

Summary: Marcy is very shy and is grateful that Liz started their friendship when they were both at high school orientation. At first she appreciated how outspoken Liz is, but recently Liz has been deliberately embarrassing Marcy in public, bossing her around, and demanding that Marcy do things for her. Marcy doesn't want to lose their friendship but doesn't want to be walked all over either—and doesn't know how to confront Liz.

I met Liz at high school orientation. We went to different middle schools but know a few people in common because our mothers are both super-involved in the Jewish community. We were standing in line to get our ID pictures taken when Liz started to talk to me. I was completely bored and wished I had someone to talk to, but I'm pretty shy, so I was really happy when she talked first. I'm not a bookworm or anything—I just could never be that outgoing! I also thought it was cool the way she stood up for herself. A couple of girls tried to butt in line and she wouldn't have it. She told them where they could go wait—it was pretty funny!

We traded screen names and kept in touch over the summer to compare schedules. After school started this fall, we started to hang out a lot. Just the usual stuff like movies and the mall. Sometimes I sleep at her house, but it's hard, because we live at opposite ends of the district.

I really like Liz, but recently she's started putting me down. It's especially annoying when she makes comments about how shy I am. She knows it embarrasses me. Everyone can't be like her. Remember how I told you how she talked to those girls who cut in line? I thought it was funny then, but now she talks to me like that in public, and it makes me feel so small. It's like she cares about getting a laugh more than she cares about our friendship.

Lately, she's always asking me to do things for her. Not like if I'm getting a soda and she asks me to get one for her, too—that would be okay—but she asks me to get her snacks when we're both lying on the couch watching TV. And she's usually closer to the kitchen. Plus, it's her house! And it doesn't stop there. This past week she left me to clean up a huge mess that we made together when we were baking cookies, and yesterday she asked me to do her homework. I get that she's stressed, but I have a lot of work to do, too.

The thing is this: I don't know what to do. I really like Liz, and I don't want to lose her friendship, but I don't want her to think she can walk all over me. If I were less shy, like her, I'd tell her exactly how I felt.



Summary: Tami and Jessica are friends who hang out a lot, both in classes and outside of school. They had arranged to go to a movie on a Saturday night, but Jessica called to say she was grounded because of a fight with her dad. Tami was sympathetic. However, on Monday Tami discovered that Jessica had not been grounded—in fact, Jessica had gone to the movies with other friends. Tami feels hurt—and confused. She doesn't want Jessica to think she can just dump her whenever something “better” comes along, but doesn't want to lose the friendship either.

Jessica is one of my friends. We're not best friends, but pretty good friends. We've known each other since the beginning of seventh grade, when we were the slowest girls around the track in gym class. Even when we could run faster, we hung back; we had so much fun together. Mostly, we would talk about our teachers or what other girls were wearing. Jessica is into fashion like me. And we always made each other laugh.

Now we take earth science together and have the same teacher for English, but during different periods. When we have the same study hour, we sit together and try to get some work done, but sometimes we're laughing so hard that we don't accomplish a thing.

It's not like we never hang out outside of school. Jessica and I are into different activities—she's on the track team, which I think is pretty funny, considering how we met, and I have guitar lessons and dance team practice. But we still do things a couple of times a month. Usually, it's a sleepover—that way we can talk and laugh all we want.

The other night Jessica and I were supposed to go to the movies. She called around five and said that she had had a huge fight with her father and she couldn't go out. It was hard to be mad at her, since I was grounded last week for yelling at my dad, but I was really bummed. There was no way I was going to find plans that late. I didn't want to call anyone, or they would think I was a loser with nothing to do on a Saturday night.

Monday I was sitting with my usual crowd at lunch, and Rachel and Caroline were talking about the movie they saw that weekend. They started to tell this really funny story about how Jessica spilled her soda and a bunch of people went slipping all over the place. I couldn't believe they were talking about my friend Jessica, so I asked them just to be sure. They looked at me like I was crazy. Then I asked if they were sure it was Saturday night, maybe it had been Sunday afternoon. They said they were sure, they were at a play Sunday afternoon.

I am so mad at Jessica. I know some girls who break plans at the last minute if something “better” comes up, but I didn't think Jessica was like that. She's broken plans before, but she always had a good excuse—at least I thought so at the time. And I can't believe she lied. I actually felt sorry for her being grounded.

Now I don't know what to do. If I tell her I know, she might get mad at me. I don't want to get Rachel and Caroline in trouble, and I don't want to lose our friendship. But I also don't want her to think she can drop me any time something “better” comes along. Maybe I should just forget about it. I wish I knew what to do.



Summary: Julie and Lindsey are best friends who have shared their secrets and dreams with each other. Lindsey is very pretty and talented and has begun to date. She started seeing a guy named Aaron, even though she knew Julie once had a secret crush on him. Shortly after Lindsey started seeing Aaron, he mocked Julie in the school hallway, using information he could only have gotten from Lindsey. Julie was embarrassed and hurt that Lindsey was sharing her secrets. Julie hasn't spoken to Lindsey since then, but her other friends think she has no claim on Aaron and that she shouldn't lose Lindsey as a friend.

Aaron was my first crush. I was so in love with him. I thought he was so cute and so funny. He did these really great impressions of our math teacher. When I liked Aaron, Lindsey liked this guy named Todd. Todd and Aaron couldn't be more different. Aaron's outgoing; Todd is quiet. Aaron has brown eyes; Todd's are really blue. Aaron is into theater and fantasy novels; Todd is really brilliant in science. In eighth grade Lindsey and I talked constantly about our crushes. We were so goofy; we even picked out the colors for our joint wedding!

Lindsey has already started dating. Nothing serious. She mostly goes out in groups, but she's messed around with a few guys. For homecoming, most of the girls in my class get together to have pizza and get ready for the dance and end up back at someone's house for a big sleepover at the end of the night. But Lindsey went with a date.

Lots of guys want to date Lindsey. She's really pretty and super nice. She's involved in a million things: chorus, debate, student government, and yearbook. She's also an amazing artist. Everybody is always asking her to draw their portraits. It's totally easy to see why people would like her. I mean, I think she's great—she's one of my closest friends.

Which is exactly why I was mad at her when she asked me if she could start seeing Aaron. I mean, she knows what he means to me. And I know I'm not into him anymore; I'm not all that interested in dating at all—too much pressure—but that doesn't mean she should get him. She has her pick of guys. He's not even her type!

She told me she was just asking as a courtesy. She had every intention of dating him, whether or not I gave her permission. She said she didn't see what the big deal was.

A few days later, I saw Aaron in the hallway at school with a bunch of his guy friends. When he passed me, he made some remark about the color scheme I'd chosen for my wedding, and everyone laughed. I was totally embarrassed. The only way he could have known that is if Lindsey told him. Not only does she want to date my crush, but she's using my secrets to get close to him.

Lindsey and I haven't spoken since Aaron made that comment. My other friends think I'm being ridiculous. They can't believe I'm throwing away an important friendship over something so small. It's not like I ever dated Aaron. That's what they all say. It's not like I own him. But I'm still mad at her. Why did she ask me how I felt if she was going to do what she wanted anyway? And, even if I'm not into Aaron anymore, I can't believe she told my secrets to someone else. I never would have done that to her. But I have to say that I miss her. If it wasn't Lindsey who had done this to me, she's the first person I'd ask for advice.



Summary: Maya wants to break up with Alex. She recognizes that Alex's jealousy makes her feel uneasy. Alex says it's about loving Maya so much, but Maya isn't so sure anymore. The cell phone Alex gave her has begun to feel like a leash. She doesn't know how to end the relationship because Alex has threatened to commit suicide if they break up.

Alex once said that if we ever broke up, there would be a suicide. Can you imagine living with that kind of responsibility? And if you think that Alex doesn't mean it, then it just means that you don't know Alex. According to Alex, there's no living without me.

For Hanukkah last year, Alex got me a cell phone—that's a pretty expensive gift! My mom thought I should give it back. But I convinced her to let me keep it. Alex's note was so cute: "So I can always reach out and touch you!" It really made me feel special.

We would talk on the phone all the time, and Alex would text me through the whole day at school. When I went away for February break with my family, Alex called every hour. Even my Bubbe noticed and said, "That Alex is sure devoted to you." I thought it was so sweet! Alex would say things like, "I can't get through the hour without hearing your voice."

One Sunday, I took my little brother and his friends to a kids' concert and turned the phone off. I am positive that I told Alex where I was going. When the concert was over, there were seven messages—all of them from Alex. The first one was cute—but then each message got angrier and angrier. In the seventh message Alex accused me of having sex with someone and laughing at the phone ringing in the middle. I couldn't believe Alex would think something like that, let alone say it. It made me so mad that I didn't call Alex back at all.

Later that night Alex came to my house and we made up. Alex said that jealousy had caused that last call. Things like that day at the concert have happened three times since, and I realize that I want to break up even though I really love Alex. I can't take the intense level of jealousy. But then there's that threat about suicide. The first time Alex said it, I thought it was so romantic—in all the Jewish stories my Bubbe tells, there is always just one soul mate for each person. Alex seemed to believe that I was the one destined to be the love of a lifetime.

Maybe there is one soul mate for every person. If that's true, then I don't believe that Alex is my soul mate anymore. And if it's not true, then what Alex says isn't romantic at all. It feels like blackmail.



Summary: Ariela is dating the guy that everyone seems to think is perfect, but she feels uneasy. She doesn't feel like she can be herself when she is with him because he always puts her down. She wonders if she is dating him because she really likes him or because everyone thinks that she should—and she is not sure about what to do.

I'm fifteen and a sophomore at the local public school. The school is huge. There are nearly four thousand students—over nine hundred in my class alone. My parents were so thrilled when I started attending youth group activities at the Jewish Community Center, because I had refused to do that whole Hebrew High thing. I guess it was okay that my parents were so happy about it, but the truth is, I didn't go because it was Jewish. I just liked the kids. When I got the female lead in the JCC play, I was so excited because I was playing opposite Jared—he's so hot.

Jared and I got close through all the rehearsals, and I felt so great when he asked me out. Now we're inseparable. All the kids at the JCC think we look really great together, and the girls tell me how lucky I am. You guessed it, my parents are crazy happy now—I mean, a nice Jewish boy! He even goes to Hebrew High, so my parents think maybe I'll start going.

My best friend, Chelsea, says that Jared and I are like one of those celebrity couples—falling in love while playing a couple that falls in love. My friends say that it's like a dream come true. But it doesn't always feel like a dream come true to me. Sometimes I wonder if I have a crush on the idea of going out with the guy everyone else wants to be with. The truth is, and it's hard to admit this, I don't always feel so great when I am with Jared. It's hard to explain, but I feel like I can't be myself.

When I say something that's really personal or important to me, he laughs at me or makes fun of what I'm saying. One of his favorite things to say is: "Just shut up and kiss me." Once, when I told him that I love to watch figure skating, he said, "Let's just forget you said that. The only skaters I'll be watching will be playing hockey." I told Chelsea about what he said, and she insisted that he must have been joking. She kind of attacked me, asking if I was going to risk being the girlfriend of such a great guy 'cause I think too much about things? I wonder: is that who I am now? Just Jared's girlfriend? Do I think too much? Maybe you agree with Chelsea. But it's hard to explain a nervous feeling deep in your guts, you know...

I told my mom that I was thinking of taking a break from Jared once the play was over. I couldn't believe it, she was out of control...She didn't even listen to me, just went off about how I am always fighting my Jewish heritage. She actually said, "You have a nice Jewish boy. Why would you throw that away?" I wonder if I'm the one who's crazy...



Summary: Sheri has been dating Nat. On the outside they seem to be perfect together, but there is a terrible secret to their relationship. Over the slightest provocation, Nat becomes physically abusive toward Sheri, who believes it is always her fault. She forgives him for his violence because he always says he is sorry and brings her a gift to make up.

If you saw me around school with my boyfriend Nat, you would probably wish that you were me. Funny, that's what my best friend, Nicole, used to say. Note the past tense in that sentence: "used to say." Nicole always said that Nat and I were the perfect couple; everyone thinks so. In the yearbook last year, we were named Mr. and Mrs. Superlative. And I think that we are PERFECT for each other. It's just that Nicole witnessed a bad fight between us, and she's been bugging me ever since. Nat has a bit of a temper problem, but I can handle it. My problem is handling Nicole. She won't leave me alone about Nat.

Two weeks ago, Nicole was hanging out with me and Nat. He and I got into a stupid fight over a game of poker, and things got worse and worse until Nat actually shoved me up against the wall and screamed in my face. Then he picked up one of my field hockey trophies and threw it at me. He missed me but hit my mirror, and it smashed all over the floor. I know—it was unbelievable! Luckily, my parents weren't there. I cleaned it all up before they got home.

Nicole keeps bugging me over and over, asking how I could still be with Nat after something like that. I try to tell her how sorry he was right afterward. I try to tell her how sweet he looked when he showed up the next morning with flowers from his mom's garden and told me how much he loves me. How he promised it won't ever happen again. As close as Nicole and I have always been, she just doesn't understand my relationship with Nat. She's never been in love.

And no matter what happens, Nat and I are really in love. Most of the time, things are perfect. But sometimes I make him so mad, he loses it. Take the night two weeks ago... If I weren't so competitive, he wouldn't have gotten so mad in the first place. Nat and I should probably make a deal not to play cards together anymore. Then I won't drive him up the wall until he explodes.

He can't help it that he has an anger problem, so I have to learn how to make sure that he doesn't get mad. It usually works. Here's an example: when Nat and I were first going out, I used to straighten my hair before school. Nat told me that he didn't like my hair straightened, and he said that I just did it to get other guys' attention. We had a huge fight about it right at the beginning of our relationship, before I really understood his temper. He pulled me down the stairs by my hair. I twisted my ankle and had to lie about it to my field hockey coach. But after it happened, he was so sweet to me. He gave me a beautiful Tiffany necklace that I wear every day. He loves me so much that he gets jealous. Believe me, I learned my lesson. I don't straighten my hair anymore.

Sometimes I make mistakes, but then I learn not to repeat them. I love him so much and know that we are meant to be together forever.



Summary: Ellen looks back at her two-year relationship with Brad and cannot understand where the self she knew went in the relationship. She doesn't recognize herself anymore and is starting to realize that Brad has consistently cut her off from everything and everyone she loves.

I'm not the same girl Brad fell in love with two years ago. I don't even know what he sees in me anymore. But he says that he adores me just the way I am. Brad says, "You are mine, all mine. And I love you just for being mine."

Except for being Brad's girlfriend, I don't know who I am anymore. Two years ago, I was a singer, a leader in my synagogue, and a great basketball player. I was so proud of all those things, and I thought that Brad fell in love with those things when he fell in love with me. But I guess I was wrong.

I met him when I was singing in the Beth Shalom Teen Choir. We did a concert at Brad's synagogue. I always sang a couple of solos, and that's how Brad noticed me. After the concert, he came up to me and said, "I bet guys tell you after every concert that you are the most beautiful girl they've ever seen." I answered, "No one has ever said that to me before. I don't believe you. Did one of my friends get you to come up to me?" I remember exactly what Brad said then: "Believe it. You are beautiful."

Who could resist that? Not me! I've never had a boyfriend before. Being called beautiful was brand new. We started seeing each other all the time, and Brad started complaining about the things that took me away from him. In the beginning, it felt kind of sweet when he'd say things like, "I miss you when you're at rehearsals," or, "When you play basketball I wonder if you think about me," but then it changed into something different. Brad would say, "Please don't go to rehearsal, because I can't bear to be without you."

A few times he told me that I didn't even sing so well anyway, and I shouldn't put my energy into losing propositions. Eventually I quit choir. It's embarrassing to admit, but I got cut from the basketball team for missing too many practices. My parents were surprised when I stopped playing basketball, but I told them that I just didn't like the coach anymore. And I haven't exactly told them that I quit choir. Every time we're at synagogue, I am so afraid that the cantor will say something to them, but so far he hasn't.

The truth is, I'm not at synagogue that much anymore. I used to go most Saturdays to see my friends, hang out in the teen service, and lead Junior Congregation once in a while. When the cantor asks me to read Torah, I go—but that's only once a month or so. And every time I do, it just doesn't seem worth the argument with Brad. I invited him to come to Beth Shalom and meet my friends, but he says that he likes his synagogue and doesn't want to go to a different one. He asks why I would rather be with other people, when I could be with him. He threatens to break up with me. Don't I love him?

So I have been wondering? Do I? I feel so separate from everything that used to make me happy.



Summary: Rinah and Adam seem to fight all the time. Their friends in synagogue youth group look at the two of them and cannot understand why they stay together. Rinah realizes that she got used to each step of negative behavior until she had to adjust to the next level of ugliness. What keeps her in the relationship with Adam? Perhaps she believes the ugly things he says about her and doubts that anyone else would want to be with her.

Adam and I met in youth group, and it seemed like the perfect relationship. You know, nice Jewish boy meets nice Jewish girl. My parents had always told me to find a Jewish boyfriend so that I could be sure that he had the right kind of values. Boy, would my parents be shocked if I ever got up the courage to tell them the truth about how Adam treats me.

The first time Adam called me a slut, I thought he was kidding. I remember saying, "If you think that's funny, it's not!" The next time he used that kind of language, I sort of shrugged and thought to myself, "I like him so much, I can teach him to stop cursing at me." The sad truth is that he didn't learn anything. I'm the one who learned. I learned to just get used to it. Sure, I fight back—I'm not a total pushover. But I never take an argument so far that I think I might lose him.

Then he started complaining about the time I spent with my friends. When I told him that I practically never saw my friends anymore, he complained about who my friends were. He called them horrible things, too. Gradually, I just stopped seeing them. The crazy thing is, we met at youth group, but now we practically never go anymore. When we do go, all we do is fight.

I guess his new trick is criticizing everything about me. He told me to get a new shampoo because my hair was flat. He called it mousy. Now every time I look in the mirror, that's all I see: a mouse. Then Adam started complaining about what I eat and told me that I should lose weight because I have fat thighs. He actually said to me, "Do you think anyone else would put up with a moose like you?" So here I am, stuck between being a mouse and a huge moose, worrying about what I eat and whether I can sneak in a visit to the mall with my friends.

You may wonder why I put up with this kind of behavior. I wish I could give you a better answer, but the truth is, I love Adam. I like to be with him, and I guess that I'm willing to put up with a few problems rather than lose him altogether.

No one is perfect, right?



Summary: Danny pressures Judi about sex all the time. They have been going out for four months and have been physically intimate from the beginning. Danny wants to go all the way. He says that he loves her enough to have sex, and it hurts him that she will not prove her love to him. She wishes she knew someone she could trust to talk with about this, but Danny's father is the principal of their Jewish day school, and she doesn't think anyone would believe her.

Danny is the best-looking guy in my grade at the Jewish day school. Even though we've known each other since kindergarten, we sort of noticed each other in a different way when we got to high school. He made varsity soccer as a freshman, and I played JV. Most afternoons his practice ended when ours began, and he would wait around and watch us practice for a while. His dad is the principal, so I guess he was waiting for a ride home anyway.

Then one afternoon he waited through my whole practice and walked me up from the fields to school. During that walk, he told me that he thought that I was really cute and that he couldn't believe that I'm the same Judi he's known since kindergarten. I was really flattered. When he told me, "I just really want to kiss you," I laughed it off. But pretty soon after that, we started going out, and we kissed all the time. Once Danny even pushed me into the men's room in the middle of the day and kissed me really hard and pressed himself against me. I was afraid and confused that day, but later, when he told me that he loved me, I wondered what was the matter with me. When people love each other, they want to be together in every way . . . don't they?

Things moved pretty fast between the two of us. Danny told me, "I'm a very physical guy. It's how I can prove our love." Soon he had full license to my body, and I was going down on him pretty regularly. He would always tell me how much he loves me. I tell him I love him, too, but Danny always says, "Prove it, Judi. Prove it."

I admit that the kissing and touching feel nice, except that it seems to be all the time. I also feel a bit nauseous when I think about Danny saying, "Prove it." Prove what? I mean, we go to a Jewish school, and there are all these moral values about respecting each other. And put yourself in my position. I can't exactly tell anyone or ask for advice. I mean, he's the principal's son! Who would believe me?

But now he is pushing me to go all the way. And I know that I am not ready for that. You know what he said to me? If I don't, then I don't love him, and this has all been a lie. And he said that he'll tell the whole school that I am a slut. And do you know how small my school is? I really don't know what to do.

