

Ten  
Commandments  
for  
Kissing  
Gloria Jean

Britt Leigh



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By Britt Leigh

For Mom and Dad,  
who gave me life and love;  
for Amy and Mallory,  
who live it;  
for all who seek the Truth  
in life and love.



“It is easy to find truth;  
it is hard to face it,  
and harder still to follow it.”

— *Fulton J. Sheen*

“We cannot give our hearts to God  
and keep our bodies for ourselves.”

— *Elisabeth Elliott*



I

Thou shalt  
ignore the pimple  
on my lip.

It is 6:47 p.m., and I, Gloria Jean Wisnewski, am late for my first-ever date. And I have a pimple on my lip. A pimple! On. My. *Lip!*

I gaze out the window of Mom's sedan so I don't have to look at her. It's all her fault. The being late part, not the pimple part. All her fault because she could not get the bread and shampoo before 6:00 tonight or on any one of the other three weekly trips she makes to All-Mart. It just had to be the very night I am going to the movies when Connor Riley will be there. Connor Riley, who's the cutest, nicest boy in the whole school.



In the side-view mirror, I catch a glimpse of the white bump. It looks like it's wearing a red inner tube. "Warning: objects in mirror may appear bigger than they are." This little reminder from the car is not comforting. While my lips aren't exactly full and juicy, I've been told they do curve into a sweet smile. And now that's wrecked. I groan and slump into my seat. Actually, the pimple *is* Mom's fault. She forgot to get my zit cream.

"Could you hurry up? We're already so late!" I lean forward as if I'm playing some motion-sensor video game and my body is the controller, demanding the car move forward.

Mom takes a deep breath. "Relax. You're fine." She pulls into the left lane to turn into the Sable Palms Cineplex. "I'm fine," she says under her breath.

And we've just missed the green light for our turn. Great.

Mom faces me and places her hand on mine. "Now, Gloria Jean, this is your first boy-girl party. Unsupervised. Remind me who's going to be there again."

"The birthday girl, of course. And Melissa. And Zack and Eric and Connor." I say the last part really fast.

Eden's been my best friend for years and years, and we met Melissa and the boys when we all started sixth grade at Panther Run Middle School. Usually birthday parties are just the girls or just the guys. But now that we're in eighth grade, Eden wants to get some dating practice in before high school, when everyone's dating, or so says her older sister, Sarai. So when her mom asked what she wanted to do this year, she came up with the idea of a boy-girl party

at the movies so she could go on an official date with her almost-boyfriend, Zack; Melissa could go on a date with this boy she's had a crush on, Eric; and I could go on a date with Connor, who was such a gentleman that he formally asked me out at the end of sixth period. The official birthday party for just us girls to celebrate was actually a couple of weeks ago. We went to the mall and then slept over at Eden's and had a fashion show with the new outfits we bought for tonight. We like to plan ahead.

Eden and I were meant to be best friends. Evidence #1: we both have fall birthdays so, thanks to school calendar rules, we have always been the oldest girls in our grade. It's one of the few times a rule is kind of cool. This one makes us *mature*.

Mom is spending this never-ending light thinking. Her mouth twists from side to side, as if she's trying to roll around the various tones she can use before settling on the one that feels right. "I hear from Eden's mom that she's been spending lots of time with Zack. Like they're dating." She looks at the traffic light. Then at me. "You know how your father and I feel about dating." She squeezes my hand. "We don't think you're old enough. But what do you think about all this?" Her pitch gets higher, along with her eyebrows.

I nudge her hand off mine. It's not quite the one I want to hold tonight. I look at her square in the face. "I think I'm ready. You let J.P. date when he was sixteen. What's two years?"

Mom slowly nods. "A lot," she says in a restrained voice. "But even with your brother, he had to start with group things with friends."

“Right! So this is not a *date*.” I smile wide. Maybe she gets it! Maybe I can tell her! I’d been kind of scared to share what I was really hoping for tonight. Afraid she’d say no to me going. “We’re all just hanging out. It’s a movie. We won’t even be talking.”

Mom purses her lips and then turns away from me and focuses on the stoplight. “Exactly. At your age, sometimes kids go to movies so they can kiss. Especially at these romantic comedy type of movies.” She darts a look at me, then goes back to her staring contest with the traffic light.

I don’t know how Mom knows this stuff, but yes, I would like Connor Riley to go out with me and kiss me. That fact is entirely the reason Eden and I picked this movie, *Fairly Able*. Well, not entirely. The winner of our favorite fashion show, *Tres Chic*, designed some of the wardrobe for it. “Mo-om!” I blush and put my hands on my face. This is the longest. Light. EVER.

“Okay, okay.” Mom lifts her hands from the steering wheel for a minute. She turns back to me with a simpering smile and brushes the side bang off my forehead. “You girls will stay together, then.” Uh-oh. This means one thing. She misheard my tone of voice and still thinks I don’t get it or worse that I don’t *want* to get it, yet.

“Green light, Mom!” Finally, finally! I bounce up so I can catch a glimpse of Connor waiting for me on the steps.

Connor is not the type to get pimples on his lips. He has perfect, peachy-tan skin and full, juicy, red lips. It amazes me how boys can get lips like that without liner, gloss, and special lipsticks made with chemical plumping agents. He is soooo adorable. I swoon back into my seat.

The sedan rolls into the horseshoe lane in front of the theater steps. Mom puts the car into park. She tucks the ever-loose section of hair behind my ear. “I’m so glad you haven’t asked me about destroying your hair with those dyes yet—maybe if next time we curl it. . . .”

I unbuckle my seat belt and peck her on the cheek. I can’t take one more minute of this. It is also all her fault that I have what I call dirty-dishwater blonde hair. Not rich, mahogany brown hair like Connor Riley has. Or always-shiny, auburn hair like Eden has. Nope, Mom and I are, as she likes to call it, *hair twins*.

“Gotta go,” I tell Mom as I slide out the door. “I see Connor on the top step.”

“Where are Eden and Melissa?” Mom calls through the window.

“Must be inside already,” I say and tap the car like it’s a horse to get it going.

I skip up the steps. “Hi, Connor,” I say. Suddenly my sandals and the pedicure Eden gave me seem really interesting.

“Hi, Gloria Jean,” Connor says.

His brown, boat-style shoes must be really interesting, too.

“My mom made me wear this,” he says, gesturing up and down his khakis and navy blue polo. Then he grins that grin that made me fall in like with him. It starts slow and then widens to one side.

I laugh. And I’m thankful that my outfit is not anyone’s fault. It is perfect. I am wearing a deep magenta top with a little peek-hole over a white tank top; a turquoise skirt

with magenta piping at the bottom; and strappy, chocolate-colored sandals. Eden thought the skirt looked weird on the hanger, but “gor-geous” during the fashion show.

“Your eyes match your skirt,” Connor says.

I look at him quizzically. My eyes are not turquoise. They are pale blue, like dirty watercolor water, pale blue.

“My brothers told me to say that,” he says. He looks at our feet again.

Connor has two older brothers—twins. They’re seventeen, so I can’t tell if they wanted to be helpful or were teasing. Maybe he means my eyes are pretty. I crane my head so I can look into his eyes. “Thanks. I like your eyes, too.”

And it’s the truth. He has dark, chocolate-brown eyes. How am I out with Connor Riley, the most perfect guy in the whole eighth grade class at Panther Run Middle? Especially when I, Gloria Jean Wisnewski, have a pimple on my lip!

Connor straightens up. “I already got the tickets. Zack and Eric are already inside with everyone else. Wanna go in?”

I nod. “I’ll get the popcorn, soda, and candy. If you want, I mean.”

When J.P. dated a girl he met at college this past summer, Dad always told him to bring extra money, because true gentlemen always paid, even if the girl offered.

“Cool,” Connor says.

Uh-oh. Maybe he is not a true gentleman.

We go inside and get the snacks. We find our theater. Not once does he open a door. Oh dear. He is not a true gentleman.

Inside the small theater, I see Eden close with Zack in the very top row. She waves and motions down, meaning we shouldn't sit with them. I don't see Melissa anywhere. So I lead us to two open seats on the aisle. It's a two-hour and twenty-minute show. I foresee needing to be close to an aisle or door, especially with the jumbo-sized soda Connor suggested we get, you know, so we could share. But he walks to the smack-dab middle of the row and pats on a cushion. Then, when I try to put the soda in the cup-holder, he shakes his head and lifts the armrest.

I giggle. I place the popcorn in between us and settle back. The lights darken. Good, he can't see the pimple anymore. Not that I think he's thinking about it, because now he's putting his arm around my shoulders. He is definitely *not* a true gentleman. But this time it's a good thing! Cause I think that means there's a chance he'll kiss me, even if it is only the first date.

Suddenly, a warm, tingly feeling zaps around the back of my neck and up to the backs of my earlobes, like I've been caught texting in class and the teacher is going to read it out loud, even though I know it's not actually anything embarrassing. Now that I am actually here on this date, I realize that of course it feels very different being on a date than how I feel when just seeing a couple dating on TV or hearing about Eden's dates with Zack. I twist around and try to find her. Her eye catches mine and she glares and softly juts her head toward Connor. He's clearing his throat and looking at the screen. I look too. Just some advertisements for a dental service and fun (not really) facts about movies I haven't seen.

I can feel him subtly shift in his seat. He's looking at me! I shift a little so our hips make a vee. I take a sip of soda and hope that the cold of the ice somehow makes it to my flushing neck and cheeks.

"Sooo . . . what'd you . . . do . . . this week?" Connor asks. His brothers must not have told him anything else about talking about on dates.

"Oh, you know, school. I'm thinking of entering that fashion design contest they talked about during closing announcements. Are you planning to enter the other one, the boat contest?"

"Nah, I don't think I will. Not my thing."

"Ah." I wonder what his Thing is. For the past two years he's been this boy who answers questions in class, but not too much, so he's not annoying like this guy I just met last night in Confirmation class. And Connor gets them wrong sometimes, but not too much, so he's not like Eric, who thinks sounding like an idiot is funny and actually did a book report on a series of little kid books full of fart jokes. No, Connor is always nice, if unreadable. Kind of like a cat in that way.

He doesn't say anything for the longest five seconds.

"Well, last night I had my first Confirmation class," I say. I hope that doesn't sound too boring or churchy. But I need to say something about this week that is new to him. We are in three of the same classes. Boys.

"Oh, cool. I started mine last week," Connor says. He takes a slurp of soda. "Didn't know you went." He stares ahead at the screen.

I didn't know he went either! Maybe Mom will be more

chill about this whole dating thing if she knows Connor is Catholic, too. Then again, I don't exactly want to come off as a nun wannabe! There's a girl in my Confirmation class who knows SO MUCH it's a little scary. I take some popcorn. "Yeah. We go to Saint Jose Maria Escriva. It's kind of a drive. But I'm so ready to start finally. I had to miss a bunch of classes last year, so they told me to re-do Year One."

"Same with me." Another slurp of soda. "My mom forgot about registration. We don't even go to church all that much anymore . . . just Christmas and Easter," Connor says. "I don't get the big deal . . . all that Holy Spirit stuff, you know?"

I crunch my popcorn thoughtfully. I try to nod sympathetically. But the answer is no, I do not really know. Mom, Dad, J.P., and I have always gone to church every Sunday. J.P. was even an altar server for a bit. The older kids who man the tables after Mass trying to get us to sign up for activities seem nice and happy. I want to tell him I get the big deal. Sort of.

"Well, Mrs. Fermacelli, my religious ed teacher, said Confirmation means you're given all these graces to help you now that you're a fully initiated Catholic. Sort of like a *Bat Mitzvah*," I tell him.

"A what kind of bat?" Connor asks.

"*Bat Mitzvah*. The thing at the synagogue Eden had last year. You were there."

"Oh yeah! That was one mad party. That's cool." He slurps his soda again. At this rate, I am not so concerned about being in the middle of the aisle.



I am concerned that his arm is around me, but he is not looking at me. Maybe it's all the church talk. I switch back to school stuff. "Sooo . . . this term project Mr. Gio's making us do. You're with Eric, right?"

He nods. The term project is this big thing our social studies teacher, Mr. Giopolous, is making us do in pairs. We have to present the cultural history of a subject using modern technology, like podcasts or apps. Of course, Eden and I are together. We haven't picked our topic yet.

"He said something about soccer . . .," I say to get him started on *some* kind of trail, otherwise this conversation is trailing off . . .

Connor's eyes widen, and I can see them catch a glint of light from the screen. It seems I have hit a Thing. "Oh yeah," he starts all excitedly.

I let him talk about sports until the movie starts and let him keep slurping the soda as long as he keeps letting his arm rest along the back of my neck, which is feeling significantly less electrified.

Then, halfway through the movie, I am desperately wishing we were on the aisle and not in the middle. And it's not from too much of the soda that Connor has finished by himself. Oh no. It's the Troubles.