

**Where Will We Go?**



# **WHERE WILL WE GO?**

**A Sequel**

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new degree press

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Where Will We Go?

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*To my sweet angel, my Nanny, Jean Casteel.*

*June 23, 1941–April 25, 2021*



# CONTENTS

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<b>A Note from the Author</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 1 To Paris, My Dear?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 2 So Close</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 3 Let's Jet!</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Bonjour, friends</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Chapter 5 Paris Awaits</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Chapter 6 Eiffel tower</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter 7 A View from the Top</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter 8 Cemetery Trip</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Chapter 9 The Louvre</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter 10 The Berry's</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Chapter 11 Approaching Deadline</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Chapter 12 Rodin Museum</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter 13 First Travel Article</b>	<b>119</b>

<b>Chapter 14</b>	<b>Wine Celebration</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Chapter 15</b>	<b>Wall of Love</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Chapter 16</b>	<b>Second Travel Article</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Chapter 17</b>	<b>The Final Adventure</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>Chapter 18</b>	<b>Saying Goodbye</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>Chapter 19</b>	<b>Hello America</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>Chapter 20</b>	<b>Third Travel Article</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Chapter 21</b>	<b>Fourth Travel Article</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>Chapter 22</b>	<b>Party Time</b>	<b>181</b>
<b>Chapter 23</b>	<b>December Reveals</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>Chapter 24</b>	<b>Unexpected</b>	<b>203</b>
	<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>215</b>
	<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>221</b>



*“Until you spread your wings, you will  
have no idea how far you can fly.”*

*— Napoleon Bonaparte*



# A Note From The Author

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*"Maybe there's something you're afraid to say, or someone you're afraid to love, or somewhere you're afraid to go. It's gonna hurt. It's gonna hurt because it matters."*

—John Green

Dear Readers,

I choose to rise above all the pain.

I wrote this book during a very dark and confusing time in my life. Two years after a major heartbreak, I found myself still triggered by internal failure. I felt lost and hopeless. Writing had always been my escape, my oasis from the world. I leaned into it and embedded my deepest and darkest moments into Lucy's world. She is my vessel of hope and light. My saving grace when I see no way out of my own torment.

I want to share stories of hope with you to show you that hope is possible after any heartbreak in your life. This

book is for the happy, sad, successful, failure, adventurous soul, romantic, and heartbroken person out there in the world. No matter what struggle or exciting moment you are facing, this book is for every moment. Life is beautiful and messy—cherish every bit.

Heartbreak comes in many shapes and forms throughout our lives, but it doesn't have to take you down with it. You can either rise above or give in.

In my debut book *Will You Love Me Again?* Lucy's husband cheated on her. Although I have never been cheated on, I knew what it felt like to have everything turned upside-down in a split second. I started to question why I wasn't enough for my ex-boyfriend, even though I was miserable in that relationship. I found an outlet to express my deepest darkest feelings in *Where Will We Go?* That, in turn, helped me grow and heal.

I didn't handle my breakup with a positive mindset. Lucy experiences the pain, then slowly comes to terms with her new beginning. But her heartbreak wasn't her final chapter, and neither was mine. We both had a lot to learn in our lives and needed closure and more chapters.

While writing this book, I faced my biggest demons—the way my ex used to make me feel, our memories, and our devastating ending. I drew on the pain and forced myself to not back down from the ache his very name brought me. After two years, he was still controlling my thoughts, but I finally said no more and began writing a new story—my story. Although this book is fiction, I weave in parts of my heartbreak trauma.

In 2021, I can say I am free. After facing my pain for what it was, heartbreak, I found love again.

Before I found my forever love, I struggled with wanting to make new connections such as friends or a relationship after

having my heart shattered multiple times. Those wants, needs, and desires of having something new were pushed to the back burner. They became emotions farfetched. Instead of bottling up my hurt, I wanted to build a narrative that showed the aftermath of an earth-shattering heartbreak. I felt compelled to invite people to see the good and ugly parts of healing and finding yourself. For a long time, I didn't feel comfortable with the healing process because I had to realize that my healing timeline wasn't the same as anyone else's. I had to learn how to accept my growth and keep pushing forward even when the world around me kept telling me to hurry up and bounce back. As if I were a robot trained to only experience emotions for a limited time, but I'm human, and healing doesn't work that way. Healing is a process that requires time, growth, reflection, and acceptance.

Our world paints a terrible picture of heartbreak, so paint a different picture. "Dream a better dream," as Max says in *The Adventures of Sharkboy and Lavagirl*. Your life doesn't suddenly stop, even if it seems like you are standing still. I promise there is hope after your heart shatters.

Heartbreak is a season in life when we can explore ourselves and the world around us. The aftermath is only the first stepping-stone, so how you handle that life change will say a lot about your strength and ambition.

My story wasn't over. Heartbreak was never my curtain call. Maybe it was my beginning.

My wish is for Lucy to be a symbol of hope and growth. If nothing else, she'll provide strength through whatever heartbreak you may be going through.

Embrace the pain.

With Love,  
Em



# Preface

---

**August 16, 2021**

Two years of marriage ruined by one drunken mistake.

At the young age of twenty-two, fresh out of college, I married my high school sweetheart. Our life together was perfect, too perfect. We fell into sync effortlessly.

Trouble rose to the surface faster than either of us expected or asked for after saying “I do” in June 2018. Only two years later, my then-husband, David Lee, went to a bar with his high school buddies. After too many drinks, a woman came up behind him and started flirting. David slipped his ring into his pocket, took the woman’s hand, and went home with her.

I didn’t find out for almost a week. In a heated fight on June 2, 2020, I kicked him out of our house. A few months later, I broke my silence with my best friend, Jenny Thompson Morgan, and spilled the beans on what went down with David. She urged me to do what was best for me and that she thought he was a jerk.

We needed a guy’s opinion. I reached out to Michael Sparks, one of my friends from college. He reminded me

that cheating isn't acceptable, and I shouldn't have to wait around to see if he did it again. *Do your heart a favor and file for divorce before it gets worse, he said.*

In August 2020, I filed for divorce from my high school sweetheart. A year later, he announced his engagement to the woman who ended our marriage.



## CHAPTER 1

# TO PARIS, my DEAR?

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**August 16–17, 2021**

I sit cross-legged in my comfy chair on an atypical August afternoon. My divorce is final. My ex-husband is engaged to his mistress. I still can't believe this is my life.

Yesterday, I promised my best friend, Jenny, that I would call her. Picking up my phone, I tap her contact in my favorites list and listen for her voice. As soon as the dial tone connects, I spill my guts.

"Jenny, did I ever tell you that I wanted to travel someday? I know I told Michael, but I can't remember if I told you."

After all these years, two of my best friends are meeting in person. Jenny and I are childhood best friends. Michael and I met while we were studying professional writing in college. Their paths in person haven't crossed yet, but that is all about to change when I reveal my travel plans. I can barely contain my excitement.

"Lucy, breathe for a minute, goodness. No, you haven't told me."

I gleefully scream, "I will tell you now, then!"

"Hurry up and tell me, girl!"

“Okay, so last year, Michael and I were talking about dream places we wanted to travel to because he was telling me about his travel plans. I have been thinking more about it. Since the divorce is now final, I want to spread my wings and venture out into the world. What do you think?”

“I think this is a great idea. Two questions. Are you taking me? And can we also invite Michael? I want to officially meet the guy who single-handedly helped you divorce that jerk of an ex-husband.”

I gasp. “Jenny!”

“Sorry, but he was a jerk. Michael swooped in like a prince.”

I shake my head. Leave it to my best friend to dis my ex and praise my college best friend in the same sentence.

“I know, but still no dissing. Oh, that’s right, I still have to introduce y’all. Oops!”

“I enjoy dissing cheaters.”

“Don’t we all?”

She laughs, then asks, “But, the more important thing is, how have you managed to keep Michael hidden all these years?”

“Michael hasn’t come to Athens since my wedding. He left right after congratulating me and talking for a bit. You were off taking care of your maid of honor duties. A while after the wedding, we met up in Florence, but not since that dinner.”

“So, you are saying I missed meeting your awesome friend?”

“Exactly. But now the opportunity is upon us, and we have to take it.”

“Yes, we do!” Jenny prompts me. “So, where are we venturing off to then?”

“I landed the travel writer position with *Getaway Travel Magazine*,” I squeal. “How do you feel about Paris?”

Michael interned for *Getaway Travel Magazine* during his senior year in college, the fall semester after my June wedding. He was in Los Angeles for an entire term. He inspired me to apply for a permanent position with their magazine. The last I heard, he was working on writing short horror stories and poems. I can't wait to catch up with him.

"Wait. Did you say Paris? Like *the* Paris, France? Your favorite city? I say yes! Best-friend adventure is definitely a yes! I am so happy for you!"

"A much-needed best friend vacation!"

"We need to clue Michael in," she laughs. "Wait, when do they want you to leave?"

"Next week. Are you teaching any classes this semester?"

Jenny was barely out of college when she landed her first assistant teaching job in the history department at our local community college. In utter disbelief, she immediately started working and slowly worked her way up over the next two years. Last year, she received the title "History Professor." Working year-around, I'm not sure she is free to take off for four weeks.

"That is so soon! No, I actually wanted to take the semester off. Good timing, huh?"

"Very good timing. I'm one lucky girl. So meet tomorrow?"

"Sounds good to me. I think we are both lucky. The getaway of a lifetime."

"Here's to getting out of the country. I'll make a group chat so we can discuss times and places."

"Ah, I am so excited!"

"Me too! I'll text you."

"Talk to you soon, bye!"

"Talk then. Bye."

*Besties Group Chat*

Me: Hey y'all! So, Jenny already knows this, sorry, Michael. I landed the travel writer position at *Getaway Travel Magazine* (yes, same as your internship), and my first assignment is this month. They are helping me with expenses. This is a paying job. More details to come. Michael, are you free to meet up with Jenny and me tomorrow afternoon in Athens? By the way, you're coming with us to Paris.

Me: It is time to dip into your savings, y'all!

Michael: Ha ha, thanks for clueing me in, y'all. No hard feelings. Tomorrow's perfect. Where and what time?

Jenny: What about we grab lunch at noon. Where do y'all want to eat?

Me: Y'all know I am always down for food.

Michael: If food wasn't involved, it wouldn't be your meeting. Also, Jenny, we finally get to meet. I'm stoked!

Jenny: Michael, you are so right! Luce is made of food. Yes, finally time to meet. Sorry, we haven't met in person yet.

Me: All right, all right, I love food. We know. Yes, finally, I let my two best friends meet. What sounds good from this list: Samurai, Applebee's, or Cracker Barrel?

Connecting my Bluetooth to my car radio, I click on the *My Jams* Spotify playlist and start singing "Old Me" by 5 Seconds of Summer at the top of my lungs as I pull onto the road. I tap the steering wheel and cheerily make my way to Highway 72.

I wasn't always this way. Life was hard after the divorce. Six months finalized, and I can finally say I am happy about my brunette curls that fall around my face—the way he used to love it, my ex. But that doesn't matter anymore. I let the wave of nostalgia pass.

Twenty minutes later, I pull into Samurai's parking lot and take a spot close to the door. I look for Michael's navy Jeep and Jenny's baby-blue GMC Terrain, and I come up empty. Panicking, I send them a text.

Me: I'm parked by the door. Where are y'all?

I check the parking lot as my phone vibrates in the cupholder.

Jenny yells, "Hey, Luce!"

"Hey, Jen!" I yell back. "Where are you?"

Jenny taps on my window, making me jump.

Her flower-patterned sundress blows in the breeze. She presses her face to the window and says through the phone, "Come on!" She is effortlessly beautiful with bright green eyes and wavy brunette hair pinned up in a messy bun.

Jenny opens my door right after the lock pops up.

"Why, thank you, best friend." I smile and give her a small sidehug. She is wearing my tan booties. I had almost forgotten I lent her those last week for her date night with Aaron. "Let's go get a table while we wait to hear from Michael."

The hostess leads us to a table in the front dining area. "Is a booth okay?"

Michael: I am outside. Where are y'all?

I cover my mouth and giggle. I say, "Oh, crap! We forgot to text him we were going inside."

"I guess we better tell him," Jenny says.

Jenny: Hey, sorry. I surprised Lucy at her car, and we completely forgot to send a text. Come on in. We are at a booth right inside the door.

Michael: On my way.

Seconds later, Michael walks in the door. I throw my hand up and wave him over to our booth. His jet-black hair falls in his face, probably overdue for a trim, and hits the top of

his black rim glasses. He is sporting his favorite color today. A white baseball tee with royal blue quarter-sleeves, paired with faded black jeans, and black lace-up Converse.

Michael apologizes as he slides in next to me. “Sorry, it took me so long!”

“Boi, it is all good! You know I understand. We both do. Jenny used to drive to Florence all the time to see me. Didn’t you, Jen?”

“Anything for you, Luce.” She smiles. “Hi, Michael, I’m Jenny. It is nice to *finally* meet you.” She draws the *finally* out while giving me a look.

I hold my hands up in surrender. “I apologize for not making this epic meeting happen sooner.”

Michael looks me directly in the eye and says, “I forgive you, but I think Jenny will take some persuading.”

Jenny grins back and says, “Yeah, you will really have to persuade me, like, a trip to Paris?”

“*That*, I can do!”

Michael says, “All right, Lucy, spill the beans on Paris!”

“Hold your horses.”

“I don’t know what horses you are speaking of.” He nudges me and winks.

“Sure you don’t, Sparks.” I nudge him back. “Let’s get down to business, shall we?”

“Are you going to start singing Disney tunes now?” Jenny asks.

They both roll their eyes.

“Hmm, no, not at all. No *Mulan* today.”

“Good!” Michael reassures me. “Not that I don’t love Disney tunes, but I would rather hear about Paris.”

“I second that!” Jenny says. “What’s the game plan, Luce?”

“I started researching flights, food, hotels, and potential places last night after our phone call. I even emailed my editor

my article pitches. No response yet, but I am hoping I hear back soon.”

“Well, what have you come up with?” Jenny asks, trying to keep me focused.

“Oh, right.” I open my wallet purse and grab my list. “I have quite the list here. Are y’all ready? Information overload time!” I slide the papers over and start my spiel. “Okay, so we are flying out of Huntsville at 11:02 a.m. on August 24. We have two stops, the first in Atlanta, the second in Germany. We will arrive in Paris at 11:10 a.m. on August 25. Are y’all following?” I stop to catch my breath.

“That is a long flight.” Michael gives me a puzzled look. “Why are they so specific?”

“The flight there is seventeen hours and eight minutes, but flying back home takes twenty hours and twenty-three minutes, with two different stops as well.” I see their eyes get big. “*Guys*, we have a layover between stops. I think specific is their specialty, just like me.”

Michael nods. “Ah, makes sense.”

“Well,” Jenny says, “we can say it is a trip worth taking because it *is* Paris, right?”

“I don’t see why not!” I clap my hands and smile.

A few moments later, I take a couple of bites of my food before diving back into my Paris information overload. “*Get-away Travel Magazine* has most of the expenses covered, and we only need money for the extra stuff. They sent me just enough money for y’all’s plane tickets and the hotel. They’re sending me a company credit card, our plane tickets, and hotel information.”

“That sounds like a dream come true,” Michael says after taking a sip of his sweet tea.

Jenny says, “I agree. It must be a dream come true for you, Luce, our very own dreamer.”

"It's a trip of a lifetime, and I am not taking it for granted." I clap my hands. "Back to planning. We are staying at the Cler Hotel, which is around a mile from the Eiffel Tower!"

Their jaws fall open.

"That close?" Jenny asks. "You're kidding."

"One second." I fumble with my phone then search on Google: *how close is Cler Hotel to the Eiffel Tower*. "Ah, here we go! By car, eight minutes away, but let's see the walking distances." I click the person on the direction screen, and it brings up three routes. I turn the phone around and point to the routes. "See, thirteen to fifteen minutes, and the shortest distance is a single kilometer."

"Wait, back up. What is that in miles?" Michael raises his eyebrow.

"Let me check." I go back to Google. "Under a mile, point six-two miles, to be precise."

"Not bad."

"As close to the Eiffel Tower as possible is how I like it."

Jenny says, "You've dreamed of going to Paris since... what, middle school?" She turns to Michael. "Did *she* tell you how long she's wanted to travel to Paris?"

"No!" He turns to me and says, "You've been holding out on me, girl!"

I hold my hands up in surrender. "Sometimes I can be forgetful, you know?"

Jenny says, "Wow, that's like hardly ever!"

"Fine. Fine." I huff. "I'm not a forgetful person, happy?"

"Very!" She laughs. "Now tell him the reason."

"Okay, okay. Promise you won't laugh?" I give him my best puppy dog eyes.

"Aren't you adorable?"

I sternly say, "Not the point. Do you promise?"



"I promise," he quickly vows.

"Do you remember the show *Pretty Little Liars*?"

"That show about a stalker named A?"

"The one and only." My tone lightens as my memories turn to my favorite show.

"Totally no judgment. That show was popular for what, seven years?"

"Yeah! Which is why a scene in the third season influenced my love for Paris."

"Really?"

"In the third season, when Emily is missing her friend Allison and looking for clues, she flashes back to the times they talked about taking a trip to Paris."

He nudges my shoulder and says, "Only *you* would fall in love with a city through a television show."

"Yes, only me. But that's why I want the Eiffel Tower to be the first place we explore."

They both nod in agreement.

Michael says, "Do you have any other plans in mind?"

"When Jenny and I got off the phone last night, I started researching. I found three other places nearby."

"How nearby are we talking?" Jenny asks.

"No more than a thirty-minute drive from our hotel."

"That's not bad! What are these 'other places'?"

"The Louvre, Rodin Museum, and Montmartre's Wall of Love. What do y'all think?"

"I love it, Luce."

"So, do I, Lucy," Michael agrees.

"The best part is, those sites have something for everyone. Jenny loves history and adventure, I have dreamed of seeing the Eiffel Tower in person for years, and Michael, you love art."

Jenny says, “I have a feeling you have more reasons for bringing those specific places up.”

Michael says, “Are you holding out on us again, girl?”

“No, no. I just haven’t gotten there yet.”

“Well, get on with it, won’t you?” Michael prompts me.

“I picked those as potential article topics.” Suddenly my phone buzzes. “Y’all, it’s my editor in chief, Ashley Wilson.”

Jenny says, “Open it! Open it!”

Michael says, “Go on, girl.”

I take a deep breath and silently read the email over.

Bonjour Ms. Berry,

Thank you for your kind email. I am doing well. I thought over your pitches. I love them. The company values hearing up-to-date research on the most common tourist attractions. I am hoping your voice gives travelers a fresh outlook on these well-known and beloved Paris places. Those places are in great proximity to your location. The Eiffel Tower is marvelous. You will love it! With that being said, those four places will be your topics moving forward. To plan your trip—if you have a tentative writing/visiting schedule, send it over, and we will discuss the schedules and deadlines later this week.

As you move into starting your first assignment with your assigned editor, I want to remind you of *Getaway Travel Magazine’s* mottos.

We Stand For: Building writers up, not tearing them down. Our writers are beginners to experts

in their field, but all have a passion to share their perspectives of the world. We are adventurous and nonjudgmental.

Our Team Goals: We aim to produce uplifting, creative, and unique conversational-style articles with a dash of research. We want to spark curiosity and lead readers to discover the world.

Our Mission is to create a safe space for travelers to hear from real-life people about out-of-this-world destinations and experiences.

Thanks,  
Ashley Wilson  
Head Editor in Chief  
*Getaway Travel Magazine*

“Ah!” I squeal.

Jenny taps on the table and says, “What? What did she say?”

“She said, ‘I love them.’”

Jenny gives me a high five. “That’s our girl.”

Michael pokes my side and says, “Get it, girl. I’m so excited. One question, how are you able to write about well-known places?”

I tell them about how my pieces can give a fresh outlook. I need to make a tentative writing schedule for Mrs. Wilson to look over.

Jenny says, “Maybeweshouldpayandheadtoyourhouse?”

“If y’all want to come over, y’all are more than welcome to come to hang and plan some more.”

“I’m down. I love planning trips,” Jenny says. “Can I invite Aaron over? I know he would love to hear about Paris and finally meet Michael. Well, that is, if you are coming over.” She raises her eyes at him as we stand by the table.

Aaron has been my best friend since kindergarten. It was always him, me, and Jenny, the original trio. Now, he and Jenny have been married for a year and a half, a total of eight-and-a-half years together. I envy the love they have for one another—supportive, precious, and committed to each other. I couldn’t think of a better duo than them.

“Aaron is more than welcomed to join.” I eye Michael. “Are you coming, boi?”

“I’m down. Let’s hang out before we spend four weeks together. Shall we?”

Michael opens the door for Jenny and me. We walk out of the restaurant into a very bright, sunny afternoon in Athens, Alabama. I shield my eyes as I head to my blue Nissan Versa. “I’ll see y’all at the house. Michael, stay close behind Jenny or me since you haven’t been there yet.” My engine rumbles as I crank my car.

Jenny says, “Just watch for blue, or call us.” She closes her door while Michael shakes his head and smiles at us.

I’m ready to roll out as Niall Horan’s “Heartbreak Weather” streams through the speakers.

