# FIRST-DATE PROBLEMS

Think of your novel, if you will, as the first date you're having with the reader. It's where you get to introduce your story and world to another person and, fingers crossed, make them fall in love with you.

Of course, like in any good romance, there are certain protocols that need to be adhered to in order to ensure you don't end up—and there is no nice way to say this—dumped.

Here are some common first-date problems I see in books:

**1. He lies:** Yep. It's that simple. No one likes being lied to, and a first date is no exception. Even if you're doing it with the best of intentions (*I just want people to like me*), lying is not cool.

What does this mean? Think a big battle scene, a heroine on her deathbed, a big dramatic moment that starts your book followed by five fateful words: *And then she woke up*. Or *It was just a dream.*

Starting your novel with a dream sequence, or someone acting in a play, or just something that isn't real is starting the relationship you have with your reader the wrong way. They won't trust you. How can they know you won't pull the pin on them again halfway through the book? Just like on first dates, lying is a big no-no.

**2. He's boring:** If you went on a first date with someone and they spent the entire time telling you how they washed the dishes, tied their shoelaces, and colour-coded their wardrobe, you likely would not be signing up for a second date, right? Well, the same applies to books. Don't spend your first chapter describing the mundane. Sure, we need to establish the world and life of the protagonist, but we don't need it to be boring. Make sure your characters do things in the first scene, and I don't just mean just looking in the mirror and thinking, or staring out the window. Be active. Be interesting.

**3. He wants to go all the way too soon:** Less common than the boring date is the book who wants to move straight to date number three when you've only just met. You're not going to sleep together on the first date—or, maybe you are, and that's fine too, but a majority of readers may not. This means don't throw too much

action and drama into the first scene before we've had a chance to meet your characters. We don't need to know what they ate for breakfast (see point two: boring), but we do need to have some vital details so that we can begin to learn and therefore care about them. If we don't care for your characters, it won't matter that you're throwing explosions, fighter planes, cheating husbands, and ninjas in their face all at once. Make those dramatic scenes count by letting us fall in love first.

**4. He talks about his ex:** There's a great quote from Stephen King: "The most important things to remember about back story are that a) everybody has a history and b) most of it isn't very interesting."

If you went on a date and your partner spent the entire time talking about an ex, you'd be a little annoyed, right?

The same is true for story. If you spend the first chapter going into things that have happened in the past, events that have already occurred, readers may get annoyed, and rightly so. If it's so important, perhaps your reader needs to be shown it and your story started earlier. Alternatively, perhaps it's just information we don't need at all—or something you can scatter later in the book. Like on date number four, after we've met the parents.

**5. He's just like every other guy …** You're looking for someone special—you don't want to meet the men you've dated a thousand times before. Sure, you want and expect this potential partner to have similar qualities, but you want him to be unique.

A book is the same. There are certain parameters of story you expect as a reader, and even certain character archetypes and story tropes that will remain the same from book to book. However, you want your first chapter to be unique. Some common first scenes that people can find too familiar include opening with a hungover detective staring into the sun (crime fiction), or a woman waking to a strange but very sexy man in her bedroom (romance). Make your book fresh so the reader comes back for date number two, and three, and four, and eventually goes all the way …