

1 ASB PRESIDENTS AND POP-TARTS

JOLENE

Not even the threat of science class—let alone seeing Justin in science class—can diminish my good mood. I’m still riding high on Anthony asking for my number during the passing period. He did it right in front of Piper, so she probably hates me now. She has a well-established crush on him, and he barely looked her way, and then she barely spoke to me after. But she hates everybody; I’ll be in good company. Although, that company won’t include Anthony. Maybe he’ll join us later.

My best friend, Logan, and I enter the chemistry classroom and take our assigned spots within the section’s final two rows, right before the lab tables against the back. I sling my backpack around the seat as Piper enters with her friends Quinn and Courtney. The two cheerleaders wave at me, but Piper doesn’t even look my way as they sit at the lab table behind us.

Justin’s seat is next to me, but he’s not here yet. He’s usually a bit late. I don’t care, really, not like that. It’s just that I ran out of his party Friday night because I

overheard him saying horrible things about me. Turns out, they were horrible things about his ex-girlfriend, Tay-Tay, but I still don't want to see him. He's been aggressively assertive, and now that Tay's his ex, there's nothing stopping him from asking me out.

This probably wouldn't be such a big deal if he weren't such a big deal, but he's Associated Student Body president, rich, and one of the hottest guys in school—not that I'm attracted to him... anymore. His stunning blue eyes are hardly captivating when they're looking at you like you're a Pop-Tart.

He swaggers in as if all the girls in class were waiting for his arrival and slides into the seat next to me. He's wearing off-white corduroy pants and a dark-gray wool jacket over a forest-green sweater.

"You disappeared Friday." He leans over, not putting his backpack on the chair like I had, because he doesn't have his backpack. He doesn't have anything. How does he expect to pass if he comes to class without his book? Should I not carry my books around? How would I do the reading, though? "Where did you go?"

I don't want to answer him. The truth—that I got confused, my feelings were hurt, and I fled—is embarrassing.

"Matt said there was an emergency." Justin shakes his head, waiting for more info. But he's gonna have to give me a minute, because—what?! Matt's the last guy I expected to come to my rescue, especially after I screamed at him while leaving Justin's party. I didn't expect to scream at Matt either. I pined for him for two years, then he was at the party, and we were

laughing and it seemed like there was something between us—then he made out with his ex-girlfriend. I should have yelled at him more. But I can't think about that now—Justin's still waiting.

“Yeah, turns out it was a false alarm.” That’s as big of a lie as he’s gonna get, so I hope it satiates him.

“What happened?” he asks.

“It was nothing, really.” I’m gonna have to change the subject myself. “Did I miss anything?”

He sits back in his chair, nonchalant. “I broke up with Tay.”

He leaves it at that, and I feel like he wants me to comment, but I have no comment. I don’t care. Is that mean? I don’t mean it to be mean; I’m just not interested in taking Tay-Tay’s place.

He gives up on waiting, sits up, and leans in. “We should go to a movie sometime, with everyone.” He adds that last part with a shrug—the nonchalance returning. He’s very good at not showing any sign of chalance.

I consider this “everyone” he speaks of. He’s close friends with Anthony, so he’d probably come.

“Sure.” I try on the nonchalance myself. “Sounds fun.”

“Great. It’s a date.” He stands and strides to the back of the room; I assume to get an extra textbook, but I wouldn’t be surprised if he left his book in his locker as an excuse to strut past the girls at the lab tables.

I bite the side of my mouth and plop my chin onto my hand. How did it go from “with everyone” to “a date?” Maybe I can get out of it when he tries to schedule it.

The whole thing nearly derails my good mood.

PIPER

I want to hate her forever in peace—difficult when all my friends love her. Justin talks to her in their seats a few feet in front of me, and he's definitely still harboring feelings—which is kind of insulting. Where's his sense of loyalty to his good friend Piper? Jolene's been a terrible friend to me—he knows this. He was there, at his party, when she flirted with Anthony in front of my face even though she knew I liked him. But whatever—it's not like Anthony's asked her to Homecoming. I bet I can get her to go with Justin before he has the chance. It'll just take a little tweaking, nothing too serious. But it will mean I'll have to speak to her again. Ugh.

After class, I let her walk to her locker with Logan before I join them. I don't want to be seen with Logan. He's a huge nerd. We dated for—like—two weeks in junior high, and too many people haven't forgotten about it. If I were seen walking around the school with him, people—well, Justin—would make way too big of a deal about it and ask me if we're dating again. And, like I said, huge nerd. I don't know how Jolene stands it.

He crouches down and sits on the ground next to his locker, almost completely out of sight, so I join Jolene. I gotta make it super clear that we're best friends and there was never any question about it.

I pull out my padlock that was on my old locker and look for an empty spot near Jolene's. "Any of these

lockers free?” I ask, opening one, seeing it’s clean, and sliding my lock on the door.

She’s frowning and looking away, possibly questioning why I’m speaking to her again. How dare she question my sincerity?

“Something bugging you?” I ask.

“Justin thinks I said yes to going on a date with him.”

Good. It’s not me. Better still, Justin’s doing his job—distracting Jolene from Anthony.

“Good!” I push my bag into my new locker.

“Why? Why good?”

“Honestly...” I take a moment to get into character—not that I’m going to not mean everything I’m about to say, but it has to come out right—like I’m truly hurt my favorite person in the world—her—would stab me in the back by flirting with my other favorite person in the world—him. “When Anthony and you were talking, it seemed like you guys were flirting with each other, but now you’re with Justin, and I guess I was wrong. Thank goodness.”

“I’m not with Justin.”

“Right. Course.” Whatever makes her happy. “But at least I don’t have to worry about you and Anthony.”

“Right,” she says, the same way I did.

“Right!?”

“Piper,” she sighs, “I’m not going to go for him. I know you like him—”

“Right!” Best news I’ve heard all day. “Thanks, Jolene.” I grab her arm to show her how much I mean it. “You’re such a good friend.”

“Course...” She looks at the ground, her face empty—lost of the spark I’ve known her for. Oh well.

LOGAN

“I’ll see you in class,” Jolene says, letting herself be whisked away by a giddy Piper. It’s like Jolene’s slowly—or kind of quickly—fading away from me. First, she ditched me for Friday’s game. She claims she forgot, but... I don’t know. And now she’s letting Piper interrupt us, then she goes off with her to class without me. She’ll eat lunch with Piper because Anthony eats lunch in that group, and I can’t join because of Piper—like—shoot! I’ve zipped up about half of my backpack when I snagged the Ziplock bag holding my Pokémon cards. Pikachu and Bulbasaur fly everywhere. I scoop them back up and shove them into the big pocket when someone’s feet stop walking a little too close to where I’ve planted my butt.

“It’s Logan, right?”

I look up—way up. Anthony peers down at me under his floppy brown hair. He’s wearing a navy-blue T-shirt that cuts off right across his muscles, as if they need help standing out; they’d probably stand out under layers of sweatshirts. I thought he was the QB—more of a runner than a tackler. Do runners have to be so bumpy?

“You’re Jolene’s friend?” He smiles with half his face. It’d put me at ease if it came from someone else, someone fatter, maybe. Guys like him don’t usually talk to me. Guys like him usually punch me in the stomach, pull my shirt over my head, and throw my First Edition Shadowless Charizard Holo Card in the toilet.

“Uh-huh.” I wait for him to insult me, or attack. There’s no other reason he’d be here, talking and stuff. I should have taken my mom up on those karate lessons.

“I’m Anthony.”

“I know.” I’m still waiting.

“You should come have lunch with us. Any friend of Jolene’s...”

I stand up, push my locker shut with my foot, and strap on my backpack. “Yeah, I don’t know...” I can think of a billion reasons I’d rather give myself a wedgie than eat lunch with his group. But he’s gonna want me to name one, and I can’t do it. “I was thinking of joining the”—I look around at the fliers and ads for different sports and groups—“golf club.”

He tilts his head and stares at me like he’s giving me the opportunity to take it back, and I’d like to—really! I would *like* to sit with Jolene and the popular kids; it’s just, oh—what’s the word—Piper.

He keeps staring at me. It’s getting uncomfortable. It reminds me of the bog Jolene and I fought in game before she went to France for a year. It was big, brooding, unbudging, and didn’t take any of my crap either.

“So, I’ll see you at lunch?” he asks.

“Fine.”

“Jolene will be glad you’re there,” he says.

“Okay,” I say as he walks off.

It’ll be nice having my friend back. And maybe it won’t be awkward sitting with Piper. Their group is so big, she might not even realize I’m there, and if it goes

south—I don't know—maybe the golf club takes late admittances.

Jolene comes up from behind me, scaring me a little—I was so caught up about lunch, and I didn't expect her to come back.

“It's too hot.” She takes off her backpack, opens her locker, and takes off her sweatshirt.

“That's the guy Piper likes?” I gesture to Anthony's back, walking away from us.

Jolene looks up, then to me—pity on her face. “Yeah. Sorry.”

“He's nice.” I loop my thumbs through my backpack straps. “I'd like him if Piper didn't.”

“If it helps,” she pushes her carefully folded hoodie into her locker, biting her lip as if considering whether she should say it, “I don't think he's as interested in her as she is in him.”

“It'd help more if it were the other way around.”

She nods, shutting her door.

“What makes you think that?” I ask.

“Just a feeling I get.”

I watch her watch him go, and it clicks into place why he asked me to join them for lunch; it wasn't for my benefit—not solely anyway. “I get that feeling, too.”

She looks at me with a smile and an eyebrow peaked, as if she's not quite sure what I mean, and we walk to class.