

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF  
*LIFE'S TOO SHORT*

# ABBY JIMENEZ

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#1 *New York Times* bestselling author

## *Part of Your World*



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FOREVER

*New York Boston*

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Praise for Abby Jimenez



*To Jeanette, Terri, Dawn, and Lindsay.  
I can't imagine being able to do half of what  
I do without your tireless support.  
This one's for you.*

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FOREVER

## Chapter 1

### Alexis

**M**oths fluttered in my headlights over the long grass of the ditch. I was still clutching the wheel, my heart pounding.

I'd swerved to miss a raccoon in the fog and careened into a shallow embankment on the side of the road. I was okay. Shaken, but okay.

I tried putting the car in reverse, and my tires spun uselessly. Probably mud. *Ugh*. I should have bought the SUV instead of the sedan.

I turned off the engine, put on the hazards, and called roadside assistance. They told me it'd be an hour wait.

Perfect. Just *perfect*.

I was still a two-hour drive from home, stuck on some lonely stretch between the funeral home I'd just left in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and my house in Minneapolis. I was starving, I had to use the bathroom, and I was in shapewear. Basically the grand finale to the worst week ever.

I called my best friend, Bri. She answered on the first ring. "So? How was hell week?"

"Well, I can tell you how it ended," I said, reclining my seat. "I just drove my car into a ditch."

"Ouch. Are you okay?"

"I am."

"Did you call a tow truck?"

"I did. An hour wait. And I'm in Spanx."

She sucked air through her teeth. “Satan’s underwear? You didn’t change before you left? You must have run out of there like you were being chased. Where are you?” she asked.

I peered out the windshield. “I have no idea. Literally the middle of nowhere. I don’t even see streetlamps.”

“Did you mess up your car?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I haven’t had a chance to get out to check. I don’t think so.” I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. “You know what? Hold on. I’m taking these off.”

I got unbuckled and reclined the seat as far as it would go. I took off my heels and tossed them on the passenger side, then reached around to unzip myself. I wiggled out of the attached bra straps and leaned all the way back and pulled my black cocktail dress up around my hips, hooking my thumbs into the top of my Spanx.

There was nobody out here. I hadn’t seen another car on this road in a half hour. But just as I started to wrestle the nylons down, headlights poured through my back windshield—because of course they did.

“Shoot,” I breathed, moving faster.

It was like trying to get out of a full-body compression sock while being timed for speed. I heard a car door slam and I got frantic, fighting my Spandex restraints down to my knees under the steering wheel and then kicking out of them just as someone came up to the window.

A large shaggy dog popped out of nowhere and jumped up on my door to look in at me. Then a bearded white guy in a denim jacket with a wool collar came up behind him. “Hunter, down.” He pulled the dog off my car and tapped on the glass with a knuckle. “Hey, you okay in there?”

My zipper was still half undone, and my dress was hiked almost to my underwear. “I’m fine,” I said, tugging my dress over my thighs, pivoting to

put my bare back to the passenger side. “Raccoon.”

He put a hand to his ear. “I’m sorry, I can’t really hear you.”

I cracked the window an inch. “I swerved for a raccoon. I’m fine,” I said again, louder.

He looked amused. “Yeah, we’ve got a lot of those around here. Want me to tow you out?”

“I called a tow truck. Thank you though.”

“If you called a tow truck, you’re waiting on Carl,” he said. “You might be waiting awhile.” He nodded down the road. “He’s six beers deep at the VFW.”

I closed my eyes and let out a tired breath. When I opened them, the man was smiling. “Give me a sec, I’ll tow you out.”

He didn’t wait for me to reply, just walked back behind my car.

I hurriedly zipped myself up. Then I picked up my phone again. “Some guy is towing me out,” I whispered to Bri.

I angled my rearview to try to see his plates, but his headlights were in my eyes. I heard metallic clanking from outside. The dog jumped back up to look at me through the window. His nubby tail began wagging, and he barked.

“Is that a dog?” Bri asked.

“Yeah. He belongs to the guy,” I said, shaking my head at the dog. He was licking the glass.

“Why are you so out of breath?”

“I was in the middle of trying to get my Spanx off when he showed up,” I said, grabbing them from the floor and balling them into my purse. “I was half naked when he walked up to the window.”

She laughed so hard I had to pull the phone away from my ear.

“It’s not funny,” I whispered.

“Maybe not to *you*,” she said, still laughing. “So what’s that guy look like? Some creepy old dude?”

“No. He’s kind of cute, actually,” I said, trying to see the activity behind me in the side mirror.

“Ahhhhh. And what do *you* look like?”

I glanced down at myself. “Hair and makeup done, black funeral dress —”

“The Dolce one?”

“Yeah.”

“So lookin’ hot. I’m gonna stay on the phone with you in case you get murdered.”

“Ha. Thanks.” I leaned back in my seat.

“So did the funeral suck?” Bri asked.

I let out a long breath. “It sucked so bad. Everyone kept asking where Neil was.”

“What’d you tell them?”

“Nothing. That we broke up and I didn’t want to talk about it. I wasn’t getting into it. And of course Derek was a no-show.”

“What a time to be in Cambodia. He’s missing *alllll* the fun,” Bri said.

My twin brother had a penchant for avoiding the family drama. I couldn’t say he knew Great-Aunt Lil was going to die suddenly in her nursing home, and that I was going to be thrust alone into the lion’s den at the three-day family reunion/funeral that followed—but it was very on brand for him nonetheless.

I rolled the window down another few inches so I could pet the dog. He had bushy old-man eyebrows and wide golden eyes that made him look startled to see me.

“Mom did a really nice job with the eulogy,” I said, giving the dog’s ear a scratch.

“Doesn’t surprise me.”

“And Neil texted me the whole time.”

“Also doesn’t surprise me. That man has nothing but the audacity. Did you reply?”

“Uh, *no*,” I said.

“Good.”

More clanking from outside.

“All right, so listen,” Bri said. “I was thinking we could do a double date thing when you get back.”

I groaned.

“Hear me out. It’s not at all convoluted.”

This was going to be convoluted.

“Both of us pick the hottest guys we can find on Tinder. Probably someone posing with a fish, but that’s not important. We take them to the café outside of Nick’s office, the one where he gets his lunch every day at eleven-thirty? And then when Nick shows up, we act totally surprised to see him there. You pretend to trip and spill some red wine down his shirt by accident while I make out with my date.”

I choked on my laugh.

“As much as I’d like to help you destroy your soon-to-be ex-husband’s clothes,” I said, still tittering, “I’m not dating for the foreseeable future. I don’t need any men in my life right now. Or ever.”

She scoffed. “Yeah, well, we’re all strong-ass women until a smoke alarm starts chirping at three a.m. on a high ceiling and there’s no one to hit it with a broom but you.”

I snorted.

“Seriously though,” she said, “we’ve never been single together before. We should embrace this. Hot girl summer. It could be so fun.”

“I think I’m more in the mood for *Golden Girls* summer...”

She seemed to mull this over. “This could work too.”

I heard more clanking from outside and felt the car move, like something was being attached to the bumper.

“Wanna get drinks tomorrow?” Bri asked.

“What time? I have Pilates.”

“After.”

“Okay, sure.”

I noticed movement in the side mirror. The man had started to walk back over. I stopped petting the dog and rolled my window back up to almost closed.

“Hey,” I whispered to Bri. “The guy’s coming. Hold on.”

The man pulled his dog off my car again and leaned down to talk to me through the glass. “Can you put the car in neutral?” he asked through the one-inch crack.

I nodded.

“When I pull you out, put it in park and turn off the engine until I get the chains off.”

I nodded again and watched him walk to his truck. A door slammed, and his engine started. Then my car lurched, and I slowly rolled out of the embankment and back to the road. He came around the car with a flashlight and looked at the fender.

A dragonfly landed on my hood. It sat there completely motionless while the man crouched to examine my tires. Then he clicked off the light and went back behind the car. More clanking chain noises and a minute later he



returned to the window. “I looked the car over. I don’t see any damage. You should be fine to drive.”

“Thank you,” I said, sliding two twenty-dollar bills through the crack.

He smiled. “This is a freebie. Drive safe.”

He went back to his truck and honked, putting up a friendly hand as he drove past me into the fog.

## Chapter 2

### Daniel

A hundred bucks if you get her to leave with you,” Doug said, nodding at the redhead sitting at the bar.

It was the woman I’d pulled from the ditch half an hour ago. Fifteen minutes later, she’d walked into the VFW.

It was nine o’clock on a Tuesday night in April, which meant the whole town was crammed into the bar. The snow had melted, and it was officially the off-season. Everything except for Jane’s Diner and this place was shut down until the river heated up, and Jane’s had closed at eight o’clock. The tourists were gone, so this poor unsuspecting woman was not only sticking out like a sore thumb, but she was also one of the only women in this tiny town who wasn’t either related to us or had grown up with us. She was going to be relentlessly pursued.

I scoffed at my best friend, chalking the end of my cue stick. “Since when do *you* have a hundred bucks?”

Brian laughed from his barstool. “Since when do you have five bucks? And if you do, you better give it to me. You still owe me from drinks the other night.”

“Good luck with *that*,” I muttered.

Doug flipped us off. “I have it. And I have your five bucks too, dick,” he said to Brian. “Besides, I’m not paying the whole bet. Losers each put in fifty, and whoever gets her to go home with you takes all.”

“Leave her alone,” I said, taking my shot. The balls bounced around the table, and the six ball went into the corner pocket. “That woman is not going home with anyone in this bar. Trust me.”

Women like her wanted nothing to do with guys like us.

The car I’d pulled from the ditch was a Mercedes. It was worth more than all three of us probably made in a year. Not to mention she was dressed like she was headed to a cocktail party on a yacht. Fancy dress, huge diamond studs in her ears, diamond tennis bracelet—she was clearly on her way through town and had no intention of stopping for a layover. In fact, I was surprised she’d stopped here at all instead of driving the forty-five more minutes to Rochester to eat. The VFW wasn’t exactly fine dining.

Doug was already fishing money out of his wallet.

“I’m not interested,” I said, putting the eight ball cleanly into the side pocket. “I don’t like betting on other human beings. She’s not an object.”

Doug shook his head at me. “At least *try* to have fun.”

“I’m having fun.”

“Oh yeah? When’s the last time you hooked up with someone?” Doug asked. “It’s been what? Four months since Megan?”

“I’m not looking to hook up. Thanks though.”

Seeing he wasn’t getting anywhere with me, Doug turned his attention to Brian. “What about you? Hundred bucks.”

Brian almost immediately glanced to Liz, working behind the bar.

Doug rolled his eyes. “She’s married. *Married*. You need to get over it. It’s getting depressing. Get on a dating app or something.” Doug tipped his glass of Sprite at Brian. “I met twins on Tinder last week. *Twins*.” He bounced his eyebrows.

I took my shot. “Oh yeah? You got to disappoint two women at once?”

Brian laughed.

Doug ignored me. “I’m serious, man. She’s not gonna leave her husband. Do your thing.”

Brian peered back at Liz. Then, almost on cue, the door to the VFW opened, and Jake sauntered in wearing his police uniform.

We all stopped to watch him walk to the bar. He made his way through, slapping backs and saying hello louder than necessary, just to make sure we all knew he’d graced us with his presence.

He went around the counter like he owned the place, strode over to Liz, and pulled her into a dramatic kiss. Hooting erupted in the bar, and Doug and I shared a glance. What an asshole.

I looked back at Brian, just in time to see the hurt move across his face.

Hell, maybe Doug was right. I wasn’t saying that betting on women was the answer, but Brian did need to get over this shit. Liz wasn’t leaving Jake—even though she should.

Mike walked by on his way to the bathroom, and Doug nodded at him. “Hey, Mike! Hundred bucks if you get her to leave with you.” He pointed to the woman at the bar.

Mike stopped and peered over at her in his glasses. He must have liked what he saw because he fished out his wallet. “Almost doesn’t seem fair. I get a hundred bucks *and* a beautiful woman.”

I laughed and checked my watch. “I have to go. I need to feed the kid,” I said, putting my stick away.

Doug groaned. “Every damn time.” He waved me off. “Fine. Get the hell outta here then.” Then he looked over my shoulder at the bar and nodded at the woman. “Hey, put in a good word for me on the way out, yeah?”

“So you want me to lie to her?” I asked, shrugging on my jacket.

Brian and Mike laughed.