

1:03:27

Today was the day. Ever since James was born, he'd had a timer inked into his right wrist. Like for most people, the timer counted down to the exact moment when you'd discover who your soulmate was. He'd probably be meeting his at school, considering that it was Thursday. In just over an hour, he'd find out exactly who he was destined to spend the rest of his life with.

He checked his timer again nervously, sitting down in math class as the bell rang, signaling the start of the period.

1:02:58

Lunch break, then. Okay. That could work. He fidgeted in his seat, copying down the complex equations from the board into his notebook. Ugh, trigonometry. James hated trigonometry.

He wondered who his soulmate was. *What if they're someone I know? What if we have nothing in common? Oh, no, what if they're a jerk?* You know, normal stuff like that.

The minutes ticked by, one by one, time blurring together. And yet, they seemed to drag on forever at the same time. This is what James called the Wednesday Effect. The young brunet found himself unable to focus on the board at the front of the classroom, but he tried his best to pay attention to what his teacher was saying. He was finally able to tune back in to hear her words, only seconds before the bell rang to dismiss him and his fellow students.

"...homework due on Friday next week. Make sure to show your work on all four of the equations on page 217."

James sighed in relief. Thank goodness, he hadn't missed anything! He looked down at his wrist one more time as he packed up all his stuff.

1:49

He waved goodbye to his teacher as he walked out of the classroom to swap out his textbook and notes for his lunch box. He tried to open his locker, but his fingers had lost all feeling, so it was far more difficult to enter the correct combination. He cursed under his breath, finally slamming the door open and tossing his things in without much thought. He'd have to fix it later, but there was almost no time left, so that'd have to wait. He had more important matters to attend to.

*1:01*

He tore his lunch box from his backpack before shutting the door and closing his lock to ensure the safety of his laptop and other items. In doing that, James had also slammed his finger in the door. He winced, clenching his hand in a fist.

*0:53*

No time, no time, no time! He rushed to his usual table in the cafeteria, panting anxiously. He'd be meeting his soulmate in less than a minute. He couldn't help his nervousness. His life was about to change in the most drastic of ways.

James's friends Aaron, Kit, Becca, and Gabe joined him at the table.

"Hey, Jamie," Becca greeted him, using his nickname.

He hummed a "Hey" back, his mouth full of buttered naan. He swallowed. "Where're the others?"

Gabe was the one who answered him. "Nyx went to the dentist, Felix was having an off day, and Theo has the flu."

"That sucks." He wrinkled his nose in disgust. Felix's off days were painful for him. That was when his AML got more unbearable. Not to mention the fact that Nyx hated the dentist, or that Theo was sick. He hoped that they were all doing okay, but he knew that there was next to nothing he could do to help.

*0:14*

James's palms began to sweat a whole lot, so he wiped them off on his jeans. He grabbed the last snack in his lunch (a bag full of celery sticks) and began to eat it as Aaron and Kit struck up an intense conversation.

Aaron seemed a little tenser today. That was strange.

James had never known him to be an overly anxious person. He was usually much more put-together than this. And grouchy. Good thing it wasn't Thursday, or Aaron would have reached peak annoyance level.

*0:07*

James chewed a little faster, eyeing the people around him. He put the last celery stick in his mouth and shoved the plastic bag back into his lunch box.

“I found this one online,” Aaron was saying, fighting a grin. His pale, green-gray eyes glinted with mischief. Clearly, he and Kit were taking turns telling jokes.

James had tried his best to pay attention to his friends’ conversation. It usually paid off, he’d discovered. Especially when Aaron was telling jokes, which he usually didn’t do. This was bound to be interesting.

“Okay, go,” Kit challenged Aaron, a confident look on their face.

“I thought my neighbours were great people. Until they put a password on their Wi-Fi, that is.”

James couldn’t help it. He snorted, not noticing that his timer had run out. In the heat of the moment, he’d completely forgotten about it. The rest of his friends giggled as he struggled to keep it together. “That’s funny,” he breathed out, wiping a small tear from his eye.

“Thanks,” Aaron replied shortly, staring at his own wrist before looking at James’s. He seemed to reach a decision before pulling out his iPhone. He typed something on his screen and James’s phone buzzed from its spot in his pocket. He looked down, seeing a simple four-word text from Aaron: *We need to talk*.

It was discreet, he’d give him that. Still, James froze a little. Those four words usually meant that there was a problem, or that he was doing something wrong.

“Sorry, guys, gimme a sec, would you?” James left the table without waiting for an answer, heading for the library. He knew it’d be mostly empty during lunchtime. He heard Aaron’s light footsteps behind him. James held the door open for him, following him inside. His feet took over, leading him to the fantasy section thanks to his habits and muscle memory.

“What’s up, Aaron?” He turned around, noticing how the other boy fiddled with one of the drawstrings on his hoodie.

“You know,” he started, “it’s kinda funny.” Aaron’s fingers began picking at a stray thread on his jeans.

“What is?” James asked, confused.

“You looked so worried before Kit and I started talking, but as soon as I had your attention, it was like whatever was on your mind just... stopped bothering you.”

That one sentence triggered a memory inside James's head. Of course! His timer had reached zero!

"That can't be right..." How could it be? They'd known each other for years! There was no way they could have been soulmates! Unless—

"Don't worry, James. I noticed that both of our timers were set to stop at the same time. I only realised it when I saw that they matched, the second the time ran out. That's the whole reason they both stopped. You laughed at the joke I was telling, and I figured it out at the last second."

He registered that Aaron had been talking with his hands, which he only ever did when he was nervous before a big exam or event. To be quite honest, he'd always found it endearing.

"So we're soulmates, then?" James whispered.

Aaron nodded. "Yeah, so I was thinking we should have a talk. Y'know, about whether we'd like to stay platonic, or, um..." He took a deep breath, the tips of his ears reddening a little. "The truth is, James, I kinda like you."

"Kinda?" He was only teasing a little bit.

Still, Aaron stuttered. "Well, yeah. I mean, you've always been really nice to people, which I always thought was pretty amazing. And, uh, well, it's not like I haven't thought about being more than just your friend, like a significant other. It's okay if you don't feel the same way, but I just wanted to let you know."

Well, that was surprising. Still, James wanted to reassure his friend—no, soulmate—no, *boyfriend*, sorry. "Okay, I get that this is new for the both of us, and believe me, I hate new, but we should probably make sure we're on the same page, so we can figure all this stuff out together."

Aaron nodded again, looking at his shoes.

"In fact, if we weren't at school right now, I'd kiss you."

The older boy stared at James, wide-eyed, before relaxing at the sight of James's smile. "So, what are we now, then?"

James's grin widened, becoming more cat-like. "I was thinking, calling you my boyfriend in my head is starting to really grow on me, even though it's been, like, half a minute or less."

Aaron's ears reddened even further. "Okay, so we're boyfriends now. That's—I mean, wow, um..."

James reached out to hold Aaron's hand in his own. "It's okay to be nervous, Aaron. We'll figure this out together. But I think we'd better hurry up. Don't wanna be late for French, do we?"

The warning bell sounded right as he finished talking, proving his point.

"No, I guess not," the older boy chuckled.

"You should laugh more often," James decided. "It's cute." Ignoring Aaron's newly-flushed face, he led his boyfriend through the loaded bookshelves and back to the cafeteria, where both of their lunch boxes waited for them. They rushed to their lockers together before heading to French class, making it there with three minutes to go.

As they entered the classroom, James thought of a single question: Did being Aaron's soulmate mean that he was allowed to refer to him as Ronnie? He'd definitely have to find out. He grinned to himself. It was high time to start messing with his *boyfriend*. But first, he had to worry about conjugating verbs.

*Welp*, he thought, *at least I have my soulmate here with me.*