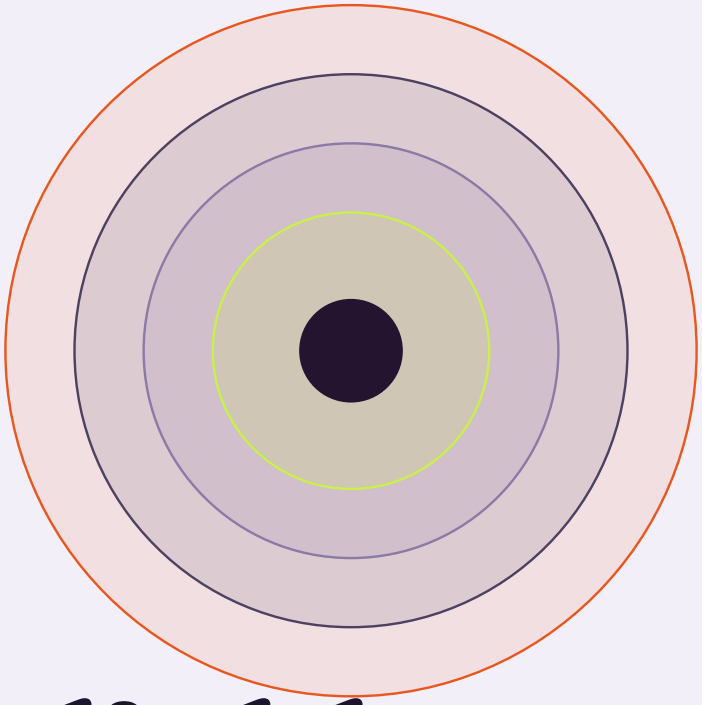


Unreliable Boyfriend: An Insider's View of Dealing with a Chaotic Super-power, Pluto-

crats, and Other Complicated Peo-ple

A reading of the book by Chrystia Freeland (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Unreliable Boyfriend: An Insider's View of Dealing with a Chaotic Superpower, Plutocrats, and Other Complicated People, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Chrystia Freeland is a Canadian journalist turned politician who served as trade minister, foreign minister, finance minister and deputy prime minister under Justin Trudeau. This book is her account of those years, which she presents as a mix of memoir, argument and plan for a second version of globalization. Its title casts the United States under Donald Trump as an unreliable boyfriend, and Canada as the partner who has to decide how to respond. She covers her Alberta upbringing, her years reporting on Russia's new rich in the 1990s, the trade talks she worked on, life inside Trudeau's cabinet and her resignation in December 2024. Her closing case is for democracies to trade more with like-minded allies, to stand up for liberal democracy, and not to give up on the United States.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

When a powerful partner turns unreliable, the answer is firmer terms, not a slammed door.

The title casts the United States under Trump as an unreliable boyfriend and Canada as the partner deciding what to do about it. Freeland's conclusion, as reviewers report it, is that Canada should not give up on the United States yet. She argues for setting boundaries and for what she calls tough love toward American democracy.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Work with a hard counterpart where your interests overlap, and hold firm where they don't.

Freeland has described Canada's approach to the first Trump administration in three moves. The first two are to collaborate where both sides want the same thing, and not to back down when pressed. In her telling, giving in does not end the pressure; it invites the next demand.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A leader at the top is one person in a large country, so talk to everyone around them.

The third move Freeland has described is what she calls the donut strategy. Instead of dealing only with the president, Canada reached governors, mayors, businesses and unions who had their own reasons to want the relationship to work. She treats the other side's irritation as a sign the approach is landing.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Lean less on one partner by trading more with friends who share your values.

Freeland's proposals for a second version of globalization include friendshoring: building supply chains and trade ties with like-minded democracies. The idea is to cut the risk of depending on any single partner, however close, while staying open to trade.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Capital has gone global while democracy stays national, so democracies have to act together.

This thread runs back to her 2012 book Plutocrats, about the very rich. Freeland argues that markets work only when democratic governments set the rules and tax fairly, and that countries acting alone get pulled into a race to the bottom on tax and regulation.

6

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Know what would make you leave before loyalty decides for you.

Freeland writes that she should have left Trudeau's cabinet sooner, perhaps by a year or two, and describes being humiliated before she resigned in December 2024. Whatever readers make of her motives, and some critics doubt her account, the lesson for a reader is to set a leave condition while you can still think clearly.

7

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Hope only counts as a strategy when you act on it.

Reporting on the book picks out Freeland's claim that hope is a strategy, set beside her call to defend liberal democracy. Read alongside her playbook, hope means keeping a door open on purpose while you do the practical work around it.

8

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Study powerful people up close, and keep your own view of the world.

Before politics, Freeland reported from Moscow in the 1990s as Russia's oligarchs rose, and later wrote about the global super-rich. The book draws on those years. Reviewers note she says she likes plutocrats while seeing a real gap between their outlook and hers.

9

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A memoir is one participant's account, so read it as one side of the story.

The book is partly an argument and partly Freeland's own record of events, including sharp portraits of Trudeau and the Trump team. Some critics found it selective about her own decisions. That does not cancel its insight into how negotiations and cabinets work; it means checking it against other accounts.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] List three shared interests
- [ ] Write your red lines down
- [ ] Draw your donut
- [ ] Find one second option
- [ ] Set your leave condition

KEEP UP DAILY

- [ ] Keep a promises log
- [ ] Wait a day before answering pressure
- [ ] Check in with one ally a week

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

List three shared interests

Pick the most powerful, least predictable counterpart in your work: a boss, a big client, a landlord.

Write down three things you both want. Start your next conversation with one of them.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Write your red lines down

Before your next negotiation, write two or three things you will not give up, and one calm sentence you will say when they come under pressure.

Keep it where you can see it during the meeting.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Draw your donut

Put the decision-maker in the middle of a page.

Around them, list the people who have their own reasons to want your arrangement to work: colleagues, their team, their customers, their suppliers.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Find one second option

If one client, employer or supplier carries most of your weight, start one alternative this month.

Send one pitch, one application or one supplier enquiry this week.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Set your leave condition

Write one sentence that starts: I will leave this role or arrangement if...

Date it and put a reminder to reread it in three months.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Keep a promises log

After each dealing with an unreliable counterpart, note what was promised and, later, what happened.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Wait a day before answering pressure

When a new demand or threat lands, reply that you will come back tomorrow.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Check in with one ally a week

Send a short update or make a call to one person in your donut.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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December 2026

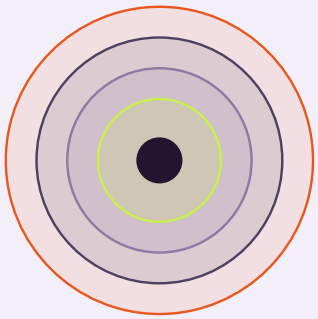
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



When a powerful partner turns unreliable, set firm terms, widen your circle of friends, and keep the door open.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER CHRYSTIA FREELAND

Read it online, and vote on the takeaways: hourlife.com/books/unreliable-boyfriend

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