

READ BOTTOM UP



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# READ BOTTOM UP

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a novel



BY  
NEEL SHAH & SKYE CHATHAM

This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, and dialogue are drawn from the authors' imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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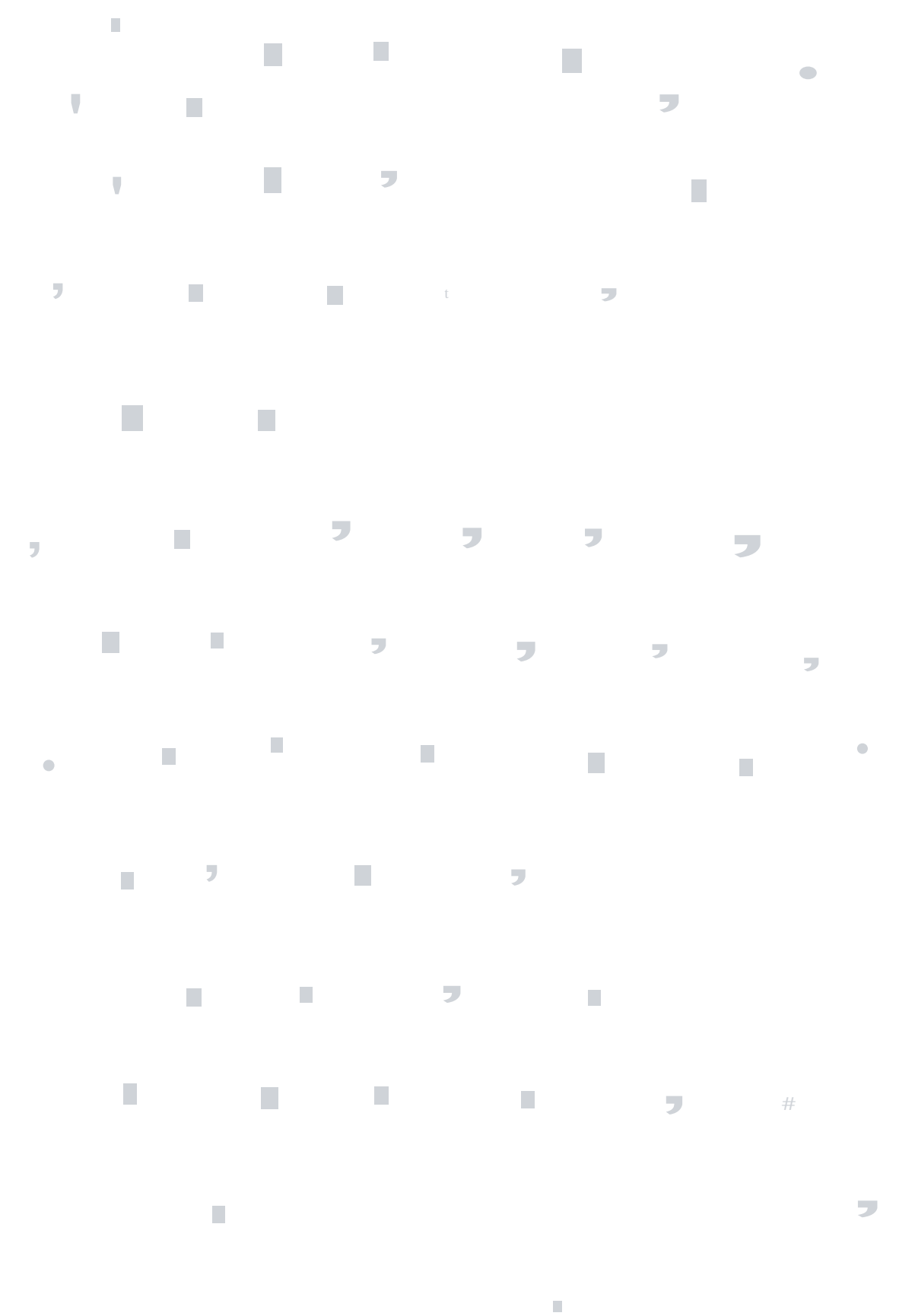
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This book is dedicated to your best friend,  
who saw the whole thing happen.



# Authors' Note

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We wrote this novel because we were sick of the scenarios: Boy likes girl; girl goes on comically disastrous date with boy. Girl likes boy; boy thinks she hates him, but it turns out this is her way of expressing affection and now they're married. Or girl likes boy; boy doesn't like girl; boy sees a shooting star or a taco and comes to the realization that he has been in love with girl this whole time. We were fine with the novels and the movies and the songs about these stories when we were younger, when we didn't realize how very distant they were from our own romantic realities. But these dating trajectories all have one thing in common: They're neat. Clean. Tidy. And therefore they bear little or no resemblance to our contemporary lives. Because sometimes, when a man and a woman like each other *very* much . . . they make an ill-defined mess.

Tell us if this scenario feels right: A great boy/girl enters your life. You both try to make it work but there's a presence of baggage or a discrepancy of feelings and by month five, you've driven each other crazy and yet, miraculously, you both keep this hope train rolling. The relationship lasts for another three months before slamming into a total communication breakdown and creates disproportionately large wreckage considering this person was *barely* your boyfriend/girlfriend. Sound familiar? It should. After all, you've already written it. It's in your inbox.

Somewhere deep in your Sent Items graveyard are the emails you wrote to your former flame along with the emails you wrote *about* those emails to

your best friend. It's all right there—a partial record of your relationship. But what if you could see the whole picture? Not just your side of it. After all, somewhere in the pixelated part of the world is your ex's inbox. Therein lies all sorts of analysis to which you were never privy. What if you could read the whole funny, tragic, wincing train wreck of it all, if you could finally open up your relationship like a dollhouse (or, say, a cadaver) and know the truth of what happened?

*Read Bottom Up* makes this twisted fantasy a reality. This book is composed entirely of carefully time-stamped emails between our hero (Elliot), our heroine (Madeline), and their respective best friends (David and Emily). But format alone is not what makes this book a mirror of our lives. We also wrote it in real time—emailing from the perspective of two characters apiece—which means that, just as you wouldn't see your boyfriend or girlfriend's emails to his/her best friend, we, as authors, never saw each other's complaints or cries for advice. Nor did we see the well-meaning (but often biased) responses that came back. We're reading half of this book for the first time, same as you. We're seeing the parts of Madeline and Elliot's relationship that we were never meant to see.

And why would we do this to ourselves? Why would we write a half-blind which-way book of the modern heart? Science, friends. Science.

—Neel & Skye



## A Visual Key



A conversation between Elliot and Madeline



A conversation between Elliot and David



A conversation between Madeline and Emily

Text Messages




READ BOTTOM UP



MARCH

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*Salato West*  
*friends & family dinner*

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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING  
THE SOFT (AND OH-SO-CUDDLY)  
OPENING OF OUR WESTSIDE OUTPOST.

Sunday, March 2

8 PM - 11 PM

450 WASHINGTON ST.  
NEW YORK CITY

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PLEASE RSVP TO SALATOWEST@GMAIL.COM  
WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU BUT WE'RE  
A SMALL SPACE... THIS INVITE ADMITS YOU  
AND YOU ONLY.







---

Subject: Idiot  
From: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 9:45 AM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>

You went home with Ellie, didn't you? Please tell me you didn't go home with Ellie.

I know she's way too hot for you and everything, but Jesus, you are a weak, weak man.

---

Subject: Re: Idiot  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 10:06 AM  
To: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>

I did not go home with her.

I mean I did walk her back to her apartment, tell her I'm still madly in love with her, and offer to stay over (just spoon) and do her laundry in the morning . . . but she said no to everything, so I didn't technically go home with her.

Except the laundry part. She did let me come in and do that.

---

Subject: Re: Idiot  
From: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 10:07 AM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>

The sad thing is I can't actually tell if you're joking or not.

---

Subject: Re: Idiot  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 11:12 AM  
To: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>

Dude, relax. I told you, we are just friends (“friends”). We hung out. Made some jokes. I pretended not to eavesdrop when she was talking to that asshole French DJ—who, for the record, I hated before I found out that he’s been trying to bang my ex. I saw the card he was giving out to people: “DJ/Model/Freelance Writer.” Very curious as to who’s ever paid him to write anything.

---

Subject: Re: Idiot  
From: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 12:15 PM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>

I still don’t get why you feel the need to have friendly relations with a girl who has basically just existed to make your life miserable for the past year, but you do you, buddy.

BTW—who was that brunette you were talking to when I was leaving? She was cute. That kind of looked like a thing?

And not that I would ever suggest this, because I am not this calculating, but if you REALLY wanted Ellie to like you again, it wouldn’t hurt for you to, you know, start dating again.

Hey what should I eat for lunch? I am so sick of everything around my office.

---

Subject: Re: Idiot  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 12:30 PM  
To: David Meyer <davidmeyer@lathamlaw.com>

Her name was Madeline. That's kind of a wifey name, right? I feel like I could marry a Madeline.

Guess it's a little weird to associate your future wife with the protagonist of a kids book, but yeah, she was cute. Didn't get her number last night but got her email today.

It's kind of cold out. Ramen? I don't know, stop asking me this every day.

---



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Subject: Is This Awkward?  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:12 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Hey Madeline,

It's Elliot, the cute scruffy dude who was wearing flannel last night. Wait, that doesn't narrow it down, lemme try again: I was the cute scruffy dude wearing flannel who also worked at the restaurant.

Shit. Still doesn't narrow it down, huh? We talked okay?! For, like, three whole minutes! You told me you loved the brick chicken but that the brussels sprouts were a little overcooked. I said, "Yeah, well why don't you try making perfectly roasted brussels sprouts for 100 drunk people in a restaurant that isn't even technically open yet." (Kidding. I just thought that.) But you left before I got a chance to ask for your number, which is why I had to get it from our PR girl, which is how this email ended up in your inbox.

Anyway. My evenings are a little tied up with said restaurant, but maybe you'd like to get coffee sometime? Like Thursday?

(Here's where you think, "I can't agree to Thursday, that's too soon. Maybe I'll suggest next Tuesday?")

Tuesday works for me too.

—Elliot



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-----Forwarded Message-----

Subject: Is This Awkward?

From: Elliot Rowe <elliot@salatowest.com>

Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:12 PM

To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Hey Madeline,

It's Elliot, the cute scruffy dude who was wearing flannel last . . .

---

Subject: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]

From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:14 PM

To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

Presented without comment.

Okay, presented with some comment . . .

This is the guy I was telling you about. Maybe he doesn't have a girlfriend?

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]

From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:16 PM

To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

He gives good email.

It's flattering, don't get me wrong, but also maybe a work thing? It almost sounds like a work thing if he's going through the PR person. Plus all the (albeit charming) notes about food.

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:20 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

And the coffee. Also: he's a little "tied up" or "tying someone else up," specifically the lightbulb-changing-height blonde he had his arm around half the night. She has a name. Don't ask me what it was since I had difficulty paying attention to this she-beast once I started talking to him . . .

He was cute. First time I've felt that way in a while.

Anyway, charming. Even if it is not a date and he maybe has a girlfriend.

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:23 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Oh, are you the one?

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:23 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

The one what?

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:24 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

The one who doesn't have access to Facebook?

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Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:31 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

haha. Yes, and I also look for my shoes under the bed. We have like 27 friends in common but i can't see anything but his profile pictures and they're all of him in glasses/dark alleys behind bars/Coachella (which is captioned "Brochella" btw. Oy).

Or pictures from when he was a kid. I hate kid pics! It's like, yes, yes, you were innocent once. Congratulations. Me too.

Maybe you can see more? Plug in "Elliot Rowe" and see.

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:33 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

I can't see anything either. But I am rereading this and i think it's a date. Have you written back yet?

x

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Subject: Re: [Fwd: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Mon, Mar 3 at 1:35 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

Nahh, will write tomorrow. Later! xo



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Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 10:02 AM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliot@salatowest.com>

Hey Elliot,

Look at you. I like the detective work, getting my email from Becca. It's just shy of creepy (creepy being "I didn't get your number so I got your address off this W9 you threw away, hope that's cool"). No, kidding, happy you wrote. So glad that things are so busy for you at the restaurant.

And sure, always happy to break beans (that sounds gross but you get the idea . . .) with a new friend.

I can't do Thursday but Tuesday works. After work? 6/7ish?

—Madeline

---

Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliot@salatowest.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:06 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Madeline,

"Just shy of creepy" is actually my middle name. Seriously, my birth certificate reads, Elliot "Just Shy of Creepy" Rowe. Filling out my name on standardized test forms was always kind of a bummer.

"New friend," huh? Ouch. At least do me a favor and wait till after the date before putting me in that category. :)

AND YES, I USE EMOTICONS FREQUENTLY AND AM NOT ASHAMED OF IT. AND CAPS LOCK TOO.

6/7ish, huh? How about 6:18, Broome Street Coffee?

—E"J.S.O.C"R



Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:20 PM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliot@salatowest.com>

Elliot,

Let's say it then. Broome Street works. Though I might show up at 6:19 just to be a big girl about it. I'll be the one with the rose in my teeth. Dangling from the stem will be a slip of paper and on that slip of paper it'll read: "Wait, I thought you had a girlfriend!"

Just kidding. The rose thing has always sounded so painful!

Serious about that last bit though. :)

Looking forward . . .

Madeline

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Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliot@salatowest.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:42 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Wait, the girl I was making awkward small talk with?! That was my ex-girlfriend. Jeez, you really think I'd be asking you on a date if 1) I had a girlfriend, and 2) you saw me with her?! I'm not an animal!

And now we've gone and violated the cardinal First Date Rule banning talking about exes. Though I suppose there's nothing in the rule book that says you can't mention them before you go out.

See you there.

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----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:42 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Wait, the girl I was making awkward small talk with?! That was my ex-girlfriend. Jeez, do you really think I'd be asking you on a date if . . .

---

Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:20 PM  
To: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>

Elliot,  
Let's say it then. Broome Street works. Though I might show up . . .

---

Subject: Re: Is This Awkward?  
From: Elliot Rowe <elliott@salatowest.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:06 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Madeline,  
"Just shy of creepy" is actually my middle name. Seriously . . .

---

Subject: [Fwd: Re: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:45 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

Stop the presses! He doesn't have a girlfriend.

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Subject: Re: [Fwd: Re: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 12:47 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

Oh, this works out VERY nicely because you, i might remind you, don't have a boyfriend. have fun.

---

Subject: Re: [Fwd: Re: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 1:02 PM  
To: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>

PS. i am a psycho because i do that thing where whatever greeting/ salutation I'm presented with, that's what I reply with. So he left off our names and thus I will too.

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Subject: Re: [Fwd: Re: Is This Awkward?]  
From: Emily Roberts <emilyrobertshere@gmail.com>  
Date: Tue, Mar 4 at 1:13 PM  
To: Madeline Whittaker <madeline@fivespoonspress.com>

that's not psychotic, that's called "engaging your mirror." report back.

xo

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