

OLD CHAPTER 2 (early draft) – Jilly's House

Erin And Jilly

Freezing Hot

“Oww,” I moaned, setting down my cup of coffee ice cream on the step so I could clutch my head in agony. I hated brain freeze. And I don't see how it can work so fast. How can it go from your mouth to your brain in under a second? And why does it have to hurt so much?

“You always eat it too fast,” Jilly said, taking a delicate suck from her spoon.

“Little bites. That's the key.” Of course, she took little bites of everything, now that she had braces. She got them right after the spring dance last year.

“I will NOT go to the dance with braces,” she had told her parents the night after she'd gone to the orthodontist's office. It was February and she'd already picked out her dress. She was going with a bunch of people but Bus Boy would be there and they were a “couple.”

“But what about next year's dance?” her mother had asked, which sounded like a reasonable question to me. “You'll still have braces next year.”

Jilly looked at her mother as if she were one of the kids she babysat, totally and utterly clueless. “By next year, I'll be used to them and everyone will be used to seeing me in them so it won't be a big deal,” Jilly said.

A good point, I must say.

“Well, all right,” her mother had said. “But that just means you'll have them on that much longer.”

I glanced at Jilly, who had taken another small bite of ice cream.

“Small bites?” I said. “Thank you, Oh Mighty Goddess of Ice Cream Eating.” I breathed deeply, the pain receding to a dull ache.

“You're welcome.”

I straightened up and reached for my cup, holding it tentatively, as if it might pop out and bite me. “So, when is Bus Boy coming over?”

“Jon. His name is Jon, okay?”

“Bus Boy,” I murmured, daring a small, Jilly like sip of melting ice cream from the spoon.

I held my breath one, two, three. I let out my breath. Ah. No freeze.

“Jon,” she said again, shoving her foot against mine. But she was smiling.

“He'll always be Bus Boy to me,” I said, smiling back. Jilly had first laid eyes on Bus Boy the second day of school on you guessed it the bus. He had flirted with her and she'd given him big eyes and then she'd forgotten about him while she got sidetracked with Mark Sacks. After they'd dumped each other, it was all about Bus Boy. She had set an all time Jillian Hennessey Record by dating him for over seventh months now. Usually it was two weeks here, three weeks there and boom on to the next crush. But this Bus Boy thing was clearly not a crush. And what was really stunning was that summer was almost over and they were still together, even though he was going to high school in the fall. Jilly was afraid he was going to dump her once he got to high school because dating an eighth grader would not be cool but so far he was all about Jilly.

“He'll be here in an hour,” Jilly said. “I need to get ready.”

“Why? You look gorgeous.” And she did. It was hard for Jilly not to look gorgeous. One of my brother's friends once said Jilly would “look good in a paper bag.”

which I guess meant she could wear just about anything and look hot but you do have to wonder how would she look in a plastic bag? Paper or plastic? Hard to say.

“I’m sweating which means my hair is icky and look at these nails? Chipped.” She held out her hand for my inspection. If I squinted and tilted her hand just right, I could see a tiny white spot on the very edge of her nail.

“I seriously doubt he’s going to notice that,” I said, dropping her hand.

“But I’ll notice.”

I sighed. Sometimes I really wanted a boyfriend, because everyone else seemed to want one because it was like some status thing like, she’s got a boyfriend. He likes her so she must be likeable. Other times I was glad I didn’t, especially when it came to all of this appearance stuff. It freaked me out. Even if I wanted to wear nail polish which I don’t I couldn’t put it on by myself. The last time I tried, back in sixth grade, my dad thought I’d been doing fingerpaints. Like a sixth grader would do fingerpaints hello? And then there’s the clothes and the makeup and the hair and the accessories. It’s like another school subject. I’d have to put it in my assignment notebook Prepare a school outfit due next Wednesday, start research today! Of course, Jilly pulled her look together without even thinking, wearing things together that no one else had thought of or would dare wear.

“Do you need any help?” I asked as Jilly stood up, holding her dish of ice cream in one hand. I kind of hoped she’d say no. I really didn’t want to be stuck inside on such an awesome day. It was hot but not overbearing and I wanted to go to the park and hang out by the pond. We’d have enough days inside when school started in a few weeks.

“That'd be great,” she said. “You can set up my manicure set while I'm in the shower.”

Oh, goody. “Okay,” I said, sucking the last of the ice cream out of the cup.

“Too fast,” Jilly said as she banged through the front door.

“Ohh,” I moaned. I hate when Jilly's right.

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“Maybe Cute Boy will be in your classes,” Jilly said, wiggling her eyebrows at me as she tried on another shirt.

“Mark. His name is Mark,” I said, feeling my cheeks warm at the old nickname. In my blog, I'd called Mark Cute Boy and Hot Tamale and of course during the Blog Fiasco, everyone in school read that and started teasing him and me. I'm lucky he's speaking to me again.

“He'll always be Cute Boy to me,” Jilly said with a smile.

“Fine, I got it. Jon. Jon Lanner. Aka Bus Boy.” I smacked her rear with a bright orange pillow.

Jilly laughed. “Mark or Cute Boy or whatever you'd still like to have him in class with you.”

“Yes, because we're good friends,” I said. “I like having my friends in class.”

“Right,” Jilly said.

I groaned. “I don't like him that way anymore. You know that.” I picked up one of her squishy pillows and squeezed it against my stomach.

“Okay,” Jilly said. “Whatever you say.” She turned and smiled at me. “I'm glad we can joke about it now. After, you know.”

Yeah, I knew. After she and Mark had gone out for a few weeks, at the same time I was totally in love with him and she didn't know. And then they were kissing five Mississippi right next to me and I thought I would die.

But I lived. And could joke about it, which was definitely something. I guess because Mark and I really were friends. I didn't daydream about him or stare at him in class or imagine what it would feel like to have his arm around my shoulders. My blog wasn't taken up with how cute his butt was (it still is, but I don't really notice anymore), or how awesome his hair looked falling over one eye (it is awesome but it doesn't send me into a whirlwind of lust and desire like it used to).

“Yeah,” I said, smiling. “Me, too.”

I picked up Jilly's black scarf and handed it to her. Scarves were her latest fashion statement. She would tie it around her head, her neck, as a belt if she was still doing it when school started I knew the whole school would be wearing scarves by the end of the first week. Jilly was a trendsetter.

“I just want this year to be normal,” I said as Jilly twisted the scarf expertly and ran it through the beltloops of her jeans. “Completely, totally, boringly normal.”

The doorbell rang.

“Omigod, he's here!” Jilly scrambled around, checking her face in the mirror while she slipped a foot into her sandal. “How do I look?”

“Gorgeous,” I said as I opened the door.

“You didn't even look at me.”

“Jilly, I've been looking at you for the last hour,” I said. “You're perfect. Now get your butt down there.”

We heard the door open. “Jon,” Jilly's mom said. “So good to see you. Jillian will be right down.” Jilly's mom never called her Jilly. “I named her Jillian. That's what I call her.”

Jilly raised her arm and sniffed under it. At least she wasn't making me do that anymore. “All clear.” She stood in front of the full length mirror behind the door, turning this way, then that way.

“You act like this is your first date or something,” I said. “Haven't you guys farted and burped in front of each other by now?”

“God, Erin.” She tugged her mini so it dropped another eighth inch around her waist.

“Well, have you?”

“Well, yeah, but it was totally embarrassing and I don't want to make a habit out of it or anything.” She rubbed her lips together before opening the door and stepping out into the hallway.

“You've got a zit about to erupt on your chin,” I said.

“What?” She ran into the bathroom and peered at herself in the mirror.

Gotcha,” I said, ducking to avoid her outstretched arm as I pounded down the stairs. I nearly ran into Mrs. Hennessey coming up. “I'm sorry,” I gasped.

She laughed. “Don't worry about it. But you may want to slow down.” She stopped at the top of the stairs, peering over the railing into Jilly's room. “Jillian, your dad and I will meet you there,” she said. “By the gazebo near the playground.”

I could see Jilly rolling her eyes in my mind. They were all going to an outdoor concert and Jilly had wanted it to be just her and Bus Boy. Her parents were letting them walk there alone together but had given them strict instructions to meet them at 7:00. “I know,

Mom. We'll be there.”

I smiled as I jumped the last step, landing in front of Jon.

“Hi, Bus Boy,” I said as I stopped at the bottom, slightly out of breath. He didn't mind the nickname. In fact, I think he kind of liked it. I smiled, a little embarrassed. Here I was, my hair all over the place, sweating in my shorts and tank, and Miss Junior America was about to walk down the stairs.

“Hey, Erin. What's up?” I could see why Jilly liked him. Not only did he have this killer wavy hair and deep brown eyes, but he was also really nice. He always said hi to me, asked me stuff, and listened like he really cared. And of course, he was going to high school this fall which meant Jilly was going out with an older man which made all the girls look at her with awe.

“Not much,” I said, then I leaned toward him and spoke in a stage whisper as Jilly started down the steps. “Don't say anything about the zit on her chin. She's very sensitive about it.”

“Erin!”

I laughed. So did Bus Boy.

“I don't have a zit,” she said as she hit bottom, smacking me before I could get out of the way.

“Okay,” I said. “Whatever you say.”

She rolled her eyes at me. “If you weren't my best friend, you would so not be my friend.”

“Lucky me,” I said, opening the front door. “Have fun, you guys. I'll talk to you later.”

I stepped out onto the porch, squinting in the bright sun. Pulling my sunglasses off my head, I slipped them on. I took off down the sidewalk toward my house. It was a stifflingly

hot July day, a normal July day, filled with the promise of more normal days ahead.

I bet I wouldn't even need that Get Out of Trouble Free card. I bet eighth grade would be a piece of cake. I'd slide right through, with no computer glitches or gut spills or anything like that. The boring normal life of Erin P. Swift.

I took a deep breath as I turned onto my street. A cloud drifted over the sun, dimming the bright day for a few seconds. I glanced up. The cloud was moving away. Hm. If anyone offered me a Get Out of Trouble Free card, I should probably take it.

Just in case.

CHAPTER 2 - EARLY DRAFT