



THE INTERNATIONALLY BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING*

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR DANCING




nicola yoon



DEAR READER,

Is love worth the heartbreak and sorrow that can come with it? This is a question I've thought about for a long time. It's the question that my main character, Evie, struggles with in *Instructions for Dancing*. Her parents have been divorced for a year. What's worse, she's been cursed with a not-so-superpower: whenever she sees a couple kiss, she has a vision of the entire history of their relationship, from the swoony beginning to the inevitable bitter end. As you can guess, this makes her more than a little jaded. Then she meets a boy named X. He's kind, funny, philosophical – and also the ridiculously hot lead singer of a rock band. Can Evie resist falling for him? And if she can't, what do those visions mean for her own love story?



I wrote this book during an incredibly hard time in my life. My mom was very sick. For more than a year and a half, we weren't sure if she would survive. My father-in-law was diagnosed with a terminal illness. We lost him a year later. During that time, I found myself thinking a lot about the cost of loving. When we love other people, it's like our heart exists outside our bodies with no way to protect it. A part of me wished for a switch to turn off my feelings. Yes, I would no longer feel joy, but there would be no pain either.

But of course the purpose of the human heart is to love.  
It's as vital as breathing.



I hope Evie's journey will help you to discover your own answer to the question of what love is worth.

All my very best,  
Nicola Yoon



## CHAPTER 1



### A Better Version of Me

BOOKS DON'T WORK their magic on me anymore. It used to be that if I was in a funk or in the barren hinterland between sad and mad, I could just pluck any random one from my favorites shelf and settle into my fuzzy pink chair for a good read. By chapter three--chapter four at the very latest--I'd be feeling better.

These days, though, the books are nothing but letters arranged into correctly spelled words, arranged into grammatically correct sentences and well-structured paragraphs and thematically cohesive chapters. They're no longer magical and transporting.

In a past life I was a librarian, so my books are arranged by genre. Until I started giving them away, the Contemporary Romance section was the biggest. My favorite of all time is *Cupcakes and Kisses*. I pull it down from my shelf and flip through it, giving it one last shot to be magical. The best scene is when the no-nonsense head chef and the sexy, constantly brooding line cook with the mysterious past have a food fight in the kitchen. They both end up covered in flour and icing. There's kissing and a lot of dessert-related wordplay:

*Sugar lips.*

*Sweet buns.*

*Sticky situations.*

Six months ago this scene would have made me gooey inside. (See what I did there?)

Now, though? Nothing.

And since the words haven't changed from the last time I read them, I have to admit the problem isn't the book.



The problem is me.

I close the book and stack it on top of the others I'm giving away. One last trip to the library tomorrow and all my romances will be gone.

Just as I start putting them into my backpack, Mom pokes her head into my room. Her eyes travel a circuit from my face, down to the tower of books, up to the four empty rows on my shelf, and then back to my face.

She frowns and looks like she wants to say something, but then she doesn't. Instead, she stretches out her hand and pushes her phone toward me. "It's your father," she says.

I shake my head so hard my braids whip around my face.

She jabs the phone my way again. "Take it. Take it," she mouths.

"No, no, no," I mouth back.

I've never seen two mimes arguing, but I imagine it would look something like this.

She moves out of the doorway and all the way into my room. I have just enough space to dart around her, so I do. I sprint down our small hallway and lock myself in the bathroom.

Mom's inevitable knock comes ten seconds later.

I open the door.

She looks at me and sighs.

I sigh back at her.

Most of our communication these days comes in the form of these small exhalations. Hers are Frustrated and Long Suffering and Exasperated and Impatient and Disappointed.

Mine are Confused.

"Yvette Antoinette Thomas," she says. "How long are you going to keep this up?"

The answer to her question--and I think it's a fair one--is forever.

Forever is how long I'm going to be angry at Dad.

Really, the better question is: Why isn't she?

She slips the phone back into her apron pocket. There's a dusting of flour on her forehead and some in her short Afro,

making it look like she suddenly went gray.

"You giving away more books?" she asks.

I nod.

"You used to love them," she says. The way she says it, you'd think I was setting them on fire instead of donating them to the library.

I meet her eyes. It feels like maybe we're having a moment. If she's willing to talk about me giving away my books, then maybe she's willing to talk about something real, like Dad and the divorce and how things have been since.

"Mom--" I begin.

But she shifts her eyes from mine, wipes her hands down the front of her apron and interrupts me. "Danica and I are going to make brownies," she says. "Come down and help us."

The baking's new. She started the day Dad moved out of our old house, and she hasn't stopped since. If she's not on shift at the hospital, she's baking.

"I'm meeting Martin and Sophie and Cassidy tonight. We're supposed to start planning our road trip."

"You spend more time out of the house than in it these days," she says.

I never know what to do when she says something like that. It's not a question and not an accusation, but it has a little bit of both in it. Instead of answering, I stare at her apron. It reads *Kiss the Cook* and has a drawing of two enormous red lips smacking.

It's true that I'm not home much these days. The thought of spending the next few hours baking with her and my sister, Danica, fills me not with despair exactly, but something close to it. Danica will be dressed perfectly for the occasion--a vintage-style apron with a matching chef's hat that sits in the middle of her Afro puffs. She'll talk about her latest boyfriend, who she is (very) excited about. Mom will tell gory emergency room stories and insist on playing reggae music, something old-school like Peter Tosh or Jimmy Cliff. Or--if Danica gets her way--they'll play trip-hop while Danica documents the whole thing for social media. They'll both pretend that everything is just completely okay with our family.

Everything is not okay.

Mom sighs again and rubs her forehead. The flour dust spreads.



"There's flour," I say, reaching to wipe it away.

She dodges my hand. "Leave it. It's just going to keep getting dirty anyway." Mom's originally from Jamaica. She moved here when she was fourteen with Grandma and Grandpa. The only time she has a Jamaican accent is when she's nervous or upset. Right now her accent is slight, but it's there.

She turns and goes back downstairs.

As I get dressed, I try not to think about our not-quite-an-argument but end up thinking about it anyway. Why was she so upset with me for giving away the last of my romance books? It's like she's disappointed in me for not being the same person I was a year ago.

But of course I'm not the same person. How could I be? I wish I were as unaffected by the divorce as she and Danica are. I wish I could bake with them, carefree. I wish I could go back to being the girl who thought her parents, especially her dad, could do no wrong. To being the girl who hoped to have a love just like theirs when she grew up. I used to believe in happily-ever-afters because they had one.

I want to go back and unknow all the things I know now.

But you can't unknow things.

I can't unknow that Dad cheated on Mom.

I can't unknow that he left us all for another woman.

Mom misses the version of me that used to love those books.

I miss her too.

## CHAPTER 2



### (Former) Favorite Romance Genres

#### **Contemporary**

1. Enemies to Lovers--Asking the perennial question will they kill each other or will they kiss each other? I'm kidding. Of course they're going to kiss.
2. Love Triangle--Everyone loves to hate love triangles, but actually they're great. They exist so the main character can choose between different versions of themselves: who they used to be, and who they're still becoming. Side note: If you ever find yourself choosing between a vampire and a werewolf, choose the vampire. See #1 below for more on why you should (obviously) choose the vampire.
3. Second Chance--These days I realize this is the most unrealistic trope. If someone hurts you once, why would you give them the chance to do it again?

#### **Paranormal**

1. Vampires--They're sexy and will love you forever.
2. Angels--They have wings that they'll use to envelop you or to take you away from this place to wherever you need to be.
3. Shape-shifters--Jaguars and leopards mostly, but basically anything in the big cat family. I once tried reading about dinosaur shape-shifters. T. rexes, pteranodons, apatosauruses, etc. They are as horrifying as you think they are.



## CHAPTER 3



### Give a Book, Take a Book

By the time I get downstairs the next morning, Mom's already left for her shift at the hospital. Danica is at the dining table taking pictures of the brownies she and Mom made. They're arranged into a pyramid on one of Mom's fancy new cake platters. Danica is from the jaunty-angle school of picture taking. She tilts her phone and circles the brownie pyramid, taking picture after jaunty picture.

I get myself cereal and sit at the table next to her. We've been in this apartment for six months, but it still feels temporary, like I'm just visiting. I keep waiting to get back to my real life.

Compared to our old house, this place is small. I miss having our own private backyard. Now we share a courtyard with twelve other apartments. Our house had two bathrooms, but now we only have one. Mostly, though, I miss how every room held our memories.

Danica settles on a photo and slides her phone to me so I can see her post. "You can't even tell they're burnt," she says with pride.

She's right. They do look perfect. I scroll through her posts. There's a selfie of her and Mom dusted with flour, holding a big block of chocolate and laughing, that makes me wish I'd stayed and helped. I read through the hashtags--#motherdaughterbakenight #blackgirlmagicbaking #perfectbrowniesareperfect--before sliding the phone back to her.

"How come you're not at brunch?" she asks.

Usually I spend Sunday mornings with my best friends at Surf City Waffle, the absolute best waffle place in all of Los Angeles. This morning, though, they're all busy.

"Everyone's got stuff," I say.

"So you're just gonna hang around here, then?" she asks, and not in a way that makes me think she wants me to hang around here.

I drop my spoon back into the bowl and take a good look at her. Most days, she looks like a supermodel from the '70s



with her enormous Afro, bright glittery makeup, and vintage clothes.

Right now she looks even more beautiful than usual. If I had to guess, I'd say she has a date. But I don't have to guess, because the doorbell rings a second later. A huge smile breaks across her face, and she runs to the door with a squeal.

In the last year, Danica has had eight different boyfriends, which is an average of 0.667 boyfriends per month or 0.154 boyfriends per week. Anyway, my problem is not the quantity or even the quality of her boyfriends (to be clear, the quality could be better. I don't know why she chooses boys who are so much less interesting and smart than she is), it's the fact that she's dating at all. Why am I the only one who learned the lesson of Mom and Dad's divorce?

I leave my bowl on the table and try to sneak through the living room so I can avoid saying hello. No luck.

"Hey, Evie," says the guy. He says "hey" as if it has more than one syllable.

"Hi," I say back, trying to remember his name. He's dressed in board shorts and a sleeveless T-shirt, like he's going to the beach or just got back from it. He's white, tall, and muscled, with long, messy blond hair. If he were furniture, he'd be a really nice-looking shag carpet.

We stand there awkwardly for a few seconds before Danica puts us all out of our misery. "Ben and I are thinking of going to the movies," she says. "You can come if you want."

But the look on both their faces tells me two things:

#1: They are not thinking of going to the movies. They are thinking of staying here. Alone. In the apartment. So they can make out.

and

#2: If they were going to the movies, they wouldn't want me tagging along.

Why did she even ask? Is she feeling sorry for me?

"Can't. Have fun, though," I say. The only thing I have to do today is go to the library and get rid of my books, but sharing that will make me feel pathetic. I go upstairs and get dressed.

When I leave, I say bye like it has more than just the one syllable.