



HOPELESS

a novel

COLLEEN HOOVER

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
IT ENDS WITH US

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Acknowledgments

About the Author

For Vance.

Some fathers give you life. Some show you how to live it. Thank you for showing me how to live mine.

Sunday, October 28th, 2012

7:29 p.m.

I stand up and look down at the bed, holding my breath in fear of the sounds that are escalating from deep within my throat.

I will not cry.

I will not cry.

Slowly sinking to my knees, I place my hands on the edge of the bed and run my fingers over the yellow stars poured across the deep blue background of the comforter. I stare at the stars until they begin to blur from the tears that are clouding my vision.

I squeeze my eyes shut and bury my head into the bed, grabbing fistfuls of the blanket. My shoulders begin to shake as the sobs I've been trying to contain violently break out of me. With one swift movement, I stand up, scream and rip the blanket off the bed, throwing it across the room.

I ball my fists and frantically look around for something else to throw. I grab the pillows off the bed and chuck them at the reflection in the mirror of the girl I no longer know. I watch as the girl in the mirror stares back at me, sobbing pathetically. The weakness in her tears infuriates me. We begin to run toward each other until our fists collide against the glass, smashing the mirror. I watch as she falls into a million shiny pieces onto the carpet.

I grip the edges of the dresser and push it sideways, letting out another

scream that has been pent up for way too long. When the dresser comes to rest on its back, I rip open the drawers and throw the contents across the room, spinning and throwing and kicking at everything in my path. I grab at the sheer blue curtain panels and yank them until the rod snaps and the curtains fall around me. I reach over to the boxes piled high in the corner and, without even knowing what's inside, I take the top one and throw it against the wall with as much force as my five foot, three-inch frame can muster.

"I hate you!" I cry. "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"

I'm throwing whatever I can find in front of me at whatever else I can find in front of me. Every time I open my mouth to scream, I taste the salt from the tears that are streaming down my cheeks.

Holder's arms suddenly engulf me from behind and grip me so tightly I become immobile. I jerk and toss and scream some more until my actions are no longer thought out. They're just reactions.

"Stop," he says calmly against my ear, unwilling to release me. I hear him, but I pretend not to. Or I just don't care. I continue to struggle against his grasp but he only tightens his grip.

"Don't touch me!" I yell at the top of my lungs, clawing at his arms. Again, it doesn't faze him.

Don't touch me. Please, please, please.

The small voice echoes in my mind and I immediately become limp in his arms. I become weaker as my tears grow stronger, consuming me. I become nothing more than a vessel for the tears that won't stop shedding.

I am weak, and I'm letting *him* win.

Holder loosens his grip around me and places his hands on my shoulders, then turns me around to face him. I can't even look at him. I melt against his chest from exhaustion and defeat, taking in fistfuls of his shirt as I sob, my cheek pressed against his heart. He places his hand on the back of my head and lowers his mouth to my ear.

"Sky." His voice is steady and unaffected. "You need to leave. Now."

Saturday, August 25th, 2012

11:50 p.m.

Two months earlier...

I'd like to think most of the decisions I've made throughout my seventeen years have been smart ones.

Hopefully intelligence is measured by weight, and the few dumb decisions I've made will be outweighed by the intelligent ones. If that's the case, I'll need to make a shitload of smart decisions tomorrow because sneaking Grayson into my bedroom window for the third time this month weighs pretty heavily on the dumb side of the scale. However, the only accurate measurement of a decision's level of stupidity is time...so I guess I'll wait and see if I get caught before I break out the gavel.

Despite what this may look like, I am *not* a slut. Unless, of course, the definition of slut is based on the fact that I make out with lots of people, regardless of my lack of attraction for them. In that case, one might have grounds for debate.

"Hurry," Grayson mouths behind the closed window, obviously irritated at my lack of urgency.

I unlock the latch and slide the window up as quietly as possible. Karen may be an unconventional parent, but when it comes to boys sneaking through bedroom windows at midnight, she's your typical, disapproving mother.

"Quiet," I whisper. Grayson hoists himself up and throws one leg over the ledge, then climbs into my bedroom. It helps that the windows on this side of the house are barely three feet from the ground; it's almost like having my own door. In fact, Six and I have probably used our windows to go back and forth to each other's houses more than we've used actual doors. Karen has become so used to it, she doesn't even question my window being open the majority of the time.

Before I close the curtain, I glance to Six's bedroom window. She waves at me with one hand while pulling on Jaxon's arm with the other as he climbs into her bedroom. As soon as Jaxon is safely inside, he turns and sticks his head back out the window. "Meet me at your truck in an hour," he whispers loudly to Grayson. He closes Six's window and shuts her curtains.

Six and I have been joined at the hip since the day she moved in next door four years ago. Our bedroom windows are adjacent to one another, which has proven to be extremely convenient. Things started out innocently enough. When we were fourteen, I would sneak into her room at night and we would steal ice cream from the freezer and watch movies. When we were fifteen, we started sneaking boys in to eat ice cream and watch movies *with* us. By the time we were sixteen, the ice cream and movies took a backseat to the boys. Now, at seventeen, we don't even bother leaving our respective bedrooms until *after* the boys go home. That's when the ice cream and movies take precedence again.

Six goes through boyfriends like I go through flavors of ice cream. Right now her flavor of the month is Jaxon. Mine is Rocky Road. Grayson and Jaxon are best friends, which is how Grayson and I were initially thrown together. When Six's flavor of the month has a hot best friend, she eases him into my graces. Grayson is definitely hot. He's got an undeniably great body, perfectly sloppy hair, piercing dark eyes...the works. The majority of girls I know would feel privileged just to be in the same room as him.

It's too bad *I* don't.

I close the curtains and spin around to find Grayson inches from my face, ready to get the show started. He places his hands on my cheeks and flashes his panty-dropping grin. "Hey, beautiful." He doesn't give me a chance to respond before his lips greet mine in a sloppy introduction. He continues kissing me while slipping off his shoes. He slides them off effortlessly while we both walk toward my bed, mouths still meshed together. The ease at which he does both things simultaneously is impressive *and* disturbing. He slowly eases me back onto my bed. "Is your door locked?"

"Go double check," I say. He gives me a quick peck on the lips before he hops up to ensure the door is locked. I've made it thirteen years with

Karen and have never been grounded; I don't want to give her any reason to start now. I'll be eighteen in a few weeks and even then, I doubt she'll change her parenting style as long as I'm under her roof.

Not that her parenting style is a negative one. It's just...very contradictory. She's been strict my whole life. We've never had access to the internet, cell phones or even a television because she believes technology is the root of all evil in the world. Yet, she's extremely lenient in other regards. She allows me to go out with Six whenever I want, and as long as she knows where I am, I don't even really have a curfew. I've never pushed that one too far, though, so maybe I do have a curfew and I just don't realize it.

She doesn't care if I cuss, even though I rarely do. She even lets me have wine with dinner every now and then. She talks to me more like I'm her friend than her daughter (even though she adopted me when I was five) and has somehow even warped me into being (almost) completely honest with her about everything that goes on in my life.

There is no middle ground with her. She's either extremely lenient or extremely strict. She's like a conservative liberal. Or a liberal conservative. Whatever she is, she's hard to figure out, which is why I stopped trying years ago.

The only thing we've ever really butted heads on was the issue of public school. She has homeschooled me my whole life (public school is another root of evil) and I've been begging to be enrolled since Six planted the idea in my head. I've been applying to colleges and feel like I'll have a better chance at getting into the schools that I want if I can add a few extracurricular activities to the applications. After months of incessant pleas from Six and me, Karen finally conceded and allowed me to enroll for my senior year. I could have enough credits to graduate from my home study program in just a couple of months, but a small part of me has always had a desire to experience life as a normal teenager.

Of course, if I had known then that Six would be leaving for a foreign exchange the same week as what was supposed to be our first day of senior year together, I never would have entertained the idea of public school. But I'm unforgivably stubborn and would rather stab myself in the meaty part of my hand with a fork than tell Karen I've changed my mind.

I've tried to avoid thinking about the fact that I won't have Six this year. I

know how much she was hoping the exchange would work out, but the selfish part of me was really hoping it wouldn't. The idea of having to walk through those doors without her terrifies me. But I realize that our separation is inevitable and I can only go so long before I'm forced into the real world where other people besides Six and Karen live.

My lack of access to the real world has been replaced completely by books, and it can't be healthy to live in a land of happily ever afters. Reading has also introduced me to the (perhaps dramatized) horrors of high school and first days and cliques and mean girls. It doesn't help that, according to Six, I've already got a bit of a reputation just being associated with her. Six doesn't have the best track record for celibacy, and apparently some of the guys I've made out with don't have the best track record for secrecy.

The combination should make for a pretty interesting first day of school.

Not that I care. I didn't enroll to make friends or impress anyone, so as long as my unwarranted reputation doesn't interfere with my ultimate goal, I'll get along just fine.

I hope.

Grayson walks back toward the bed after ensuring my door is locked, and he shoots me a seductive grin. "How about a little strip tease?" He sways his hips and inches his shirt up, revealing his hard-earned set of abs. I'm beginning to notice he flashes them any chance he gets. He's pretty much your typical, self-absorbed bad boy.

I laugh when he twirls the shirt around his head and throws it at me, then slides on top of me again.

He slips his hand behind my neck, pulling my mouth back into position.

The first time Grayson snuck into my room was a little over a month ago, and he made it clear from the beginning that he wasn't looking for a relationship. I made it clear that I wasn't looking for *him*, so naturally we hit it off right away. Of course, he'll be one of the few people I know at school, so I'm worried it might mess up the good thing we've got going—which is absolutely nothing.

He's been here less than three minutes and he's already got his hand up my shirt. I think it's safe to say he's not here for my stimulating conversation. His lips move from my mouth in favor of my neck, so I use the moment of respite to inhale deeply and try again to feel something.

Anything.

I fixate my eyes on the plastic glow-in-the-dark stars adhered to the ceiling above my bed, vaguely aware of the lips that have inched their way to my chest. There are seventy-six of them. Stars, that is. I know this because for the last few weeks I've had ample time to count them while I've been in this same predicament. Me, lying unnoticeably unresponsive, while Grayson explores my face and neck, and sometimes my chest, with his curious, over-excited lips.

Why, if I'm not into this, do I let him do it?

I've never had any emotional connection to the guys I make out with. Or rather, the guys that make out with *me*. It's unfortunately mostly one sided. I've only had one guy come close to provoking a physical or emotional response from me once, and that turned out to be a self-induced delusion. His name was Matt and we ended up dating for less than a month before his idiosyncrasies got the best of me. Like how he refused to drink bottled water unless it was through a straw. Or the way his nostrils flared right before he leaned in to kiss me. Or the way he said, "I love you," after only three weeks of declaring ourselves exclusive.

Yeah. That last one was the kicker. Buh-bye Matty boy.

Six and I have analyzed my lack of physical response to guys many times in the past. For a while she suspected I might be gay. After a very brief and awkward "theory testing" kiss between us when we were sixteen, we both concluded that wasn't the case. It's not that I don't enjoy making out with guys. I do enjoy it—otherwise, I wouldn't do it. I just don't enjoy it for the same reasons as other girls. I've never been swept off my feet. I don't get butterflies. In fact, the whole idea of being swooned by anyone is foreign to me. The real reason I enjoy making out with guys is simply because it makes me feel completely and comfortably numb. It's situations like the one I'm in right now with Grayson when it's nice for my mind to shut down. It just completely stops, and I like that feeling.

My eyes are focused on the seventeen stars in the upper right quadrant of the cluster on my ceiling, when I suddenly snap back to reality. Grayson's hands have ventured further than I've allowed them to in the past and I quickly become aware of the fact that he has unbuttoned my jeans and his fingers are working their way around the cotton edge of my panties.

"No, Grayson," I whisper, pushing his hand away.

He pulls his hand back and groans, then presses his forehead into my pillow. "Come on, Sky." He's breathing heavily against my neck. He adjusts his weight to his right arm and looks down at me, attempting to play me with his smile.

Did I mention I'm immune to his panty-dropping grin?

"How much longer are you gonna keep this up?" He slides his hand over my stomach and inches his fingertips into my jeans again.

My skin crawls. "Keep *what* up?" I attempt to ease out from under him.

He pushes up on his hands and looks down at me like I'm clueless. "This 'good girl' act you've been trying to put on. I'm over it, Sky. Let's just do this already." This brings me back to the fact that, contrary to popular belief, I am *not* a slut. I've never had sex with any of the boys I've made out with, including the currently pouting Grayson. I'm aware that my lack of sexual response would probably make it easier on an emotional level to have sex with random people.

However, I'm also aware that it might be the very reason I *shouldn't* have sex. I know that once I cross that line, the rumors about me will no longer be rumors. They'll all be fact. The last thing I want is for the things people say about me to be validated. I guess I can chalk my almost eighteen years of virginity up to sheer stubbornness.

For the first time in the ten minutes he's been here, I notice the smell of alcohol reeking from him.

"You're drunk." I push against his chest. "I told you not to come over here drunk again." He rolls off of me and I stand up to button my pants and pull my shirt back into place. I'm relieved he's drunk. I'm beyond ready for him to leave.

He sits up on the edge of the bed and grabs my waist, pulling me toward him. He wraps his arms around me and rests his head against my stomach. "I'm sorry," he says. "It's just that I want you so bad I don't think I can take coming over here again if you don't let me have you." He lowers his hands and cups my butt, then presses his lips against the area of skin where my shirt meets my jeans.

"Then don't come over here." I roll my eyes and back away from him, then head to the window.

When I pull the curtain back, Jaxon is already making his way out of Six's window. Somehow we both managed to condense this hour-long visit into ten minutes. I glance at Six and she gives me the all-knowing "time for a new flavor" look.

She follows Jaxon out of her window and walks over to me. "Is Grayson drunk, too?" I nod. "Strike three." I turn and look at Grayson who's lying back on the bed, ignorant to the fact that he's no longer welcome. I walk over to the bed and pick his shirt up, tossing it at his face. "Leave," I say.

He looks up at me and cocks an eyebrow, then begrudgingly slides off the bed when he sees I'm not making a joke. He slips his shoes back on, pouting like a four-year-old. I step aside to let him out.

Six waits until Grayson has cleared the window, then she climbs inside when one of the guys mumbles the word "*whores*." Once inside, Six rolls her eyes and turns around to stick her head out.

"Funny how we're whores because you *didn't* get laid. Assholes." She shuts the window and walks over to the bed, plopping down on it and crossing her hands behind her head. "And another one bites the dust."

I laugh, but my laugh is cut short by a loud bang on my bedroom door. I immediately go unlock it, then step aside preparing for Karen to barge in. Her motherly instincts don't let me down. She looks around the room frantically until she eyes Six on the bed.

"Dammit," she says, spinning around to face me. She puts her hands on her hips and frowns. "I could have sworn I heard boys in here."

I walk over to the bed and attempt to hide the sheer panic coursing

throughout my body. “And you seem disappointed *because...*” I absolutely don’t understand her reaction to things sometimes. Like I said before... *contradictory*.

“You turn eighteen in a month. I’m running out of time to ground you for the first time ever. You need to start screwing up a little more, kid.”

I breathe a sigh of relief, seeing she’s only kidding. I almost feel guilty that she doesn’t actually suspect her daughter was being felt up five minutes earlier in this very room. My heart is pounding against my chest so incredibly loud, I’m afraid she might hear it.

“Karen?” Six says from behind us. “If it makes you feel better, two hotties just made out with us, but we kicked them out right before you walked in because they were drunk.” My jaw drops and I spin around to shoot Six a look that I’m hoping will let her know that sarcasm isn’t at all funny when it’s the *truth*.

Karen laughs. “Well, maybe tomorrow night you’ll get some cute *sober* boys.” I don’t think I have to worry about Karen hearing my heartbeat anymore, because it just completely stopped.

“Sober boys, huh? I think I can arrange that,” Six says, winking at me.

“Are you staying the night?” Karen says to Six as she makes her way back to the bedroom door.

Six shrugs her shoulders. “I think we’ll stay at my house tonight. It’s my last week in my own bed for six months. Plus, I’ve got Channing Tatum on the flat screen.” I glance back at Karen and see it starting.

“Don’t, Mom.” I begin walking toward her, but I can see the mist forming in her eyes. “No, no, no.” By the time I reach her, it’s too late. She’s bawling. If there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s crying. Not because it makes me emotional, but because it annoys the hell out of me. And it’s awkward.

“Just one more,” she says, rushing toward Six. She’s already hugged her no less than ten times today.

I almost think she’s sadder than I am that Six is leaving in a few days. Six

obliges her request for the eleventh hug and winks at me over Karen's shoulder. I practically have to pry them apart, just so Karen will get out of my room.

She walks back to the door and turns around one last time. "I hope you meet a hot Italian boy," she says to Six.

"I better meet more than just one," Six deadpans.

When the door closes behind Karen, I spin around and jump on the bed, then punch Six in the arm.

"You're such a *bitch*," I say. "That wasn't funny. I thought I got caught." She laughs and grabs my hand, then stands up. "Come. I've got Rocky Road." She doesn't have to ask twice.

Monday, August 27th, 2012

7:15 a.m.

I debated on whether or not to run this morning but I ended up sleeping in, instead. I run every day except Sunday, but it seems wrong having to get up extra early today. Being the first day of school is enough torture in itself, so I decide to put off my run until after school.

Luckily, I've had my own car for about a year now, so I don't have to rely on anyone other than myself to get me to school on time. Not only do I get here on time, I get here forty-five minutes early. I'm the third car in the parking lot, so at least I get a good spot.

I use the extra time to check out the athletic facilities next to the parking lot. If I'm going to be trying out for the track team, I should at least know where to go. Besides, I can't just sit in my car for the next half hour and count down the minutes.

When I reach the track, there's a guy across the field running laps, so I cut right and walk up the bleachers. I take a seat at the very top and take in my new surroundings. From up here, I can see the whole school laid out in front of me. It doesn't look nearly as big or intimidating as I've been

imagining. Six made me a hand-drawn map and even wrote a few pointers down, so I pull the paper out of my backpack and look at it for the first time. I think she's trying to overcompensate because she feels bad for abandoning me.

I look at the school grounds, then back at the map. It looks easy enough. Classrooms in the building to the right. Lunchroom on the left. Track and field behind the gym. There is a long list of her pointers, so I begin reading them.

-Never use the restroom next to the science lab. Ever. Not ever.

-Only wear your backpack across one shoulder. Never double-arm it, it's lame.

-Always check the date on the milk.

-Befriend Stewart, the maintenance guy. It's good to have him on your side.

-The cafeteria. Avoid it at all costs, but if the weather is bad, just pretend you know what you're doing when you walk inside. They can smell fear.

-If you get Mr. Declare for math, sit in the back and don't make eye contact. He loves high school girls, if you know what I mean. Or, better yet, sit in the front. It'll be an easy A.

The list goes on, but I can't read anymore right now. I'm still stuck on, "*they can smell fear.*" It's times like these that I wish I had a cell phone, because I would call Six right now and demand an explanation. I fold the paper up and put it back in my bag, then focus my attention on the lone runner. He's seated on the track with his back turned to me, stretching. I don't know if he's a student or a coach, but if Grayson saw this guy without a shirt, he'd probably become a lot more modest about being so quick to flash his own abs.

The guy stands up and walks toward the bleachers, never looking up at me. He exits the gate and walks to one of the cars in the parking lot. He opens his door and grabs a shirt off the front seat, then pulls it on over his head. He hops in the car and pulls away, just as the parking lot begins to fill up.

And it's



filling up fast.

Oh, God.

I grab my backpack and purposefully pull both arms through it, then descend the stairs that lead straight to Hell.

Did I say Hell? Because that was putting it mildly. Public school is everything I was afraid it would be and worse. The classes aren't so bad, but I had to (out of pure necessity and unfamiliarity) use the restroom next to the science lab, and although I survived, I'll be scarred for life. A simple side note from Six informing me that it's used as more of a brothel than an actual restroom would have sufficed.

It's fourth period now and I've heard the words "slut" and "whore" whispered not so subtly by almost every girl I've passed in the hallways. And speaking of not-so-subtle, the heap of dollar bills that just fell out of my locker, along with a note, were a good indicator that I may not be very welcome. The note was signed by the principal, but I find that hard to believe based on the fact that "your" was spelled

"you're," and the note said, *"Sorry you're locker didn't come with a pole, slut."* I stare at the note in my hands with a tight-lipped smile, shamefully accepting my self-inflicted fate that will be the next two semesters. I seriously thought people only acted this way in books, but I'm witnessing first hand that idiots actually exist. I'm also hoping most of the pranks being played at my expense are going to be just like the stripper-cash prank I'm experiencing right now. What idiot gives away money as an insult? I'm guessing a rich one. Or rich *ones*.

I'm sure the clique of giggling girls behind me that are scantily, yet expensively clad, are expecting my reaction to be to drop my things and

run to the nearest restroom crying. There are only three issues with their expectations.

- 1) I don't cry. Ever.
- 2) I've been to that restroom and I'll never go back.
- 3) I like money. Who would run from that?

I set my backpack on the ground below my locker and pick the money up. There are at least twenty one-dollar bills on the ground, and more than ten still in my locker. I scoop those up as well and shove it all into my backpack. I switch books and shut my locker, then slide my backpack on both shoulders and smile.

"Tell your daddies I said thank you." I walk past the clique of girls (that are no longer giggling) and ignore their glares.

It's lunchtime, and looking at the amount of rain flooding the courtyard, it's obvious that Karma has retaliated with shitty weather. Who she's retaliating against is still up in the air.

I can do this.

I place my hands on the doors to the cafeteria and open them, half-expecting to be greeted by fire and brimstone.

I step through the doorway and it's not fire and brimstone that I'm met with. It's a decibel of noise unlike anything my ears have ever been subjected to. It's almost as if every single person in this entire cafeteria is trying to talk louder than every other person in this entire cafeteria. I've just enrolled in a school of nothing but one-uppers.

I do my best to feign confidence, not wanting to attract unwanted attention from anyone. Guys, cliques, outcasts *or* Grayson. I make it halfway to the food line unscathed, when someone slips his arm through mine and pulls me along behind him.

"I've been waiting for you," he says. I don't even get a good look at his face before he's guiding me across the cafeteria, weaving in and out of tables. I would object to this sudden disruption, but it's the most exciting