

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ABBY JIMENEZ

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JUST FOR THE SUMMER



JUST FOR THE SUMMER

ABBY JIMENEZ



FOREVER

New York Boston

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This book is for my wonderful readers. I started writing just for me. I never thought it would go anywhere or that anyone would see it. Now I write for you. It's way better with company.

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Dear Reader,

While my books are all rom-coms, some themes in this story may be triggering for some readers. If you feel trigger warnings are spoilers and you don't need them, please skip the next paragraph and jump right into the book.

This book has scenes containing panic attacks, anxiety, PTSD, depression, depictions of undiagnosed mental health issues, a toxic mother, and past child neglect. Please visit my website or Goodreads page for a full list of content guidance.

PROLOGUE

r/Amltheasshole

1 week ago

Posted by just_in_267

AITA for naming my ugly dog after my ex best friend?

I [29m] have been friends with Chad [32m] since we were born. Our moms are best friends and we grew up together and were roommates for the last 10 years, up until the incident that set our current situation into motion.

A little backstory. I have this... streak if you will? Basically every woman I date more than a few times ends up finding her soulmate after we break up. It's a thing. It started three years ago and it's now happened five times. We break things off and the very next person they date ends up being The One.

My friends think this is hilarious. I always part ways with the women on good terms, and I'm happy they're happy. But my buddies tease me mercilessly about it. They call me the good luck charm.

Anyway, forward to five months ago. I dated Hope [28f] for a few weeks. Not a big deal. We decided we weren't feeling it, no chemistry, so we called it quits. And then lo and behold she hits it off with Chad. Of course in true Good Luck Charm fashion, this means Chad is her soulmate. Chad is all googly-eyed over her, they've met the parents, they're ring shopping—and they want to move in together. Immediately.

The only problem is that Chad has six more months on our lease but found a perfect new house for him and Hope, and he can't afford to pay rent on two places at the same time. So he had to make the difficult decision to screw me over or screw her over—and he picked me. Now I have to find a way to cover his rent until the lease is up.

I spent several weeks stressing. I really didn't want to find a new roommate, and the landlord wouldn't let me out of the lease completely, but he did say I could move to a less expensive apartment. The only available unit in the entire complex was a studio. A little small, but it's just temporary, and it's cheap. I jumped at the chance and agreed to it sight unseen. Then I found out WHY this studio was cheap and available—it directly faces one of those Toilet King plumber billboards. The one where he's dressed like Henry Tudor and holding a plunger over a giant poop-filled toilet bowl? It should be illegal for a billboard to be this close to a building. It's like the only person meant to see it is the poor soul who lives in this apartment—who is now me. Seriously. It's all you can see. No sky, no water—just the Toilet King. All day. All night. Lit up when the sun goes down, it shines through the blinds. I work from home. I am in hell.

Chad thinks this is the funniest thing that's ever happened and he trolls me constantly, despite this being mostly his fault. He keeps sending me pictures of every Toilet King billboard, bus bench, and airplane banner he sees, which if you live in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, you understand exactly how often this happens.

I'm annoyed, but I decided to try to find a reason to spend more time outside so I don't have to stare out my window. I've always wanted a dog, but Chad would never agree to it. So I went to a rescue and found the ugliest animal there. The one so hideous, nobody else wanted it. This dog's got an underbite and mange, and he's missing half an ear. He's a little Brussels Griffon, so he's got that deep frown—he looks like a judgmental gremlin. I adopted him and named him Chad since the dog is now my new best friend. If you're reading this, you're dead to me, human Chad. (Not really, I still love the guy.) But I tag him in the captions of every Chad the Dog Instagram post with "Look, a loyal Chad!"

Chad laughs it all off, but Hope is upset and says I should rename the dog. Chad's mom agrees and says I'm not allowed to come over until I change the name, which kind of sucks because she's my mom's best friend and I end up there a lot for family stuff. I'm still not doing it.

Am I petty? Yes. But am I the asshole?

CHAPTER 1

EMMA

Have you seen this?”

My best friend tilted her phone so I could see what she was talking about. There was a black Reddit “Am I the Asshole” thread taking up the screen.

We were in the hospital cafeteria on our lunch break.

“What is it?” I asked, squeezing ketchup on my fries.

“Just read it,” she said. “I’m sending you the link.”

She thumbed it in and it came through.

I picked up my drink and held the straw of my iced tea between my teeth while I read. The moment I hit the second paragraph my eyes went wide. “Oh my God...” I breathed.

“*Right?* And here I thought you were the only one with that good luck charm thing.”

“It’s a gift,” I said. “Not for *me*, but my exes are happy.” I sipped my drink and kept reading. When I finished, I set my phone down. “Not the asshole.”

“Totally agree,” she said. “Have you seen that billboard?”

“No.”

“I googled it. Look.”

She held her phone out again and I almost choked on my laugh. “That poor guy.”

“I would never do you dirty like that,” Maddy said.

“I hope not. I couldn’t live without you.”

She grinned and took a bite of her veggie wrap.

“It’s weird you guys both have the same thing going on,” she said, after she swallowed. “All your exes, just riding off into the sunset.”

“Ha. I wonder how many weddings he’s had to be in,” I said, pulling the pickles out of my chicken sandwich and putting them on her plate.

She nodded at my phone. “You should ask him.”

I gave her a look. “Just DM him?”

She shrugged. “Yeah, why not? Guys love it when girls slide into their DMs,” she said. “Seriously. Ask him. Lunch is boring. It’ll give us something to do.”

I sighed. “All right. *One* message.” I wiped my fingers on a napkin, picked up my phone, and swiped open my Reddit DMs.

His handle was just_in_267. I wondered if his name was Justin. My handle was Emma16_dilemma. I hadn’t changed it since tenth grade. I probably should.

I started typing.

I have the same problem you have. It's happened seven times in the last four years. We break up and the guy is married within six months. Do they ask you to be in their weddings too? I've been asked to be a bridesmaid three times 😊

I hit send. "There. I sent it, a message to a complete stranger." I set my phone down. "It sort of feels like something my mom would do."

Maddy scoffed. "If this were Amber, she'd spend all her rent money on a psychic who paints portraits of your soulmate and then sends you the same painting she sends everyone else. *That's* what Amber would do."

I didn't laugh. It was too true to be funny.

My cell pinged. "That Reddit guy just replied," I said.

Maddy stopped with her wrap halfway to her mouth. "What'd he say?"

I clicked on the message.

Justin: Excuse me if this isn't the case, but you're not a reporter trying to figure out my identity for another article about the Reddit thread, are you? You have to tell me. It's like when you're an undercover cop and someone asks you if you're a cop and you can't lie about it.

I laughed.

"What?" Maddy asked.

"He thinks I'm a reporter trying to figure out who he is."

"Is that a problem he has?"

"Apparently."

I started typing.

Me: I am not a reporter.

Justin: That's exactly what an undercover reporter would say.

I shook my head with a smile.

Me: I'm a nurse.

He sent me a narrow-eyed emoji.

I got an idea.

Me: Tell me how many fingers to hold up.

A few seconds passed.

Justin: Four

"Maddy, take a picture of me."

She gawked. "You're gonna send this dude a *picture*?"

"Yeah, why not?"

"Uh, because he could be a serial killer?"

"A serial killer with a sense of humor, a rescue dog, lifelong friends, and a relationship with his mom?" I handed her my phone. "It's no different than what he'd see if he'd matched with me on Tinder and anyway, we'll be in Hawaii in a few weeks. He's in Minnesota. Even if he could figure out who I am, he'd never track me down."

"What if he's some gross dude who doesn't floss and now he's got a picture for his spank bank?"

I rolled my eyes. "Oh *stop*."

I tilted my head so my braid fell to one side and held up four fingers. Maddy didn't look happy, but she took the picture with my phone, then handed it back to me.

I was in scrubs and my hospital badge was clipped to my pocket. I opened the edit feature, scribbled out the identifying information, and sent the pic.

Me: I'm at work. Do reporters wear scrubs? And how many times have you been catfished by reporters?

Justin: This week? Or like, in total?

I sent a laughing emoji.

Justin: Now that we've established you are who you say you are, I will answer your question. I've been asked only once to be in a wedding for someone who benefited from my little streak. But I was best man and it was Beetlejuice themed.

I laughed and read it out loud to Maddy.

"Pictures or it didn't happen," she said.

I typed "Pictures or it didn't happen. 😊"

I set my phone back down. "You're right. This is fun."

"I have good ideas," she said.

I was almost done eating my sandwich when my DMs pinged.

"He just replied," I said. "There's a picture."

Maddy jumped from her seat to stand over my shoulder.

When I clicked it, I started cracking up. The bride and groom were dressed as Beetlejuice and Lydia, in her red wedding dress from the movie. The maid of honor and best man were dressed like the Maitlands, only with the scary faces they put on in the beginning to frighten the new residents. He was wearing a long cone-shaped nose and buggy eyes. I sent a row of laughing emojis.

"You're right, he *does* have a sense of humor," Maddy said.

I tilted my head. "Too bad I can't see his face."

"Send me that."

"Why?"

"I'll reverse image search it."

"Oh, good thinking. Okay, hold on."

I sent it to her. She sat back down and started thumbing into her phone, and I went back to finish my food.

"Found him," Maddy said, after about forty-five seconds.

I gawked. "*That* fast???"

"The FBI should hire more women. We're natural investigators. It's on his Instagram. And it's definitely him, I see the billboard. I'll send you the link."

My phone chirped with the incoming text, but I paused. "Wait. Should we be looking at this? It feels like a violation of his privacy."

She gave me a look over the top of her phone. "When men stop assaulting women they meet on the internet, we'll stop creeping on them to make sure they pass the vibe check. And anyway, if he wanted privacy, his account would be *private*."

I bobbed my head. "Okay. Good point."

I clicked on the link, and we both pored over his wall at the same time from our respective phones. He had brown hair, brown eyes, he was clean-shaven. White, dimples. A nice smile, fit—and he was *cute*. Super cute.

“Are you seeing this?” Maddy said. “This guy *definitely* flosses.”

“Oh my God, the dog.”

She gasped. “Wow. He really *is* ugly. Like a tiny gargoyle.”

I tilted my head. “I don’t know. He’s so ugly he’s almost adorable.” The small brown dog was shaggy with floppy ears, a pushed-in snout, and a hard frown. His watery eyes bulged a little. In the picture, Justin was holding him and smiling like a kid who just got what he’d always wanted for Christmas. The caption read: *Well, Dog Brad’s got a tapeworm, but at least he didn’t stiff me on rent.*

“Brad?” I asked, looking up. “I thought his friend’s name was Chad.”

“He probably changed the names to protect their privacy. Classy. Did you see the comments?” she asked. “Go look.”

I clicked to expand them. Laughing emojis, laughing emojis. Someone named Faith said, “Really, Justin? SMH.” And then a guy named Brad commented, “The next time I come over I’m stealing the stick to your blinds.”

I was laughing over my phone.

“Check out the way the dog looks,” Maddy said.

“What about him?”

“The dog looks comfortable with him. I always look at the animals in pictures, it tells you a lot about the person. Like, I can totally tell when someone borrowed someone’s dog for their profile pic. The dog’s like, ‘Okay, don’t know you but I guess.’ Scroll down,” she said. “See? Look at the one of him on the sofa.”

There was a shot of Justin on a couch. On one side he had an arm wrapped around a little girl who was sleeping curled up against him with her head on his chest. The dog was sleeping on the other side with his chin on Justin’s thigh. The picture was adorable.

“That dog trusts him,” Maddy said. “And that’s a rescue dog, so that means something. They’re usually all skittish and freaked out.” She went quiet again looking at his wall. “Go down further,” Maddy said. “The billboard.”

I scrolled a few pictures down and there it was. The infamous sign. And Justin hadn’t been kidding, it was *bad*. I already knew what it looked like from Maddy’s Google search but seeing it from the apartment was a whole different thing. It consumed the entire window. “Oh wow. Yeah, Justin’s definitely not the asshole. That’s a *lot*.”

The picture had been taken from the kitchen, so he could get the entire view. Since it was a studio, it only had the one large sliding glass door, and the whole thing was filled with a grinning, bearded middle-aged man dressed like a king, holding a plunger over a clogged toilet.

“He’s got a bed frame,” Maddy said.

“So?”

“So that’s a green flag. The closer to the floor the bed is, the worse humans they are. Every guy who pretends to forget his wallet on a date a thousand percent sleeps on a futon or a mattress on the floor. I make them send me a picture of their bed before I show up. *And* I deduct points for sleeping bags as blankets, even if they *do* have a headboard.”

“Why?”

“Because sleeping bags have floor energy?”

“What if it’s a bunk bed?” I said.

“That is the *only* circumstance in which my theory doesn’t hold up, but that is also why I require bedroom photos before I meet them.”

“You kill me.”

I zoomed around the photo at the rest of the room. His bed was made with a beige duvet. A neat desk with an elaborate computer set up on it. Three large screens and a keypad and wireless mouse in the middle. There was a tiny dog bed next to the desk and a potted plant in the corner. Artwork on the walls. It was a nice apartment—minus the view. He was obviously clean and had good enough taste.

I scrolled down to look at the rest of his photos. None with girls. Several with what appeared to be his family—a teenage boy who looked like a fifteen-year-old version of Justin, same dimples. A girl who was probably eleven or twelve, and then the little sleeping girl from the couch photo, who couldn’t be more than five. He’d tagged who I assumed was his mom in the pictures and I clicked on her profile, but it was private.

“I found him on LinkedIn,” Maddy said. “His full name is Justin Dahl. He’s a software engineer.” She went quiet again for a few moments. “His dad died a few years ago. I just found an obituary that mentions him. Yup. That’s him. Same kids from his Instagram. He’s got three siblings. Alex, Chelsea, and Sarah.”

“How did his dad die?” I asked.

“It just says ‘unexpectedly.’ He was only forty-five. Sucks. Hold on, I’m checking the sex-offender registry.” She typed into her phone for a minute. “He’s clear.” She set her phone down and picked up her wrap. “I don’t see any red flags here, other than he’s got a J name. J-named men are the *worst*. I’m following him on Instagram from my throwaway account to keep up surveillance. You may proceed.”

I looked at her, amused. “Proceed to do *what*?”

“I don’t know. Keep talking to him. See if he’s normal.”

“He seems normal,” I said, looking back at the phone. “We’re the ones who aren’t normal,” I muttered.

He’d sent the Beetlejuice photo nine minutes ago and we’d already deconstructed his entire life. I’d seen his face, his family, his apartment, his dad’s obituary, and I knew where he worked.

Then I looked at the time. “Oh, crap, we gotta go.”

Maddy checked her watch. “Shit.” She took one last bite and got to her feet. We cleared our table and ran to the ICU. Justin didn’t reply before I went back to my shift.

That night after work Maddy made dinner. Grilled portobello mushrooms and rice pilaf. I did the dishes and cleaned the kitchen, then took a shower and blew out my hair.

I was in my pajamas and in bed when I finally saw the DM from Justin. It was from right after I’d gone back to work from my lunch break.

He sent me a picture of himself. It wasn’t one on Instagram. He was in his living room and the billboard was behind him over his shoulder. He was holding the dog.

Justin: So you know that I’m not actually a Beetlejuice character. Please don’t be an undercover reporter trying to blow the lid off the Good Luck Charm story.

I laughed and started typing.

Me: So this is Chad?

Justin: Brad. I changed the names on Reddit. Hope is actually named Faith.

Me: Ah. And how does Brad feel about being internet famous for being an asshole?

Justin: He thinks it’s funny. Because he *is* an asshole.

I made an amused noise.

Me: You weren’t kidding about that billboard.

Justin: Believe me when I tell you it is so much worse in person.

Me: For the record I don't think your dog's that ugly.

Justin: I'm disappointed to hear that. Takes some of the thunder out of the name. Do you have any pets?

Me: No. I'm a travel nurse. It would be too hard. But I buy a plant at every new city.

Justin: You take it with you?

Me: No, I can't. I leave it.

Justin: *gasp* murderer.

I shook my head with a smile.

Me: I leave it with someone. No plants are injured in the pursuit of my career.

Justin: Why a plant? Do u like to garden?

I sat up and crossed my legs under me.

Me: Plants brighten a room. And yes, I like to garden. I move too much for it though.

Justin: So the same thing really happens to you? The good luck charm thing?

Me: It does. So why are reporters trying to figure out your secret identity?

He typed for a minute, and I dabbed on some lip balm while I waited.

Justin: Because everyone wants to know who the guy who can guarantee you a happy ever after is. I don't think anyone even cared about the rest of the story. The good luck charm part was what made it viral.

Me: I could see that.

Justin: My DMs are off the hook. I had to turn off notifications, it was driving me bonkers. I only answered you because you said the same thing happens to you and I figured you weren't trying to date me just to break up with me.

I laughed. Again.

I looked at the time. It was late.

Me: I have to go to bed. I have another twelve-hour shift tomorrow.

Justin: 👍 Okay. Nice chatting with you.

I smiled.

Yeah, you too.

CHAPTER 2

JUSTIN

I spotted Brad and Benny at the back of the restaurant and made my way over.

“Finally,” Brad said as I slid into the maroon booth. “You know some of us have limited lunch breaks, dick.”

“Sorry, I had to give Brad his dewormer. I brought some for you too. Faith said you’ve been dragging your ass on the carpet?”

Benny snorted and Brad tried to keep his face serious, but he couldn’t.

My best friend was in a Hawaiian shirt and pink cargo shorts. He was a general manager at Trader Joe’s. I missed not having to go to the grocery store now that he had moved out. Actually, I missed a lot of things now that Brad had moved out. Like having another human to talk to, even if it *was* this one.

I plucked a mozzarella stick off the appetizer platter they’d ordered and dipped it in marinara. “What’s good here?”

“The wings,” Brad said.

“How did I know you were going to say that?”

Brad got wings at every restaurant we went to, without fail. He’d get wings at a sushi place if they had them.

Benny nodded at the menu. “The burgers are good. They make their own buns.”

“Oh cool,” I said, taking off my jacket. “How’s Jane?”

“Good. She says hi.”

Brad put an arm over the back of the booth. “Yeah, Faith says hi too. And to rename your fucking dog.”

“Nope.” I made a popping noise on the *P* while I grabbed the menu. “It’s viral. I can’t back down now, where would my principles be?”

“That Reddit thing’s still going?” Benny asked.

“Yeah, pretty much,” I said, talking while I looked at the menu. “I think it hit TikTok the other day, so it started up again. It’s been nonstop all week.”

“What are people saying?” Benny asked.

I laughed a little. “Mostly that *I’m* not the asshole.” I looked directly at Brad, and he smirked.

“A few people told me I should have sued you for breach of contract.” I laughed at this. Never. “A bunch of comments said we’re both assholes.”

“This is true,” Brad said, looking at his phone. “We are assholes. But only to each other. It’s the foundation of our friendship.”

“I had a bunch of girls ask if I’d date them and break up with them so they can find their

soulmate,” I said, amused, perusing the burger options.

“Are you gonna do it?” Brad asked. “Offer your services?”

I scoffed. “No.”

“Why not?” he asked.

“They only want to date me to break up with me. I have like two hundred messages right now and they’re all the same.”

“What if there’s someone cool in there?” Benny chimed in.

I gave him a look. “Someone cool who wants to break up with me? Before we’ve even met? I’m a novelty. A fun story to tell their friends. They got to date the good luck charm guy from Reddit. No thank you. Besides, my streak’s not even a real thing.”

“As someone on the benefiting end of it, I’m gonna tell you, it’s real,” Brad said.

“It’s a series of coincidences,” I said. “There is nothing magical about any of it.”

Brad shook his head. “Look, you can believe whatever the heck you want. But when I met Faith, and I mean the *second* I laid eyes on her, it was like I got hit by a truck. It was the same way for her. You’re ferrying women to their happily ever afters. You could charge for this shit.”

“Oh, now you tell me,” I said, slapping the menu shut. “I could have used the extra twelve hundred bucks last month.”

He flipped me off.

I grabbed another mozzarella stick. “You know, I actually did sort of meet somebody from it.”

Benny looked interested. “You did? Who?”

“Just some girl. A nurse. She messaged me a few days ago. Said she’s got the same thing I do.”

“The good luck charm thing?” Benny asked.

I nodded. “Yeah.”

She was *beautiful*. In her picture she was wearing light blue scrubs and her long brown hair was in a braid. She had hazel eyes, a broad grin. She didn’t look like a nurse. She looked like a movie star playing a nurse. She seemed pretty cool too.

“So you gonna hook up with her or what?” Brad said.

“I don’t think she lives here. She’s a travel nurse.”

“Damn. That sucks. Where’s she at?” Brad said.

“I don’t know. I didn’t ask.”

“You should ask,” Benny said. “What if she’s in Vegas or something? We could all go. It’d be fun.”

Brad nodded at me. “You know, if she’s got the same thing you do, if you guys date each other, you’ll both find your soulmates when you break up.”

I laughed a little, dipping my mozzarella stick in ranch.

“No, I’m serious,” he said. “Think about it. You guys would cancel each other out.”

“I don’t know about that. She was pretty nice though.”

“Did you text her today?” Brad asked.

“No. Why?”

“I don’t know. Just getting tired of your ass being single all the time. You’re messing up the ratio.”

“Bold of you to assume I care about the ratio,” I said, taking a bite.

Only lately I sort of *did* care.