

Dear Reader,

It was really difficult to start writing this book.

As soon as my editor suggested Lenore as a main character, I knew I had to tell her story. But I put so much of myself into *Happily Ever Afters*. I was worried I didn't have anything left to give. And then *right* as I began to discover Lenore's voice and figure out what this story should be: Covid-19 arrived.

My kids were sent home from school indefinitely. I was overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty over this virus that had shut down the whole world. How was I supposed to write a fluffy, funny love story when I felt so sad and anxious?

Well, the answer was: slowly. After a month of getting my bearings in our new reality, I started waking up at 5 a.m., when our house was still quiet. And even though I was tired, even though I would have preferred to sleep or cry or do really anything else, I wrote 1000 words at a time. I kept showing up.

And soon, what was a chore became my reprieve. My early morning writing sessions were my bright spots in days that had so few; my joy when there was so much pain. I felt like I did as a teenage writer when I would fill notebooks with stories just for myself, escaping into a world that I needed.

That became even more the case during the grief and trauma of June 2020 (though, of course, those feelings didn't begin or end in that month—they were just tragically heightened). It made me realize the importance of the story I was creating; how joy is an act of resistance. *One True Loves* is about two Black teens, Lenore and Alex, experiencing joy: traveling

around beautiful locations, falling in love, making fart jokes, and being carefree—or at least working through cares that don't have life-or-death consequences. Lenore, a Black girl, has the space to be imperfect, figure herself out, and take her time—a privilege that Black girls don't often get. And Lenore's brother, Wally, a Black man in his early twenties, learns how to take care of his mental health—and he's loved and supported through it all. I wrote the reality that I want to live in.

One True Loves is a love letter to Black teens, and it carried me through 2020 and now 2021. It made me laugh and smile and provided me an escape when I needed it most. I hope it can do the same for you.

Love,
Elise