

PROPER ROMANCE®

LIES, *Love*, AND
Breakfast
AT
Tiffany's

Author of *Lies Jane Austen Told Me*

JULIE WRIGHT



The Lie

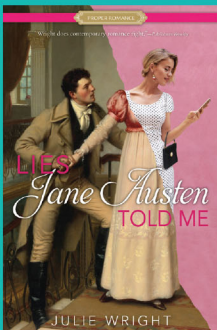
Women in Hollywood are just pretty faces. But Silvia Bradshaw knows that's a lie, and she's ready to be treated as an equal and prove her worth as one of Hollywood's newest film editors.

The Love

She and Ben Mason had worked together as editors before Silvia got her big break, so he's the perfect person to ask for feedback on her first major film. But even as their friendship begins to blossom into something more, a lawsuit surfaces, jeopardizing both Ben and Silvia's jobs—as well as their fledgling romance. Audrey Hepburn once said: “The most important thing is to enjoy your life—to be happy—it's all that matters.” Silvia agrees. Or she used to. It's one thing to risk her job and her heart, but can she really risk Ben's, too? Does she have the right to make decisions for her own happiness when they affect so many other people?

The Breakfast

With everything to lose, Silvia meets Ben for breakfast at his favorite diner, Tiffany's, for one last conversation before the credits roll on true love.



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JULIE WRIGHT

Lies Jane Austen Told Me

LIES, *Love*, AND
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*To all the women who work in Hollywood,
and in other creative endeavors, who are making
the changes needed to have their creativity
and voices heard and recognized.*

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Wright, Julie, 1972– author.

Title: Lies, love, and breakfast at Tiffany's / Julie Wright.

Description: Salt Lake City, Utah : Shadow Mountain, [2018]

Identifiers: LCCN 2018010591 | ISBN 9781629724874 (paperbound)

Subjects: LCSH: Motion picture producers and directors—Fiction. | Man-woman relationships—Fiction. | LCGFT: Romance fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3623.R55 L55 2018 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018010591>

Printed in the United States of America

LSC Communications, Crawfordsville, IN

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Chapter One

"I'm not going to let anyone put me in a cage."

—Holly Golightly, played by Audrey Hepburn
in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

Audrey Hepburn was haunting me. She had been ever since I was a child. Not in the literal sense. No wispy spirit trailed behind me everywhere I went or anything like that—at least, I didn't think so—but we were connected, Audrey and I, because she died from cancer on the same day I lost my right eye to that same monster. She had been sixty-three; I was five. Likely the connection wouldn't have been all that remarkable except the TV from the nurses' station across the hall was loud, and the news coverage focused on one story.

The one story where Audrey died.

My five-year-old mind feared I would be cancer's next victim. After all, it had already taken my eye. And it had taken a woman the nurses had loved well enough to cry over.

"She was an amazing woman," said one nurse.

"And so brave," said another.

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I imagined cancer lurking through the dark hallways and sneaking into my room to steal my life like it had stolen hers. People say I shouldn't be able to remember that day so clearly because I was so little, but I bet if they had lost an eye, the details would stick out in their memories, too.

The surgery was not the most frightening part of losing my eye. The scariest part was when night came and the hospital noise quieted to whispers. I imagined cancer hiding under my bed or behind the monitors that glowed and beeped in the dark. With only half my vision available to me, how was I supposed to see when cancer attacked? Every noise from the hallway or squeak from the frame of my own bed sent my heart rate speeding enough that nurses came in to check on me. I was glad to see them come and devastated when they left again.

Alone in the dark, I thought of Audrey. In my mind, I pictured a beautiful woman in long, white, glowing robes. I gave the ghost woman a sword and a shield and imagined her at the foot of my bed, keeping watch over me. The ghost of Audrey conjured by my imagination battled the cancer lurking in my closet and under my bed. She fought back death for me.

Only then, with this picture of a woman guarding me firmly fixed in my mind, did I finally go to sleep.

Thankfully, cancer didn't collect anything more from me than the eye. But I still worried—even when the doctor released me from the hospital. Later, when she fit me with my prosthetic eye, she asked me what I was going to name it.

"Name?" I asked. "Why would I name an eye?"

"It will make it personal to you so you'll take better care of it."

I didn't know exactly what she meant, but coming up

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with a name was easy. "Audrey," I said. The name of my midnight protector.

Though I slowly grew out of the idea of Audrey as my guardian angel, Audrey-the-eye remained my constant companion.

Audrey-the-eye went through many iterations over the years as I grew and had to upgrade to larger models. When I was twelve, my parents gave in to my tantrums and let me get a version with a star-shaped pupil.

That was the year Grandma commented that it was fitting for me to want a star for my eye since I'd named my eye after a star.

When I asked her what she was talking about, she explained that Audrey was a movie star—not just an eye, not just a random person who died from cancer. She wasn't even *just* a star. She had been *the* star. The one woman to teach other women how to be.

"She taught us to reach for the moon in a way that would make the moon want to reach back," Grandma had said.

"Sounds like a horror film, Grandma."

Grandma had glared at me. "Don't be sassy."

She was perturbed that I had the audacity to name an eye after Audrey Hepburn when I didn't even know about her movies. So for my twelfth birthday, I got a starry eye and an education on the film *My Fair Lady*. The movie had the longest beginning of nothing but names and music that anyone had ever been forced to endure, and I almost sneaked out of the living room, but Grandma had zebra cookies baking, so I decided to stick around until they came out of the oven. The

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credits finally ended, and actors bustled out in front of the camera, hit their marks, and froze.

I froze, too, standing in front of the television, mesmerized by the scene cuts, the music, and the smudged flower girl. It was the first time I noticed camera angles and how the movie cut from one actor or actress to the other.

Grandma and I stayed up late to finish the film, and I left Grandma's house with bloodshot eyes—well, *one* bloodshot eye, since I only had one—but perfect vision. I knew what I was going to do for the rest of my life. I was going to make movies, and it was all because of Audrey.

Which was why I felt like I could blame her for my mess of a life when, years later, I landed a job as Portal Pictures' newest assistant film editor, and things weren't as awesome as I'd hoped. Audrey-the-ghost-protector had become Audrey-the-poltergeist-getting-me-into-trouble.

I sat in the editing studio and checked the digital wall clock, the one patterned after Portal Pictures' first science-fiction film, and tightened my mouth to keep from saying something that would make Grandma scowl at me.

He'd said he'd meet me here so we could go to the sound studio together.

He'd promised he'd be on time today, and though common sense told me that *that* was a bald-faced lie, I'd held out hope.

When I received an out-of-the-blue text from Ben Armstrong, who had been my boss when we'd worked together at a much smaller film studio, asking me how it was working with the illustrious Dean Thomas, I wanted to write, "I wouldn't know, since he's a serial no-show." What I actually

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sent was, "Great! Thanks for helping me get this job! You'll never know how much I appreciate you helping me get this chance."

And I did appreciate it. My career meant everything to me. I wanted to climb until there were no mountains left. I wanted to make films that mattered—ones that had staying power in the minds and hearts of audiences everywhere. I wanted to make movies like *My Fair Lady*. Like the hundreds of other movies that inspired me through film school and kept me inspired even after job hunting had become awful. But now that I'd landed a job—with Ben's help—at a high-profile studio, it felt like I was babysitting, not creating iconic films.

Sending the text decided it: Dean Thomas was going to show up today because I did not want my text to Ben to be a lie.

I pushed back from the editing panel and stood. "Let's figure out where you've gone off to this time, Mr. Thomas." I was only twenty-seven years old, and the phrase "I'm too old for this" played on constant repeat in my head.

I marched to where Adam, Dean Thomas's personal assistant, sat at his desk and guarded the way to the boss's office. As soon as Adam saw me, his face flushed as red as his hair, and he put up his hands as if to defend himself from my attack. "I swear I reminded him, Silvia."

I jabbed a finger at the closed door. "Is he even in there?"

Adam stood, apparently anticipating that I was about to barge in uninvited. He stepped in my way. "He *is* in there, but he's busy."

"Busy with what?" I kept my voice to a whisper-yell.

“The only thing he has to do is the stuff *I’ve* been doing for him and the stuff *you’ve* been doing for him. Between the two of us, he’s completely unnecessary. We should fire him.”

Adam frowned in confusion. “But he’s the boss. And I don’t know what he’s doing. He just told me he wasn’t to be disturbed.”

“Are you kidding? We’re supposed to be meeting the sound director today. Dean said he’d be there for this meeting. How do you think it looks when I have to tell these people that their film editor is too busy to meet with them?”

Adam shrugged. “Take good notes.”

I’d never punched someone before, but Adam was treading on dangerous ground with me. I glared as hard as a one-eyed woman could glare. “You do know that when I asked Dean if we could have a post-production assistant because I saw we had it listed in the budget, that he told me *you* were the office assistant and that I was to use you. Do you want to be the one to *take good notes*, or do you want to step aside so I can fetch Dean?”

Adam moved.

I sucked in a deep breath of courage, knocked on the door, and then entered before he could tell me to go away.

Dean had his head bent over his laptop. I could see the way his dark hair was thinning on top, revealing a shiny scalp under the carefully combed lines. He looked up from his laptop and growled, “Adam!”

Adam poked his head around the doorframe.

“What part of ‘I’m not to be disturbed’ did you miss?”

I cut in before Adam could speak. “I’m sorry, Mr. Thomas, but we have a meeting with Bronson, the sound

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director.” I added Bronson’s job description because Dean’s blank look indicated he had no idea who I was talking about. Of course, he had to know Bronson, but Dean’s increasingly erratic behavior meant I couldn’t depend on anything. “He wants to discuss the musical score we’ve planned.”

“If we’ve already planned it, what’s there to discuss? You have my notes. Surely you can manage the follow-up meetings without me holding your hand.”

I refused to look away from his challenging gaze. The fact was, I did have his notes. And they were useless. Which meant that it was a good thing *I* had taken copious notes during our last meeting with Bronson. Dean had spent the whole time drawing stick figures shooting each other or stabbing each other. I tried not to read anything into the art, but when I mentioned the stick figures to my friend Emma, she bought me a can of pepper spray to keep in my purse. Just in case.

“Bronson’s asked to speak with you directly, sir. And we’re also supposed to visit the set today to talk to the director and the script supervisor. They’ll be waiting for us at the video village. I was also wondering if we could let the DP know the slate isn’t getting its fair share of screen time. Some of the shots are too dark to see it properly, and it would be great if we could get more of the slate in the shot.”

“You don’t bother the director of photography with slate details, Sara. Call the assistant cameraman. I’m sure you have his number—or do I need to get that for you, too?”

“It’s Silvia, sir. And I *do* have the number. I *have* called the assistant cameraman, and the slate is still a problem. If you could mention it—”

Dean narrowed his eyes at me as he lumbered to his feet.

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“Look, new girl, I’ve worked with these guys for a lot of years, and the slate has never been an issue before, which means the problem is likely not with them.”

I shut my mouth with a clack of teeth before I said all the things in my head. New girl? Really? He called me *new girl* even though he’d just heard me say my name? And for him to imply that the slate fault was mine?

But at least he was standing. That was movement in the right direction.

I forged ahead. “Also, with production under way, the DIT is sending the raw footage dailies faster than I can process them. Have you thought any more about the second assistant film editor position we discussed last week?”

“DIT?” Adam whispered to me.

“Digital imaging technician,” Dean answered, proving he was listening to at least one of us. “Look, I know you’re new, which means you’re still trying to figure out my processes, so listen up. I’m not someone who gives in to the idea that an assistant needs an assistant. The redundancy is ridiculous.” He slid his jacket off the back of his leather chair and shrugged into it.

I should have let the conversation go. He didn’t like to be contradicted, but he wasn’t helping with the dailies at all. I was the assistant, which meant I was there to assist someone else and not do the job entirely on my own. “But the budget allows for—”

He pinned me to the spot with a single sharp glance before he resumed fixing his jacket collar. “Budget? Just because something is budgeted doesn’t mean it’s needed. Don’t be frivolous with other people’s money. *You’re* the assistant,

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which means we don't need another assistant, because we already have one. If you don't like it, maybe this won't work out for either of us."

I closed my mouth again. But this time I kept it closed. At least Dean was walking in the direction of the sound studio. I had to celebrate the little things.

When we got to the studio, Dean held out his hand to Bronson and flashed a smile I barely remembered from when I'd had my interview with the man. I swear that interview was the one and only time Dean Thomas had ever really looked at me. Dean gave Bronson a one-armed hug and clapped him on the back. "Good to see you, good to see you!" Dean never used Bronson's name, which made me wonder if he really didn't remember. He never seemed to remember mine.

Bronson had us listen to a variety of needle drops that he felt added to the emotion of the film before he took us through a full list of the sound effects he intended to use. He'd marked the script for each sound cue.

"At our last roundtable, I also took some notes of some sound effects I thought might work really well for the mood Danny said he wanted." I offered up my iPad.

Bronson was excited to see my notes and to hear my ideas. He played with the sound board to create a few of the sounds I suggested then nodded and scribbled some notes of his own. Together, we talked about some of the more creative Foley work we'd heard throughout our careers and laughed at how something like a chair scraping back on a cement floor could create a monster growl.

Dean laughed along with us and added suggestions of his own that sounded like he was being unique and original at

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first, but when analyzed, were simply different ways of restating something Bronson or I had already said. I tried not to sigh at that, or at the way he chummed with Bronson as if they were good friends.

Going to the actual set was more of the same. Dean shook Danny's hand like they were long-lost brothers. "Danny, it's so good to see you. How's filming going? The weather reschedules haven't seemed to hold you back any."

He'd only known about those delays in exterior shots because I'd told him.

Danny laughed, his brown hair spiked up in a way that was both stylish and whimsical, which matched his personality. He was a director who was easy to get along with as long as your vision for his movie matched his vision.

Dean had a knack for making it seem like his vision was in perfect alignment.

The problem was he had no idea what Danny envisioned because he'd never worked on any part of this project so far. Not one part of this film had Dean's stamp of approval on it. Not one scene had any mark of Dean Thomas and his editorial work. I doubted he had even read the script.

I realized Dean wasn't going to step aside and allow me to take part in the conversation, so I stuck my hand out and said hello.

"Hello, Silvia, nice to see you," Danny said. He then turned to Dean and said, "You trust this girl with a whole lot of responsibility. She's been meeting with us regularly and seems to have a good handle on what she's doing. Girl's got a sharp head on her shoulders. It's a pity she's an editor."

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She'd have made a great actress with eyes like that. She's got Audrey's eyes."

I started at the reference. It was something my grandmother said often. My mom and dad said it on occasion. Every now and again, even strangers mentioned my eyes. But in the movie business, the place where Audrey Hepburn would be most recognizable, few people ever mentioned my dark, slightly olive-shaped eyes, and even fewer made the comparison. It made me laugh when people told me I had Audrey's eyes since one of my eyes was named Audrey. If they only knew.

"Thank you, Danny, but I realized a long time ago that my acting skills were nonexistent," I said. "I do my best work after the filming has been handled by the professionals."

He waved away what he looked at as false modesty. "Anyone can be taught to act, but you can't teach someone to have eyes like yours. You're either born with it or you're not. You, Silvia, were born with it."

I didn't bother telling him that I might have been born with it, but I didn't get to keep it for very long since one of those eyes he admired so much went missing two and a half decades earlier. If he couldn't tell a glass one from a fake one, who was I to correct him?

"Have you seen her movies?" Danny asked. "You should do some research on her. You really do look like her."

I *had* seen her movies—or several of the major ones, anyway. When I was a film student, they were homework, but my relationship with Audrey had become complicated over the years. Yes, I had named my eye after her, but when I thought of her, I could still remember the fear of the phantom cancer

lurking in my hospital room, a fear that had never quite gone away.

“I hear she was great,” Danny continued. “You know, they say she used to bring chocolate for the entire cast and crew while on set, paid for with her own money.”

“Really? I didn’t know that.” I gave a laugh. “Sounds like someone I could be friends with.”

“Or sisters, with eyes like that.”

Dean shook his head and stepped forward enough to put himself between Danny and me. “Now don’t go giving the new girl a big head,” Dean said. “The last thing I need is a starlet hoping for a big break. I need someone who can work seriously.”

“You’ve definitely found that. All Silvia does is work. You guys are keeping up with the dailies nearly as fast as we’re sending them. Between your team and Bronson’s team, things are going well. You cannot know how much I appreciate that.”

Dean smiled, but he didn’t make any sign of agreement regarding my work habits. He also didn’t comment that his team was a one-woman show.

Danny continued, “I really need you guys to keep up the pace.”

Dean made a joke about taking away my breaks and lunches, which irritated me enough to need a distraction, so I turned to the sound mixer and gave him my most apologetic smile. “I hate to ask this, but could you do me a favor? The walkie-talkies are getting too close to the mics during filming and creating pops in the sound. They aren’t too bad, and I was able to scrub them out of the raw footage for the last two days, but it’s a lot of detail work. I’m worried I might not be

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able to clean them out in the future. Could you tell the crew to keep their distance from the set during filming? I know they need their walkies, but it could be a real issue if we don't take care of it now."

The sound mixer nodded and said he'd talk to the crew.

"Cheese thirty!" A woman from craft services brought over a tray filled with fruits, cheeses, and crackers, and left it on a stand near Danny's director chair.

Danny and Dean, deep in conversation, didn't seem to notice the food.

I edged closer. I wanted to hear whatever they deemed important enough to discuss in such hushed tones.

Danny's creased brow and firm jaw let me know he was giving Dean a stern talking-to. "I'm bringing this up because of what Silvia mentioned about the walkie pops. I know you're working hard. Silvia keeps in good contact with us as we're doing the dailies, but Christopher has made this clear: we can have no more interruptions. Karl-Erik's skimboarding accident was a delay we couldn't afford. The first cut pretty much needs to be a final cut. The studio won't allow any further delays."

"A final cut on the first round is ridiculous," Dean said. "Nobody expects that. Postproduction is just as important as filming. You gotta ask yourself, do you want it fast, or do you want it right?"

Danny's hands splayed out in helplessness. "I hear what you're saying, but Christopher is adamant. He expects it both fast and right if you want a job."

Dean stiffened. He didn't like being threatened. I didn't like it either. My job was on the line, too.

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Danny shook his head, making his crazy hair wave back and forth. “It’s not my place to say this to you, but it’s better to know what Christopher is thinking. I like knowing where I stand. I figured you would want the same.”

“Sure. Sure,” Dean said. “Thanks for the heads-up.”

Danny clapped his hands together and said, “Well, now that that’s settled, let’s enjoy cheese thirty! Then we can look at today’s footage.”

Christopher showed up soon after and confirmed everything Danny had said. Only Christopher was far less friendly in the message delivery.

On the way back to the studio, Dean ground his teeth together and stayed relatively quiet. Relief flooded me. If Christopher and Danny expected final-cut quality on the first pass, Dean would have to involve himself in the process. He’d step up and take some of the work off my shoulders.

We passed through the guardhouse and parked the car, and Dean exited the vehicle without a word.

“Mr. Thomas?” I said, hurrying to catch up with him. I mentally rolled my eyes at myself calling him “Mr. Thomas” and “sir” as if he was someone to respect. But in my short time working with him, I knew this man—or at least I understood his type. He clung to the old Hollywood ways where women were to be looked at, not looked up to. It was past time for that to change, in my opinion.

He opened the glass doors leading into the studio. I barely squeezed through before the doors swung closed; Dean hadn’t bothered holding them open, even knowing I was right behind him.

When he made a right turn to his office instead of left to

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the editing studio, I called out to him. "We have a lot of work to do if they want a final cut in a first-cut time frame."

He didn't even glance back to me. "Yes, *you* do."

"Mr. *Thomas*!"

Realizing I'd pretty much yelled at him, he stopped and turned in my direction. "Do you have something you need to say to me?"

I had lots of things I needed to say to him. I wanted to say that he was a misogynistic monster. I wanted to tell him his lazy behavior disgusted me. I wanted to explain that stealing the hard work and ideas of others and passing them off as his own made him a vulture.

Instead, I said, "Do you intend on taking part in this film at all?"

He stepped closer, close enough I could see the bloodshot eyes of a man who'd hit the bottle too hard for too long. "I did my part. I hired you."

I lifted my chin, my chest tightening with the anger that burned through my entire midsection. "And you believe that's enough to earn your name in the credits when they roll?"

His chin came up as well. He stretched his neck and squared his shoulders. With a breath that looked like he was about to unleash a torrent of anger in my direction, he turned left in the direction of the editing studio.

I closed my eyes and balled my shaking hands into fists before following him. Round one to me.

The sad thing about rounds was that winning one didn't mean anything in the grand scheme of things.

A couple weeks later, with Dean still being hit-and-miss on coming into the editing studio, and me finding I actually

hated working with him on the days he did show up, we had a blowup because I needed him to sign off on some of my scene choices, but I was insisting he actually see the footage first. He was hungover and angry.

“You know . . .” His gravelly voice had lowered to a tone that sounded dangerous. “I’ve often found that those who are dependent on the opinions of others are fairly weak. Show me any assistant film editor, and I will show you a man who would jump at the chance to work without someone breathing down his neck.”

I caught the insinuation. A *man* wouldn’t be bothering him with the trivialities of the job.

But I wasn’t bothering him with trivialities. This job belonged to him. My job was to assist him.

I lowered my voice to match his tone. “So you’re fine with me doing my job *and* yours?”

He narrowed his eyes. “I resent you saying that.”

“I resent doing it. So I guess that makes us even.” Holding my ground with him looming over me in my personal space took all my effort. I thought about the shooters and stabbers he drew when he should have been taking notes, and wondered why he was so angry all the time. “I’m actually surprised you don’t want to do your job.” The statement alone would have definitely earned me a sharp reprimand had I let him respond. “At some point, you had to have cared. You wouldn’t have moved into this position if you hadn’t been good at your work. So what’s the problem here? What happened to you?”

His nostrils flared, and his eyes widened at my unmistakable belligerence. “You don’t know anything about my life or

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my work. Just do what you're told if you want to still have a job!"

With that, he fled the office.

I sank into my chair, wishing I'd become a carpenter or maybe a private detective or even a lion tamer, because working in Hollywood was a nightmare.

The problem with my particular nightmare was that there was no leaving. I would never be able to wake up to a more pleasant reality. No one ever told me that Hollywood came with no exits. They never mentioned that I could drown in Hollywood dreams. For me, making movies was an addiction stronger than any other known substance. All I had ever wanted was to be a part of making films that were like Audrey's *My Fair Lady*.

Which was why this was all her fault. I slammed my fist on the table, took a deep breath, and got back to work.

Because hate it or love it, I had a deadline to meet. I was a strong, independent woman who'd somehow managed to be put into a cage with bars forged of ambition and fear.

Thanks for nothing, Audrey Hepburn.