



chapter 1

Dear Dr. Maude,

I know we don't actually know each other, but I know who you are from TV, which is kind of like knowing you. Especially since, before my parents got divorced, my dad convinced my mom to get a 46-inch TV screen, so now you're almost life-size when I watch you on your show. I have Come On, People—Get With the Program on pretty much any afternoon after school that I don't hang out with my sort-of friend Marissa, and listen to her talk nonstop. She's basically my only friend ever since I got friend-dumped right before sixth grade started.

I got your e-mail address off your website (BTW that picture of you with your two dachshunds is soooooo cute!! I love dogs, too, but my mom's allergic to them. That's why I only have a cat. But when I grow up I'm totally getting a dog). I know how busy you are, so I won't go into all of it now, because it's kind of a long story, but let's just say that between being friend-dumped, and having my mother bug me nonstop about how it's time for me to start wearing a bra, and the Hat incident, sixth grade is NOT what I was hoping it would be. IN fact, it feels like it just gets worse and worse every day.

Anyway, I was wondering if you might have some advice for a person with these types of problems. And please don't say, "Don't worry, Lucy, everything changes if you wait long enough," because that's what my dad keeps saying to me.

And, frankly, I find it REALLY ANNOYING.

I look forward to hearing from you.

*Yours truly,
Lucy B. Parker*

Obviously I sent that e-mail to Dr. Maude too soon. If I had waited until after that Wednesday evening in January when Mom took me to the Holyoke Mall, I would have had a lot more advice to ask Dr. Maude.

I should have known something was wrong the minute Mom asked me if I wanted to go. We barely ever went to the mall on a school night, even though, if it were up to me, I'd go there every day because both H&M and Target are there, and they're my two favorite stores in the entire world.

"You want to stop at Scoops for some ice cream first?" Mom asked as we got into Virginia Woolf, our twenty-year-old blue Volvo. I don't know why our car couldn't have a normal name—like, say, Christine, which is what my ex-best friend Rachel's mother's car is called—instead of being named after some famous writer, especially one who walked into a river and drowned herself, but both my

parents are weird that way. Dad’s red Saab was named Alfred Stieglitz after a famous photographer, which is an even weirder name than Virginia Woolf. And almost impossible to spell, even for someone like me, who was runner-up in the Jefferson Middle School Spelling Bee this year after Danica Morris (I totally knew how to spell *philistine*, but I was so nervous during the bee that I spelled it *p-h-i-l-e* instead of *i*). Dad’s always saying that “creative types” (Mom’s a writer and Dad’s a photographer) are allowed to be a little weird, but I’m sorry—lately? They’ve both been a lot weird.

The minute Mom said “ice cream” I definitely knew something was up. Ever since I turned twelve back in November, I was only supposed to have ice cream on the weekends, on account of the fact that the more sugar I ate, the more pimples popped up on my forehead, no matter how much zit cream I put on before I went to bed at night. Unless it was a super-special occasion during the week—like after a chorus concert (even though I was only a mouther instead of a singer because my voice isn’t very good). Dad’s girlfriend, Sarah—who isn’t creative-weird, but just weird-weird because she’s a yoga teacher— gave me a bottle of this essential oil and said that if I dabbed a few drops on my wrists and behind my ears, it would make it so that I don’t want sugar, but I never use it because I think it makes me smell like a sweaty sneaker. The last thing I needed after the Hat Incident was for people in Northampton to start going around saying, “Lucy B. Parker smells like a sweaty sneaker.”

“Okay, what’s going on?” I demanded as I finished the last bite of my mint-chocolate-chip butterscotch sundae (another clue something weird was going on—usually I was allowed to get only one scoop) as we walked into the mall.

Mom flashed me another big smile, the third one in the last half hour. That was another thing: over the last few months, Mom had been a lot happier than usual. Like singing-out-loud-as-she-made-dinner-even-thoughtshe-had-a-horrible-voice-too kind of happy. It wasn’t like she had spent every night crying since she and Dad had gotten divorced the year before, like her BFF Deanna had done when she got divorced, but she definitely hadn’t been singing.

Right before we got on the escalator I stopped short. Suddenly, it all made sense. “Nope. I’m not going,” I announced.

“What are you talking about, honey?” Mom asked all innocently. “We’re going to Target. You love Target.”

My eyes narrowed. “But you’re not taking me to Target—you’re taking me to Barbara’s Bra World.” Which just happened to be next to Target. I bet the mall people did that on purpose so that people like me would think they were going to their favorite store, but really were being tricked into something even more horrible than getting a cavity filled or having a mixed-fractions pop quiz: bra shopping.

If there’s anything I hate more than mixed fractions, it’s my

boobs. Seventh graders like Frankie Bankuti and Timmy McFarland stare at them, but even worse than that is the fact that it makes it hard to read the writing on my green i don't play well with others T-shirt because some of the letters are on top of my boobs and some are underneath. (Sarah's always saying that wearing a T-shirt like that is putting out a "negative vibe" because, unlike someone like, say, Nicole Meloni, I actually do play well with others—but that's because Sarah barely thinks anything's funny.) Ever since the week before sixth grade started, when I woke up one morning to find that I had gone from totally flat chested to having two large hacky sacks on my chest, Mom's been on me to start wearing a bra. I keep refusing, even though at Christmastime she tried to bribe me by saying she'd give me twenty dollars if I did. The one time I tried one on, it was so itchy that I got a rash and had to put calamine lotion on my chest and I used too much and it ruined my Maggie Simpson T-shirt.

Back when Rachel and Missy (my other ex-BFF) and I would go to the mall on Saturdays, before they friend-dumped me three days before sixth grade started, they loved to try on bras in Forever 21, even though they barely had anything to put in them. (While they did that, I spent my time trying on barrettes and headbands, but that was before the Straightening Iron Incident.) My sort-of friend Marissa who is almost completely flat has been using every birthday and penny-in-the-mall-fountain wish since she was nine to ask for big boobs. She actually cuts ads out of the Macy's circular of bras she wants and keeps them on the bulletin board above her desk, which, if you ask

me, is beyond weird. I call Marissa my “sort-of” friend because there’s no way I could ever be BFFs with someone so annoying, even though she totally thinks we are. To be honest, the only reason we started hanging out is because my last name is Parker and hers is Parini, which means she sits right in front of me in homeroom. I was so nervous about not having anyone to eat lunch with that first day of sixth grade because of the Rachel/ Missy thing that I just asked Marissa, and now she won’t leave me alone. I have to listen to her go on and on about horses, and all the different things she’s allergic to, and the dolls from different countries she collects. Seriously, I’m surprised people don’t literally die from boredom after being around her.

Mom grabbed my hand and yanked me on the escalator. “We’re going to Target. I promise.” She reached into her purse and took out a crumpled-up list that had a coffee stain on it. “I have a list and everything.” That was another clue something was going on because although Mom made tons of lists, she always lost them right away.

Once we got inside Target, the sigh of relief I let out was so loud that Mom said, “Lucy, is that really necessary?” Then she turned to me. “Go get those Converse shoes you want and meet me over near the cleaning supplies.”

“Really?” I’m totally addicted to Converse. I have five pairs of high-tops and three pairs of low-tops. Not only do I have them in all different colors like purple (my favorite color) and red (my second favorite), but I also have them in tie-dye (Dad got them for me for my twelfth birthday

even though they were pretty expensive). Mom and I had a deal that I could get a pair of One Stars if I got an 85 on my mixed-fractions test. I had gotten only an 80, but if she didn't remember that, because she was being all weird, it's not like I was going to remind her.

She nodded. "I'll meet you near the paper towels in ten minutes," she said as she began to wheel her cart away, humming so loud off-key I thought I was going to die.

Something was going on. And I was going to find out what it was.

"Lucy, you do not need another box of maxipads," Mom said loudly at the checkout counter ten minutes later as I dumped a box of Always Maximum Protection Maxis on the belt along with the sneakers.

I cringed. As much as I loved my mom, she had a totally loud inside voice that seemed like it got even louder whenever we were talking about anything period- or bra-related.

"But this one has wings," I whispered. "It's important to have those." I wasn't sure why, but the announcer in the commercial made it seem like if they were missing, you were setting yourself up for big trouble, like ruined underwear. Even though I still hadn't gotten my period yet, the last time I counted I had seven boxes of maxipads, minipads, and pantliners in my closet so when the day came, I'd be prepared. For a while I was wearing a pad

every day just to be safe, but then Mom yelled at me that we weren't made of money and made me stop. Now I just made sure never to leave the house without at least one of each in my knapsack.

Out of the fifty-three girls in the entire sixth grade, only twenty-two had gotten their periods so far, so it wasn't like I was behind schedule or anything. As long as I was the twenty-sixth to get mine, I was above average, which is all I cared about. As the Keeper of the Periods at Jefferson, I kept a notebook of who got theirs when, and everyone knew to come to me if they needed that information for some reason. It wasn't like it made me popular or anything (I was probably in the fortieth percentile of popularity), but after the Hat Incident, not only did everyone at Jefferson know who I was but probably everyone in the entire town of Northampton did. Maybe even Amherst, which was a few towns away.

I looked at all the cleaning supplies that were being rung up. "Is Grandma Maureen coming to visit?" I asked suspiciously. Our house wasn't dirty or anything, but the only time Mom did a humongous cleaning was when my grandmother came to visit.

"No," Mom replied. "But I thought on Friday we'd all come back to the house for dessert after dinner."

"Who's 'we'?"

Mom took a deep breath as we grabbed the bags and started

walking out into the mall. “Well, for the last six weeks I’ve sort of been . . . seeing someone,” she said nervously, “and we decided last week that the time has come for everyone to meet.”

“What do you mean ‘seeing someone’?” I asked.

“I mean...dating someone.”

I stopped so short I almost fell on my butt. “You’re dating someone?!” I cried. “I haven’t heard you say anything to Deanna about that!” Deanna had been Mom’s BFF ever since they were roommates their first year in college at Smith, which was just down the street from our house. Mom told her everything. And because I have super-strong hearing, sometimes when I’m upstairs in my room and they’re in the kitchen having coffee, I just happen to overhear them. Okay, maybe sometimes I’m not in my room—maybe I’m at the top of the stairs—but I’m not eavesdropping. I’m overlistening. There’s a difference.

I was so shocked and in such a total daze that my mom was dating that I didn’t even realize we had ended up in the middle of Barbara’s Bra World. “Wait a minute—not only are you telling me you have a boyfriend, but you’re going to make me try on bras, too?!” I yelled. I couldn’t believe how unfair my mother was being. Not to mention if she had known she was going to do this, the least she could have done was let me get a large sundae instead of a small one.

Before I knew it, I had been taken prisoner by Barbara, the

owner, and had a tape measure around my chest. “So who is this person?” I demanded as I tried to squirm away. “Is it Liam from Coffee Corner?” Liam was a musician with long dreadlocks who had had a crush on Mom forever. He was nice and all—sometimes if Maia, the owner, wasn’t there, he gave me and Marissa free coconut-peanut-butter cookies—but he had the worst

B.O. on the planet, and there was no way I would be able to sit next to him for an entire dinner.

“No, it’s not Liam,” Mom said as she picked up a light blue bra that had so much padding it would’ve made me look like I was in eleventh grade.

I exhaled the breath I had been holding because Barbara smelled like a mixture of egg salad and very flowery perfume. “Then who is it?” I asked.

“Well, it’s—” Mom began to say.

“Oh my God!” I gasped, pulling my purple knit newsboy cap down farther on my head in order to try to hide as two girls walked into the store. It was Lisa Silfen and Shelly Powell—the two most popular girls in the seventh grade. It wasn’t like I knew them personally, on account of the fact that you had to be pretty popular yourself in order for the older popular kids to talk to you, but they definitely knew who I was because of the Hat Incident.

“What is it, dear?” asked Barbara loudly. “Am I pulling the tape measure too tight around your bosoms?” Even though

I didn't dare look over at the girls, I could hear one of them laugh. When I got to school tomorrow, I was going to ask Mr. Mackey, the science teacher, if you could actually die of embarrassment. That is, I'd ask him if it didn't happen to me before that.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Mom asked in her loud voice.
"Your face is all red. Are you okay?" She felt my forehead.
"Do you think you're coming down with something?"
"Can we just leave?" I whispered between gritted teeth.

"What, sweetie?" Mom said. "I can't understand you."

"I was right—34A!" Barbara announced. She flashed me a smile. "I knew that just by looking at you!" She turned to Mom. "This one's going to be very bosomy when she gets older, though. Believe me, when you've been in this business as long as I have, you know these things."

If no one had died of embarrassment before this moment, I was pretty sure I was about to be the first one.

Barbara clapped her hands. "Okay, into the dressing room!" she ordered.

I think I ran faster than I ever had in my entire life. And for someone who hates exercise so much that she carries around a note that says, "Please excuse Lucy B. Parker from gym today on account of the fact that she is menstruating," that was saying a lot. (When Marissa helped me write the note, and before she forged Mom's signature

by studying her real signature from a field-trip permission slip, she said that “menstruating” was better than “has her period” because it made it sound more official.) Luckily, when I peered out, I saw Lisa and Shelly leaving. If they had come into the dressing room area to try on bras as well, I definitely would have had to die.

Instead, Mom and Barbara came in, which was almost as in bad. Then they both came into the actual dressing room, which was even worse.

“What are you doing?” I asked them.

“Well, we have to make sure your bosoms are properly supported in the brassiere, dear,” said Barbara, who was stinking up the whole room with her perfume.

“Take off your shirt, honey,” said Mom.

I crossed my arms over my chest. Yup, this was definitely the most embarrassing moment of my life. Even worse than the Hat Incident.

“Why?” I asked.

“Because I’m your mother, and I said so,” she replied firmly. “And because if you do, I’ll take you to H&M after this and let you get a hat.”

As I took off my shirt, I closed my eyes and kept them closed the entire time. It was bad enough that my mother

could see my bare boobs, but a complete stranger who wasn't even a doctor was looking at them, too?!

Barbara must have been psychic because right then she said, "There's no need to be embarrassed, dear—I've seen more boobies in my life than you'd ever imagine!"

I cringed. Bosoms, boobies—why could she just call them boobs?! Or at least just breasts, like Ms. DeMarco, my health teacher, did?

"Now in you go," she said, holding out the bra.

I shoved my arms in it. "Okay, it fits—can we just buy it and get out of here?" I asked as she fastened it in the back.

"Now you have to position yourself in it," Barbara explained. "So reach in and lift your bosoms up—"

Could this get any worse? But I knew that if I didn't do it myself, she'd probably reach in and do it, which would be just beyond awful. "So who is this guy you've been going out with?" I asked as I did what I was told. I still couldn't believe Mom had been hiding all this from me. Or that she had been able to hide it from me, because I'm really good at figuring that stuff out. Since the divorce, she said she didn't want to date and instead had been spending all her time writing her novel. But that hadn't been going so well because she had what she calls "writer's block," where basically she does anything but write—like polish her nails or organize her sock drawer.

“It’s . . . Alan Moses,” she finally said.

Now I understood why she had hidden it from me. “You’ve been going out with Laurel Moses’s father?!” I yelled. “After everything I went through with the Hat Incident?!” Barbara was so startled she let the bra strap snap me so hard on the shoulder I yelled. “Laurel Moses, from *The World According to Madison Tennyson*?” she gasped. “My granddaughter and I just love that show!” Laurel Moses was one of the most famous people in the world. Even though she was only fourteen and her TV series was on Kidz TV, adults knew who she was because she sang and acted in movies, too.

Yeah, most people loved her, but me, Lucy B. Parker? I hated her.