

ABBY
JIMENEZ

USA Today Bestselling Author of
The Happy Ever After Playlist



*Life's
too
Short*



“JIMENEZ TACKLES DEEP EMOTIONS
WITHOUT EVER LOSING SIGHT OF FUN.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

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New York Boston

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[PRAISE FOR ABBY JIMENEZ](#)

[Also by Abby Jimenez](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[CHAPTER 1: HEARD CRYING FROM NEXT DOOR, WHAT I FOUND WAS SHOCKING!](#)

[CHAPTER 2: HOT GUY TAMES MY BABY!](#)

[CHAPTER 3: CHEATER GETS BUSTED!](#)

[CHAPTER 4: THIS STARTLING VIDEO WILL HAVE YOU COVERING YOUR EYES!](#)

[CHAPTER 5: MAN RESCUES DOG BUT WAIT UNTIL YOU SEE WHAT IT DID TO HIS APARTMENT!](#)

[CHAPTER 6: IF YOU HAVE THIS SYMPTOM, YOU MIGHT BE DYING!](#)

[CHAPTER 7: THINGS YOU CAN DO TO MAKE YOURSELF HAPPY \(YOU WON'T BELIEVE #4!\)](#)

[CHAPTER 8: THE POLICE SHOWED UP AND WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WILL BLOW YOUR MIND!](#)

[CHAPTER 9: MAN TRAPPED IN GRUESOME AVALANCHE! YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT BURIED HIM!](#)

[CHAPTER 10: HOW TO FIND WHAT YOU'RE MISSING USING THIS ONE WEIRD TRICK!](#)

[CHAPTER 11: TAKE THIS QUIZ TO SEE WHICH OFFICE CHARACTER YOU ARE!](#)

[CHAPTER 12: THIS MAN CUT HIS WORK HOURS IN HALF AND THE RESULTS ARE STAGGERING!](#)

[CHAPTER 13: HE LAUGHED AT MY BODY WHEN WE WENT TO SECOND BASE!](#)

[CHAPTER 14: THESE PEOPLE ARE EATING DINNER IN A DUMP](#)

[AND YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE WHY!](#)

[CHAPTER 15: THE DOCTOR COMES OUT AND EVERYONE IS STUNNED!](#)

[CHAPTER 16: I SHOWED UP TO MY BIRTHDAY PARTY AND YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHO WAS THERE!](#)

[CHAPTER 17: WILL YOUR CRUSH EVER NOTICE YOU? TAKE THIS QUIZ!](#)

[CHAPTER 18: HOW TO LOSE A GUY BY MAKING THIS ONE BIG MISTAKE!](#)

[CHAPTER 19: 10 THINGS GUARANTEED TO MAKE YOU SAY WTF](#)

[CHAPTER 20: THE LUCRATIVE INVESTMENT THAT THE EXPERTS DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT!](#)

[CHAPTER 21: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ESCAPING THE FRIEND ZONE](#)

[CHAPTER 22: LEARN THE NUMBER ONE SECRET TRICK FOR PERFECT ABS!](#)

[CHAPTER 23: SEE WHICH CELEBRITY IS YOUR SOUL MATE!](#)

[CHAPTER 24: 7 SMALL TOWNS YOU MUST VISIT IN YOUR LIFETIME \(YOU'LL LOVE #1\)](#)

[CHAPTER 25: 10 SIGNS THAT YOUR PERFECT RELATIONSHIP IS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE](#)

[CHAPTER 26: YOUR WORST NIGHTMARES RANKED!](#)

[CHAPTER 27: THEY THOUGHT THEY HAD EVERYTHING, THEN DISASTER STRUCK!](#)

[CHAPTER 28: TAKE THIS QUIZ TO SEE IF HE'S GHOSTING YOU!](#)

[CHAPTER 29: THIS GOODBYE WILL LEAVE YOU IN TEARS](#)

[CHAPTER 30: THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO SURVIVING A BREAKUP \(THAT'S YOUR FAULT\)](#)

[CHAPTER 31: ARE YOU BROKENHEARTED? TAKE THIS TEST TO SEE!](#)

[EPILOGUE: THESE CELEBRITIES HAVE FALLEN OFF THE MAP, SEE WHERE THEY ARE NOW!](#)

[READING GROUP GUIDE](#)

[Author's Note](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[Adrian's Chicken and Wild Rice Soup](#)

[Vanessa's Horseradish Mashed Potatoes](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Discover More](#)

[Don't miss Abby's next novel, Part of Your World, coming in Spring 2022!](#)

[About the Author](#)

PRAISE FOR ABBY JIMENEZ

LIFE'S TOO SHORT

“This is the kind of novel that leaves you a little better than when it found you. Jimenez is a true talent.”

—Emily Henry, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Beach Read*

“Abby Jimenez’s knack for tackling heavy subjects with humor and care shines through in this exquisitely written story about love, difficult family relationships, and living life to its fullest.”

—Farrah Rochon, *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Boyfriend Project*

“With refreshingly real characters and compulsively readable prose, Abby Jimenez captures the thrill of falling in love without shying away from deeper themes. Clear your schedule because you won’t be able to put this delicious book down!”

—Katherine St. John, author of *The Siren*

“Jimenez masterfully blends heavy issues and humor.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

THE HAPPY EVER AFTER PLAYLIST

“Sparkling wit and vulnerable characters bring this story to life. Jimenez tackles deep emotions without ever losing sight of fun.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“A perfect blend of smart, heart-wrenching, and fun.”

—*Kirkus*

“*The Happy Ever After Playlist* tackles love after loss with fierce humor and fiercer heart.”

—Casey McQuiston, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Red, White & Royal Blue*

“*The Happy Ever After Playlist* shines.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“A powerfully life-affirming love story...and a dangerously addictive sense of humor.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

“Sweet and achingly romantic—a truly wonderful love story.”

—Beth O’Leary, author of *The Flatshare*

“Delightfully adorable.”

—*Library Journal*

“Emotional and exceptionally swoon-worthy. You won’t be able to stop grinning and gushing as you read this masterpiece.”

—*SheReads.com*

“Sweet and funny, yet with vulnerable depths, *The Happy Ever After Playlist* is a delightful romance.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

THE FRIEND ZONE

“*The Friend Zone* is that rare beach read with tons of heart that will make you laugh and cry in equal parts.”

—PopSugar

“A brilliantly written romantic comedy.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

“Jimenez manages to fulfill all expectations for a romantic comedy while refusing to sacrifice nuance. Biting wit and laugh-out-loud moments take priority, but the novel remains subtle in its sentimentality and sneaks up on the reader with unanticipated depth....Deeply relatable.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

“An excellent debut that combines wit, humor, and emotional intensity.”

—*Kirkus*

“Zingy dialog, laugh-out-loud humor, and plenty of sass temper the heartbreak of infertility in this modern, well-grounded debut that is sure to satisfy.”

—*Library Journal*

“A deliciously hot, sweet debut full of banter I couldn’t get enough of. This book is an absolute treat.”

—L. J. Shen, *USA Today* bestselling author

“A zippy, instantly recognizable voice and fresh, funny characters.”

—*Entertainment Weekly*

“This novel doesn’t shy away from anything—it’s fiercely loving all the way to the HEA.”

—NPR

Also by Abby Jimenez

The Happy Ever After Playlist
The Friend Zone

*To my grandma, who was
the picture of a life well lived.
I wish you were still here
to hold this book in your hands.*

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FOREVER

clickbait (noun)

click·bait | \ 'klik-·bāt \

Definition of *clickbait*: something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest

—Dictionary by Merriam-Webster

CHAPTER 1

HEARD CRYING FROM NEXT DOOR, WHAT I FOUND WAS SHOCKING!

ADRIAN

Wailing.

Banshee, demon-baby wailing from the apartment next to mine for the millionth hour straight. I lay in bed, looking at the ceiling in the dark.

Rachel groaned from beside me. “You have to do something. Go over there.”

I scoffed. “I’m not going over there. I don’t know her.”

I think I’d seen my neighbor in the lobby getting her mail once, but she was on the phone and she didn’t make eye contact with me, so I didn’t say hi. Now I wished I’d at least gotten to know her well enough to be able to text her and ask her to please move to a room that didn’t share a wall with my bedroom.

Rachel let out a frustrated breath, and I rolled over and hugged her back to my chest.

She tensed up. She’d been tensing up since she got here three days ago, actually.

“What’s wrong?”

She spoke over her shoulder at me. “Nothing. I’m just tired. I’m two

seconds from getting a hotel room so I can sleep. Without *you*,” she teased.

I chuckled tiredly. She knew how to poke me, that was for damn sure.

I only got one weekend a month with my girlfriend. Losing the last night with her to a hotel before she went back to Seattle was a price I was not willing to pay for my neighbor *or* her baby.

Fuck.

I begrudgingly climbed out of bed, put on a T-shirt and slippers, and let myself out into the hallway of my apartment building.

No idea if she'd answer the door. It was 4:00 in the morning, and I was a stranger. Rachel probably would have called the police if she'd seen a man she didn't know knocking on her apartment in the middle of the night.

“Who is it?” a woman's voice called over the wailing.

“Your neighbor.”

The chain raked from the other side and the door opened.

Yup, the woman from the mailbox. She looked like hell. Baggy faded black T-shirt with a hole at a seam on the shoulder and some drawstring sweatpants with stains on them. Dark circles under her eyes, wild frizzy hair.

“What?” she said, looking at me over the tiny, loud bundle she had pressed to her chest.

I'd never seen a baby that small. I had bricks of cheese in my fridge bigger than this kid. It didn't even look real.

It sounded real though.

She eyeballed me impatiently. “Yeah?”

“I have a deposition in four hours. Is there any way you can—”

“Any way I can *what*?” She glared at me.

“Any way you could maybe move to another side of the apartment? So I might be able to sleep?”

“There *is* no other side of this apartment. It's a studio.”

Right. I knew that. “Okay...Well, can you—”

“Can I what? Make it stop?” She cocked her head. “Maybe put her in a closet? Because I'd be lying if I said I hadn't considered it.”

“I—”

“This isn't a trumpet I'm playing in here. It's not a TV I have turned up too loud. It's a tiny human being. It can't be reasoned with, and it's not responding to negotiation attempts so I don't know what to tell you.” She bounced the shrieking infant, and it cried on. “She's fed, and clean, and dry.

She doesn't have a fever. She's too young for teething. I've given her Tylenol and gas drops for colic. I've bounced her and rocked her and I'm coming to the conclusion that she's simply playing out some cosmic karma-based retribution for crimes I committed in a past life because I *cannot* for the life of me understand what I'm doing wrong." Her chin started to quiver. "So no, I can't make it stop. I can't help *you*, or *me* or *her*, and I am truly sorry if my own personal hell is inconvenient for you. Get earplugs."

She slammed the door in my face.

I stood there, blinking at her peephole.

Great. Now *I* was the asshole.

I dragged a hand down my beard and let out a long, tired breath and knocked again. I knew she was peeking through the peephole because the wailing was pressed right to the door. She opened it. "What?" She had tears running down her face.

I made a give-it-here motion with my hand. "Give me the baby."

She stared at me.

"Go take a shower. I'll hold her."

She blinked at me. "Are you kidding me?"

"No, I'm not. You obviously need a break. Maybe it will help."

Continuing to do the same thing was going to yield the same results. What she was doing wasn't working, and it was clear that this situation wasn't going to resolve itself without outside intervention.

She looked at me like I'd gone mad. "I'm not giving you my baby."

"Why? Are you afraid I might piss her off?" As if she intended to illustrate my point, the wails went up an octave. "I'm going to hold her until you're done. If neither of us are sleeping, it makes no sense for both of us to suffer. And you have vomit in your hair."

She looked down on the hair gathered over her shoulder and saw the white goop. She rolled her eyes like it didn't surprise her and came back up to me. "Look, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but this isn't your problem."

I rubbed my forehead tiredly. "Well, I beg to differ. As long as we're sharing a wall, we're in this together. Sometimes a change of circumstances can change behavior. Someone new to hold her while you go and lower your anxiety might make the difference."

She bounced the baby uselessly and it kept crying. I could see the frustration around the woman's eyes. She looked exhausted. "I don't know

you,” she said.

“My name is Adrian Copeland. I live in apartment 307, next door to you, and I own this building. I’m thirty-two years old, no criminal history, I’m a partner at Beaker and Copeland in St. Paul. I’m harmless and I’m standing here in the hallway at”—I looked at my watch—“4:07 in the morning, trying to help you. Let me in and let me hold her.”

I watched the deliberation on her face. She was going to crack. I could read people. She was that deadlocked juror who was going to fold—and she did.

She pulled open the door and let me in. I stepped inside.

Fuck, her apartment was a disaster.

It looked like the place used to be nice. It had that Pottery Barn thing going on. But the studio was small and completely cluttered with baby paraphernalia. A car seat, a crib by the king-size bed at the back of the apartment, a swing. Bottles were piled on the kitchen countertops and the place smelled faintly like shit. Actual shit. Dirty-diaper shit.

She eyed me. “Just so you know, I have my little stabby thingy so don’t try anything stupid.”

I arched an eyebrow. “Your stabby thingy?”

She jutted her chin up. “Yeah. You know, the keychain thingy? I’ve got cameras too. Tons of them. And a gun,” she added. “I also have a gun.”

I crossed my arms. “Okay. And do you know how to use this gun you have?”

“No,” she said matter-of-factly. “Which makes me more dangerous.”

I snorted.

She stood there, still holding the baby like she’d decided to let me in but hadn’t yet committed to actually letting me help her. I put my hands out, but she shook her head. “You need to wash your hands first.”

Right. I’d heard that before. Babies had weaker immune systems. I went to her kitchen and washed my hands over the stack of dirty dishes. “You weren’t pregnant,” I said, over my shoulder, raising my voice so she could hear me above the screaming. “Where’d you get her?”

“Target,” she deadpanned. “She was on sale and you know how you can never leave with just one thing,” she mumbled.

The corners of my lips quirked.

The paper towel roll was empty and based on the state of the rest of the

place, I didn't trust the towel hanging off the stove. There was a rogue Chipotle napkin by an empty fruit bowl, so I dried my hands with that. It disintegrated into spitballs, and I dropped them into the overflowing trash can.

"I'm fostering her," she said over the crying, answering my question. She eyeballed me as I cleared the space between us and put my hands out again to take the baby. She turned her body sideways away from me. "Have you ever held a baby before?"

"No. But I can't imagine there's much to it."

"You have to support her neck. Like this." She showed me her hand on the back of the little kiwi-looking head.

"Okay. Got it."

"And you need to bounce her. She likes that."

"As evidenced by the earth-shattering wailing," I said dryly.

She narrowed her brown eyes at me.

"I'm kidding. I'm very capable of this, I promise you."

She still didn't move. I waited patiently.

She finally nodded. "Okay." She got closer to hand the baby over. Close enough that I could smell her hair as she leaned in to put the baby in my arms. Vanilla—and a touch of spoiled milk.

I cradled the tiny angry bundle. She was red faced and furious. She couldn't be more than ten, eleven pounds, tops.

"Are you sure about this?" she asked, eyeing me.

"Go. I got this. And take your time."

She paused for another moment. "I'll be right on the other side of that door if you need anything."

"Okay."

"That's Grace. My name is Vanessa."

"Nice to meet you, Vanessa. Now go. Take. A *shower*."

She stood another few beats, then finally turned and rummaged clothes from the dresser and headed to the bathroom. She closed the door slowly, looking at me through the crack until it shut.

A higher-pitched cry came from the wiggling pink blanket in my arms. I peered down again at the baby.

Not much made me nervous. Actually, outside of flying, nothing made me nervous. I was a criminal defense attorney. I looked pure evil in the eye daily.