

LESSON 18

MISLEADING WORDS

Fabulous. Just perfect. Now my dad and Rex both think I'm a loser. How could I have been so stupid? Didn't r know that guys lied? Especially teenage guys? Especially teenage *musician* guys?

I was sitting in my room with the door locked. a pile of Angry Girl CDs was lying by my stereo. Janet and I had picked them out last night, figuring that I would need at least a week's supply to live down the awful interview incident. "I can't *believe* that happened: she had said, passing me her old Alanis Morissette album. "I mean, for weeks things are going well and then, poof! I can't believe he didn't stop his friends from laughing. at least."

"I know," I said, taking another heaping spoonful of Ben and Jerry's Chunky Monkey. "Tell me about it. I just can't believe he pulled such a 180 on me. Why do boys always say one thing and then do another?" I put in Alanis and let her loud, whiny voice wash over me. "Whatever. I'm over it." Janet said that was a good attitude to have.

I was tired of being cranky and lame. I decided to do something about it so I got to work on some new poems. So far in the angry Girl CD list I had gone through Bjork, Uz Phair, and Sleater-Kinney, and now I was listening to the Donnas as loud as possible (but not *too* loud – the last thing I wanted to deal with was my dad yelling at me about my music). The phone rang just as I was getting through a really good sonnet. Probably Janet, offering me some more moral support. "Hi, darling," I said.

An unmistakable voice on the other line barked, "So, do you want to go to the formal or not?"

"Walter? Walter Chen?" I couldn't believe it. "What kind of stupid trick are you pulling?" God! Had he *no* sense of decency? I was even less of a fan of Walter's today since he was cousins with That Boy Who Shall Remain Nameless.

"No trick," Walter said. "My cousin was a jackass for pulling that on you. And ..." he stammered. "And he doesn't deserve you, okay?"

I was floored. Did Walter Chen have a soul after all?

"So, stop being a moron, Lee, and say you'll go to formal with me."

Well, nice to know some things never change.

"Walter, I'd be happy to go." Wait a minute, what was I saying?! Oh well, too late. "After all, I wouldn't want my dress to go to waste. But you do realize, Walter, that this is not some Freddie Prinze, Jr. movie – *nothing* is going to happen between us at this dance. You got that?"

Walter laughed. "Deal, Lee. I wouldn't want your cooties all over me anyway. Just manage to dress like a normal person, okay?"

"Will do, Walter," I said as we hung up.

Jesus. If live to be a hundred, I will never understand boys.

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So, in honor of all the **duplicitous** (*adj*) boys out there (in other words, all the deceptive, misleading boys), I've put together a list of words that don't mean what they sound like, or words that sound like other words. Take **pulchritude** (*n*) for example. Who would have ever guessed that word meant "beauty"? Doesn't it sound like something you'd use to clean your drain with? So here goes. Use some of them in casual conversation and watch your friends get all confused. (Try *logorrhea*, another old favorite!)

MISLEADING WORDS

I like watching little kids at the playground. They run around from place to place in such a funny, **apian** manner.

apian (*adj*): having to do with bees (not apes, surprisingly enough)

My father was completely **apoplectic** when I said I wanted to take a year off to travel.

apoplectic (*adj*): really angry

At MFC, the creation of perfect ice-cream Squashies is my **bailiwick**.

bailiwick (*n*): an area in which a person has a special ability or responsibility (not something that gave you nightmares as a little kid)

Whenever I get a box of original Krispy Kremes, I get an even **baker's dozen**.

baker's dozen (*n*): a baker's dozen isn't a dozen at all-the phrase means "a set of thirteen."

My idea of **beatitude** is a world without lame teenage boys.

beatitude (*n*): perfect happiness and peace

In English class, Walter Chen is always making loud, **bumptious** arguments.

bumptious (*adj*): aggressively opinionated

My cousin has a **congenital** heart defect that keeps her in and out of the hospital.

congenital (*adj*): Nope, not something you can catch from a toilet seat. Congenital describes a condition that has existed since birth.

Janet's favorite touch at the Winter Formal was the disco ball, which **coruscated** as it spun.

coruscate (*v*): to shine, to flash brightly

When it came to eating, my brothers' **cupidity** is alarming. When you see them at the dinner table, you'd think they'd been starved for weeks.

cupidity (*n*): greed

Watching the Buffy marathon last weekend **enervated** me – after ten hours of lying on my couch, I barely had the energy to get up and go

to bed.

enervate (v): to weaken

Walter and I are always getting into **frays** in English class.

fray (n): as a verb, it means "to shred something"; as a noun, though, it means "a fight."

After a few weeks, the chocolate bar I left on my desk dried up and became **friable**.

friable (adj): easily broken up into little pieces

When Walter wants to wheedle an A out of a teacher, he gets this **fulsome** tone in his voice that I hate.

fulsome (adj): offensively fawning

When my dad asked me why I was being so mopey, I just **hedged** the question.

hedge (v): to avoid answering a question directly

I envy girls with **helicoid** hair – mine is stick straight.

helicoid (adj): shaped like a spiral

They're cutting back my hours at MFC, so I'm going to have to **husband** my money if I want to go to that White Stripes concert in March.

husband (v): No, I don't mean I'm going to try to marry a rich guy. To husband means to use something economically.

My brothers are **immutable** in the fact that they're never mute.

immutable (adj): unchangeable

My fathers resolve is **impregnable** – I don't think there's any way I can convince him that he's wrong.

impregnable (adj): unable to be broken by an outside force

Christina Aguilera is **infamous** for wearing awful outfits.

infamous (adj): This word doesn't mean "not famous"-the word describes someone famous for a bad reputation.

When Rex turned me down for the Winter Formal, it broke my heart into **infinitesimal** pieces.

infinitesimal (adj): This isn't a synonym for infinite-it means "very, very tiny."

Janet was **instrumental** in making me feel better.

instrumental (adj): necessary in order to bring something about

At first I thought my grief would be **insuperable**.

insuperable (adj): unable to be overcome or gotten rid of

Sometimes my jock brothers are quite **jocular**, especially when they sense I'm in a really bad mood.

jocular (adj): joking, playful

Even though they're cousins, Walter and Rex couldn't be more different. If you **juxtaposed** them, though, you might get a pretty neat guy-smart and cool, but probably still crazy.

juxtapose (v): to put two (usually unlike) things together

When I get my heart broken by a boy, I just want to lie on the couch and watch **lachrymose** movies all day.

lachrymose (adj): crying easily, or making someone else cry

The head cheerleader at our high school suffers from **logorrhea**. It's sad, really.

logorrhea (n): extreme talkativeness. It usually also implies incoherence, as in someone with a mental disease.

Janet needed to **marshal** some people to help with Winter Formal setup, but I managed to duck out of it.

marshal (v): to gather people together and organize them

I hate watching my brothers **masticate** at the dinner table.

masticate (v): Ew! Get your mind out of the gutter. It means "to grind with the teeth."

Noisome smells are always coming from my brothers' room.

noisome (adj): offensive to the senses

When all of Rex's friends laughed at me, I felt completely **nugatory**.

nugatory (adj): completely unimportant

If you put a plastic cup in the microwave, it becomes **plastic**.

plastic (adj): easily bent and shaped

I should have known the idea of dating an indie rock boy was a **quixotic** fantasy.

quixotic (adj): overly idealistic, romanticized and impractical (This word is drawn from the title character of Miguel Cervantes's novel *Don Quixote*, about a knight who had these qualities.)

Janet bought a pretty **racy** dress for the Winter Formal-there's going to be a lot of skin exposed.

racy (adj): shockingly sexual

When her mom saw it, she said, "Is that a **rent** in your dress, or did it come that way?"

rent (n): It can be something you pay a landlord, but here it means "a rip" or "a tear."

When my brothers get grounded, they usually get so **restive** that my dad goes crazy and lets them out early.

restive (adj): active and out-of-control

When Janet was Sick, she got all **rheumy** and disgusting.

rheumy (adj): Nope, your mom's SUV isn't rheumy. Rheum is a watery discharge coming out of the eyes, nose, or mouth.

Janet lent me a Celine Dion CD, but I find her music so **saccharine**.

saccharine (adj): sickeningly sweet

After the awful incident at the rehearsal, Janet brought me lots of Ben and Jerry's, which had a **salubrious** effect.

salubrious (adj): being good for your health or general well-being

I got a splinter the other day and **scarified** myself trying to get it out.

scarify (v): to scratch the skin

My dad doesn't like the Tin Cup because he thinks it's **seamy**.

seamy (adj): distasteful because of its immorality

I always tell him that, just because it looks **seedy**, that doesn't mean it's filled with bad people.

seedy (*adj*): Nope, you won't get a tree if you plant something seedy. It means "cheap" and "run-down."

When my brothers were little, they used to **somnambulate**. Sometimes they'd do it at the same time and really freak out my parents.

somnambulate (*v*): to sleepwalk (Actually, this word makes sense if you know the roots – *somni* means "sleep," and *ambulate* means "to walk.")

My dad hoped that getting a job at MFC would teach me the value of money and how to be less **spendthrift**.

spendthrift (*adj*): Sounds like being "spendthrift" would be a good thing, right? actually, it doesn't mean "being thrifty," it means the exact opposite – "spending money wastefully and unnecessarily."

After being humiliated, I spent a few days shut up in my room. But then I decided that was lame, so I **spruced** myself up and went out.

spruce (*v*): to make something look better

Lately, I've been thinking that I'd like to spend next year in the **Strait** of Gibraltar area – Morocco, Spain, and the Mediterranean.

Strait (*n*): a narrow band of water that joins two larger bodies of water

I can't believe Rex dissed me so **summarily**.

summarily (*adv*): brusquely, rudely, without discussion

Last month, this total **tyro** came swaggering into the Tin Cup and wanted to read his poems. He was so proud of them, but they were really awful.

tyro (*n*): a complete, rank amateur

I keep **waffling** about whether or not to call him, but Janet keeps convincing me to wait.

waffle (*v*): as a noun, it means something that tastes good with syrup. As a verb, though, it means "to keep changing your opinion: