, in the situation between Ruby and Kim, Kim technically followed the rules, but Ruby was still left feeling betrayed. Loyalty was also an issue in many of the romantic relationships, particularly concerning Jackson. Ruby never fully trusted Jackson with Heidi, and now Kim doesn't trust Jackson with Ruby. Before that, Kim didn't trust Finn with Ruby, and in the bathroom, Kim's betrayal reaches boiling point. Rather than talk to Ruby about how she feels, she posts the Boyfriend List around school and writes degrading messages about Ruby in the bathroom. There is no truth in the loyalty expressed between these friends, yet Ruby doesn't see it. Noel tries to warn Ruby saying that her friends are not really her friends, and she responds, "I wanted to believe him, to skip off to some punk-rock hangout and develop an ironic distance and start over in a universe where it didn't matter what any of these people thought about me. But I couldn't. I just loved them" (p. 176). Unfortunately, Ruby will remain loyal to undeserving friends until she sees the truth for herself.

## Truth Telling

When Ruby starts having panic attacks, her parents think she's suffering from anorexia, but Doctor Z thinks she's suffering from her lies: "Doctor Z thinks I'm lying way too much of the time. She thinks I lie to my parents. She thinks I lied to Jackson. She thinks I lie to myself, mainly. Not about truths or facts. About feelings" (p. 117). Ruby lies or covers the truth, about everything, from her emotions in pre-school to whether she wants to play spin-the-bottle in eighth grade (and whether she enjoys the experience), to how she feels about the Spring Fling in high school. The main reason Ruby feels the need to lie is because she fears what people will think about her if she tells the truth. As a result, Ruby holds her emotions inside and her body must have panic attacks to process them. At the end of this chapter nine, Ruby is able to stop a panic attack from overtaking her by shouting at Katarina, telling her to keep her gossip about Jackson and Kim's sex life to herself. It is clear that Katarina told Ruby the story about Jackson and Kim simply to get a rise out of her, so the verbal beating Ruby put on her was justified. For the first time in her life, Ruby has spoken her mind and told the truth, regardless of how it made someone else feel. Doctor Z hopes that if Ruby embraces her true emotions, rather than valuing what others think of her, she'll be able to have healthy, happy relationships. On a minor level, it appears that Doctor Z's suggestion works.



## Sexual Exploration

Because the novel is set in high school, where hormones are running rampant and teenagers are exploring their first "adult" relationships, sexuality influences the way the characters relate to each other. For Ruby and her friends, sex - who's having it, who's not, and how far they're willing to go with their boyfriends - consumes their conversations. It also colors every relationship with boys they have. From her first romantic encounter, Ruby views guys as objects, what they represent as symbols of romance, rather than as people (or friends): "We didn't want the boys to be gentlemen. We wanted them to think we were pretty and ask us to dance and hold our hands and maybe kiss us in the corner and then send us clever instant messages. Yes, that's what we wanted, even from boys who were as stupid and mean as Adam Cox and his friends" (p. 26). Because Ruby looks for boyfriends who are handsome and popular, rather than boyfriends who treat her well, she has unhealthy relationships. As a result, Ruby also has an immature, naïve view of her own sexuality. She uses her sexuality - wearing fishnet stockings and batting her eyelids - to attract her ideal man, not as a way of expressing love with her partner. As the novel progresses, however, and Ruby has more sexual experiences, she realizes how nice it is to share her body with men that she cares about, rather than just as a vehicle for popularity.



# Style

## Point of View

The Boyfriend List is told in the first-person and limited yet omniscient perspective from fifteen-year-old Ruby Oliver's perspective. Ruby writes using "me" and "I" and that the only character whose thoughts the reader has access to are Ruby's alone. The reader is held very close to Ruby's emotions and thoughts, as these are the most important factors to understanding the novel as a whole. Because the reader is held so close to Ruby the point-of-view is completely reliable. As Ruby is struggling to understand what is happening to her, she has no reason to manipulate the circumstances for her own personal gain. She embraces Doctor Z's assignment - the boyfriend list - wholeheartedly and writes about her romantic experiences with abandon. Although it's difficult for her to identify exactly what went wrong, when, she expresses her emotions freely in her diary, certainly more freely than she ever has out loud. This point of view is important to the novel since one of the most important themes in the novel is Ruby's emotional growth, particularly in her relationship with her parents. There could not be the dramatic impact of this growth if not for the reader's peek into Ruby's thoughts and emotions. The reader is given unprecedented access into Ruby's emotions and often, the reader understands what is happening to Ruby long before she does, which creates an interesting relationship with her character. Since the reader can identify problems early-on, they root for Ruby's personal success, even when she is acting terribly.

## Setting

This novel is set in Seattle, Washington. Most of the teenagers in this novel live in an upper crust neighborhood, and almost everyone lives in the upper-middle class economic setting. The majority of the novel takes place within the walls of Tate High, the elite high school that Ruby and her friends attend. However, in the story, Ruby is actually recounting major high school events while sitting in the stark office of her psychiatrist, Doctor Z. The wealthy setting of the novel distinctly sets Tate High apart from most American public schools, where funds are always a problem. It is because of this that many audience members struggle to relate to Ruby, her friends, and the setting in general. Although Ruby is living a modern high schooler's life, hers is a life of privilege that can be alienating to many readers. To balance this, Lockhart has cleverly chosen for Ruby's family to live in a small houseboat rather than a deluxe mansion. Although Ruby's parents are just as wealthy as her friends, they have chosen a quirky, artistic life. It's clear that Lockhart hopes that readers will recognize their own family problems in the cramped space and thin walls of Ruby's houseboat.



## Language and Meaning

The Boyfriend List is told mostly through exposition, with the exception of Ruby's rare scenes of dialogue with either her parents or with Doctor Z. The stark lack of dialogue highlight the isolation Ruby feels in the world now that she has become a social leper, and how Ruby has completely closed herself off to the outside world, being forced - whether by outside forces or her own securities - into reclusive isolation. Because of this, the reader's only insight into the world is through Ruby's thoughts and emotions. Absolutely everything Ruby sees in the world is somehow related back to romantic troubles, past and present, and the perils of unrequited love are reflected language of the text. Because the novel is written for teenage readers, and is formatted like a fifteen-year-old's diary, the language is very conversational, with the voice of each character ringing true to what readers would hear everyday in their high school hallways - or what they remember of their high school hallways. E. Lockhart has clearly researched the voice of her characters, which makes all the language, including Ruby's inner thoughts and dialogue completely believable. Ruby's diary entries highlight the banter of teenage girls, the way they playfully tease each other, flirt with their boyfriends, and bully their victims. The novel is clearly geared toward modern teenagers and is written in modern teen-speak. Adult readers may be confused by some of the teenage vernacular, but are given ample contextual clues to understand its meaning.

## Structure

This novel is written in sixteen short chapters averaging fifteen pages in length. Each chapter is numbered in the same way that Ruby numbers her boyfriend list, and starts with her first boyfriend to her most recent romantic encounter. This system reflects Ruby's quest to discover how each relationship affected the next, and how she ended up as a confused and broken-hearted teenager suffering from panic attacks. is written as the actual boyfriend list Ruby has created for Doctor Z. Therefore, it is written in a journalistic style, and the reader often feels as if they are reading a diary rather than a novel. It is interesting to note that there are two systems of narration at work in the novel although the story is narrated entirely by Ruby. On the surface, the reader is presented with the actual initial entries Ruby has created in the Boyfriend List for Doctor Z. As she writes, however, Ruby adds information, changes her opinions, and retraces thoughts, which is reflected in the novel's many footnotes. Although this structure can be a bit clunky and difficult to follow, once the reader gets into the flow of the writing the footnotes add humor to the text and give a deeper analysis of Ruby's thought. This structure also highlights the way Ruby has protected herself, and those around her, from her vulnerabilities, which actually proves to be the cause of her anxiety. Ruby doesn't feel secure enough to tell her story in a straightforward way, so she tells a bit, changes her mind, and adds more honesty as she goes along. This way, Ruby feels that she is avoiding the judgment and condemnation of her friends, her parents, and Doctor Z.





## Quotes

"We didn't want the boys to be gentlemen. We wanted them to think we were pretty and ask us to dance and hold our hands and maybe kiss us in the corner and then send us clever instant messages. Yes, that's what we wanted, even from boys who were as stupid and mean as Adam Cox and his friends" (p. 26).

"I felt like everyone in school could see my heart breaking, blood pouring out of my chest and sloshing down across my shoes and gushing under the table. And nobody cared, because they thought I deserved it" (Page 52).

"In movies, there are always misunderstandings before the hero and heroine get together. He seems like he hates her, she thinks she hates him ... and then it turns out they were wrong. They love each other madly. And that's the end" (Page 64).

"If people want to fight for their rights and actually see some action, then they have to stick together and not be pissy with each other about little things" (Page 83).

"He's out there, somewhere ... I don't mean Tommy Hazard, like he looks the way I think he looks. I mean someone who's the one for me, and I'm the one for him" (Page 88).

"Doctor Z thinks I'm lying way too much of the time. She thinks I lie to my parents. She thinks I lied to Jackson. She thinks I lie to myself, mainly. Not about truths or facts. About feelings" (Page 117).

"More and more every hour, I stopped feeling the sadness I was supposedly going to get over - and started feeling angry" (Page 153).

"I wanted to believe him, to skip off to some punk-rock hangout and develop an ironic distance and start over in a universe where it didn't matter what any of these people thought about me. But I couldn't. I just loved them" (Page 176).

"My dad tells me to forgive. My mom tells me to forget. But I don't want to do either. Just because I understand where Kim was coming from doesn't mean that I think what she did was right" (Pages 186-187).

"That surprised me almost as much as Shiv Neel, golden boy, thinking we were all laughing at him because he was Indian. Like even the people at the center of the Tate universe feel like they're on the outside" (Pages 224-225).



## Topics for Discussion

Why do you think Doctor Z asks Ruby to write the Boyfriend List? Do you agree with all Ruby's selections of "boyfriends" to include? Why or why not? In the end, would you consider the boyfriend list a successful experiment or a failure? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Ruby's teenage encounter with her first "boyfriend," Adam Cox. Why did this encounter have such a profound effect on Ruby? What does the reader learn about Ruby and the way she relates to boys through her narration of this experience? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Why is Ruby friends with Kim? In your opinion, is Ruby's relationship with Kim a true friendship, or is Noel right: that Ruby's friends are not really her friends? In your opinion, which friend betrayed which? Why? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Aside from Jackson, what boyfriend, or boy experience, do you think has had the strongest impact on the way Ruby views herself and love? How do you see the impact of this relationship affecting Ruby's life? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

Describe Ruby's relationship with her mother. Do you think Ruby's attitudes toward men are a learned behavior, as Doctor Z suggests? Why or why not? How do you feel about Lockhart's decision to focus the end of the novel on Ruby's relationship with her mother? How does the ending also reflect Ruby's relationship with men? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

At the close of the novel, Ruby had not reconciled her relationships with Kim, Nora, or Cricket. Why do you think Lockhart chose to leave the novel so open-ended? What do you think will happen between Ruby and her friends in the future? How can you tell? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.

At the end of the novel, Ruby had a plethora of boyfriends to choose from: Jackson, Angelo, Noel, and Cabbie. Which boy do you think is the best choice for Ruby, given her current emotional situation? Do you think Ruby's opinions on love will change due to her relationships with these boys? Why or why not? Be sure to include examples from the text to help strengthen your arguments.