The Illusion Of A Boy

**Chapter 1**

**Jessie**

A fiery spark rocketed upward from the earth and burned through the dark sky. As gravity pulled it towards the ground, it shimmered into the golden shape of a palm tree. My lips flicked upward into a smile with the vision of my favorite firework. I walked Baby, our little black mutt, toward the large grassy hill in the middle of Hunter Park. Walking at night was my preferred time as it hid my identity. I was a nameless girl with her dog.

Baby was my perfect, always agreeable companion. I wanted to do a lot of things in silence since my dad died. In our neighborhood, suspicions and questions about his death surrounded me like a shroud.

It took too much energy to talk, to force my thoughts into words. It wasn’t worth the effort.

I shook my head as if I could dislodge the thoughts of his death. He died in the woods, but other than that I couldn’t think about how he ended up there. Bottom line, I was relieved. His death meant the abuse was finally over.

The 4th of July fireworks exploded overhead as I settled in with Baby. I chose a grassy spot on the outskirts of the crowd.

My fellow watchers chatted and wrangled their children. Cans cracked open and the aroma of beer hung in the humid summer air. The low, deep booms of the fireworks resonated through my body. Orbs of gold, blue and red flashed across the night sky and then crackled back to the ground. Baby pressed herself against me and trembled. I squeezed her to my chest.

“You’re fine, you’re fine,” I whispered in her black, silky ear.

I should have left her at home, but I had been too uncomfortable to watch the fireworks completely alone. Baby was a good cover for my evening walk. Grandma tried to hide her hurt feelings when I didn’t invite on her my walks. Tonight, it hadn’t been necessary as she was spending the weekend with friends.

Mom had stared blankly at the TV when I left. Severe depression plagued her since my father’s death. Inconceivable to me, she missed him. She thought they were in love. Her continued delusion angered me and drove me crazy. Of course, he had been *slightly* less abusive to her.

She didn’t even turn her head to acknowledge my goodbye. Instead of our lives getting instantly easier with his death, it transitioned to providing constant care. Pushing down my feelings of frustration, I smirked to myself. On the bright side, I wasn’t afraid for my life anymore.

Grandma had been keeping a close eye on her, but she needed a break. We all did. I didn’t mind Grandma taking some time for herself. She had been doing most of the care for Mom.

Four months had dragged on while we processed the shock of his absence. Like the walking wounded, Brian, my brother, and I were so grateful it was finally over but were still struck by the carnage. Mom had barely gotten out of bed unless Grandma made her eat or shower. I assured myself she would be okay watching TV for a bit. My brow crinkled, maybe her doctor was giving her too much medication?

The mosquitos buzzed around my long dark hair incessantly. I swatted at the light tickles on my legs. A slight breeze brought a little relief, but not much. Sweat trickled down my back and into the waistband of my shorts. After thirty minutes of the swirling death match, I gave up battling the mosquitos and walked back toward my house brushing the grass from the back of my shorts.

“Jessie?”

I jumped and wheeled my body to see who had called my name. It was Will, my classmate, previous kissing partner and the blond Adonis of my dreams.

“Oh hey, how are you?” I said. My mouth had become a desert wasteland in an instant.

His profile was like a Greek statue with its strong jaw and nose. It wasn’t just his looks that attracted me. He cared about me. He had shown up to support me over and over again like after my car accident and most importantly during my dad’s search party.

Afraid of what I didn’t remember about the day, my cheeks flamed with embarrassment. Will’s warm and caring embrace early that day was the only thing I did recall.

“Better now. I’m glad I spotted you,” he said. Even in the darkness, his eyes eagerly searched my face.

My heart pounded as he began to walk beside me. “Are you here with friends?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he nodded towards them with a smile, “but they can live without me for a few minutes.”

I hadn’t seen Will since the day we found my father dead in the woods.

We had texted a few times, but it had been pretty general. It had been a lonely last few months. Alex, my cheating ex-boyfriend, was out of the picture. Will had been one bright spot of love and attention.

I didn’t blame him for not staying in touch. What do you say to someone when their parent dies? *Oh hey, I know your dad died recently, but let’s go out.* It wasn’t Will’s style*.*

We continued to talk as I made my way back to the house. It was so nice to see him and hear his voice. As it always had, our conversation flowed easily as we ambled along the sidewalk under the canopy of trees. I basked in his attentiveness.

Far too soon, we were back at my house. Will lingered on my front porch, his weight shifting from one leg to the other. He stilled to lean down and embrace me. His long, strong arms wrapped around me. My face pressed into his chest and my whole body relaxed. We stood with our arms wrapped around each other, his heart thudding steadily in my ear. His hug soothed my starving soul. He straightened but kept his hands on my shoulders.

“It’s good to see you,” he said.

My brown eyes locked with his light blue ones. I needed his hugs and desperately wanted more.

“It’s good to see you too,” I said.

Will’s face split into a wide smile revealing his perfectly white teeth that screamed, “*I wore braces for years*.” His hands slid down from my shoulders and squeezed my hands.

“Let’s hang out soon. Message me,” he said.

“Yeah, I’d like that,” I said. Will bent down and patted Baby’s head. He smiled and gave me a small wave as he slowly backed away. He couldn’t possibly be any cuter.

Humming to myself, I opened my front door and crouched down to let Baby off her leash. I straightened as the door clicked shut behind me.

The house was silent. Every light had been turned off including the TV. I groped my way toward the kitchen and flipped on the light. A scrap of paper was in the middle of the spotless kitchen counter. I reached for it and recognized my mom’s handwriting. “*Don’t do drugs, they ruin your life. Love Mom”*

My brows furrowed in bewilderment. What in the hell was the note supposed to mean? I crumpled the ridiculous piece of paper in my hand. It only took a few seconds to understand.

“No, no” I shrieked turning toward the hall. “Mom!” I screamed for her. My screams ricocheted through the house and out the open windows.

I pushed open her slightly ajar door and flipped on the light. She lay on her bed curled to the side in the gray sweatshirt and pants she had on when I left the house. My whole body trembled as I grabbed and shook her shoulder. Her mouth dropped open, but she didn’t respond.

Footsteps pounded down the hallway. “Jessie?” Will shouted. He ran into her room with his eyes fully open.

“She tried to kill herself!” I cried while ineffectually gesturing toward her.

Will dug his phone out of his pocket and dialed 911. I stared blankly as Will gave the operator the details.

“Is she breathing?” Will asked.

His question made me focus. I watched as her chest slightly rose and then fell. “Yes,” I said.

What had she taken? Her nightstand was empty, so I turned to the adjoining bathroom. A prescription pill bottle lay in the bottom of the white sink with just a few capsules remaining. My hand trembled as I reached for the bottle to quickly scan the label. I wasn’t familiar with the medication.

Minutes ticked by as I rocked back and forth by the bed. I focused on the shallow rise and fall of her chest. The squawk of the ambulance sounded in the driveway and startled me from my shocked stupor. Why had she done this? Didn’t Brian and I mean anything to her? Life wasn’t worth living if her drunk abusive husband wasn’t around? Rage built within me.

Will let the EMT’s in and led them back to the bedroom.

“Miss, do you know what happened?” the paramedic asked.

“She tried to kill herself,” I said. Wasn’t it obvious? The thought played on a loop in my mind.

My hand trembled as I handed him the pill bottle and the scrap of paper. The paramedic inspected the prescription bottle and read the note with an impassive face. He stuffed them both into his pocket without making eye contact.

Her one sentence suicide note perfectly demonstrated her delusional mental state. She hadn’t said she was sorry. She hadn’t said she loved us. We didn’t do drugs. All of it was utter nonsense. My entire body continued to shake. Why was she like this? It was my biggest question. Why was she an utter mess?

Will put his arm around my shoulders and held me securely against him. We watched as the paramedics loaded her onto the gurney.

“How did you know to come back?” I said looking up at him.

“I heard you scream as I was walking down your driveway,” he said.

I nodded and mumbled thank you. Our eyes met and, in that moment, understanding, sadness, and disbelief passed between us. I don’t know what I would have done without him here. It was a struggle to remain standing. His comforting presence made the situation somewhat bearable. With Will’s support, I was able to function. .

I patted my short pockets for my phone. I needed to call Brian, my brother, and get him home.

Brian picked up after a few rings. “Where are you?” I asked.

“Why? What’s wrong?” he said responding to the panicked tone of my voice.

“I need you to meet me at Stanton Hospital. Mom tried to kill herself with pills.” Blunt was my mode of operation when freaked out.

“Are you fucking kidding me!? Is she okay?” Brian said. His anger and then worry bled through the phone.

“I think so, she’s still breathing.” The EMT’s carried Mom toward the waiting ambulance.

“Miss, do you want to ride with us to the hospital?” The EMT asked looking at me expectantly.

I looked at Will standing right beside me.

“I’ll take you,” he said before I could ask. Thank God. I was clinging to him like a lifeline. I took a deep breath and shook my head no to the EMT.

“Just meet me at the emergency room. Will is giving me a ride.” The red and blue lights pulsed into the darkness as they loaded her into the ambulance.

The EMT turned to me. “Do you have your mom’s ID?” he asked.

“Uh, yeah I’ll get her purse.” I said. I ran back into the house and grabbed her purse from the counter. I would probably need her insurance information too. It was to surreal. How could this be happening? The doors of the ambulance closed as I hustled to Will’s car with Mom’s purse clutched to my chest.

We followed the ambulance and pulled into the emergency room parking lot. The artificial brightness of the hospital lit the surrounding mature fir trees and landscaped flower beds.

Will and I waited for Brian to show up in the ER lobby. The shock had started to wear off and anger built in its place.

Of course, she would do this. God forbid we just live peacefully after Dad died. Oh no, I lose the biggest stressor of my life and my mom breaks down completely. I had been gifted the worst parents of all time. Why these two idiots had Brian and me, I had no idea. They clearly couldn’t handle themselves, let alone children.

Brian ran into the ER, panic stamped across his face. Tracey, his girlfriend, followed just a few steps behind. Tracey rushed over to hug me and then stopped. Her arms hung in the air a moment, but then dropped. Her brows knitted together as she studied my face. She retreated a few steps away. My arms were crossed tightly over my chest. I quickly brought Brian up to speed on Mom’s condition, or at least what I understood.

“Hey Will, thanks for driving her,” Brian said.

“Yeah, no problem. We walked to your house after the fireworks and that’s when we found her,” Will said.

Brian nodded and rubbed his fist in the palm of his left hand repeatedly. My brother rubbed his fist if he was excited or nervous. He’d done it since we were little.

A doctor, I would guess in his forties, in light blue scrubs walked into the waiting area. He scanned the waiting room. “Miss Taylor?” He asked while eyeing our group.

I nodded and said, “Yes.”

He exhaled forcefully and came over to us. “And this is?” the doctor asked.

“My brother,” I answered.

“I’m Dr. Adams. Your mom is in stable condition. We pumped her stomach, but she’s resting comfortably now. I don’t think she will have any long-term effects from the pills she took, but we’ll need to keep her on a psychiatric hold.”

“Is she awake?” Brian asked.

“She’s very groggy. I would guess she’ll sleep for several hours.” He cleared his throat. “Is there an adult or any other family with you?”. His lined tanned face watched us with concern.

“I’m 18, but I will contact our grandmother,” Brian answered.

“Okay, good. Was there an issue that may have led her to this?” The doctor asked.

“Our Dad passed away in March,” Brian answered.

The doctor’s face creased with worry. “I’m sorry for your loss.” He paused a moment. “And your current struggle.” He reached out and squeezed Brian’s shoulder. Brian was shocked and confused, but I radiated anger.

“Go home and try to get some sleep. They won’t let you see her until after 9 am tomorrow,” he said.

Relief flooded by body. The thought of hanging out in the ER for a few more hours would piss me off more. Why would she do this? I wanted to scream *WHY* so loud it would reach the heavens.

Will walked with us to Brian’s car. He had dropped his arm from my shoulder. “Call me anytime for whatever you need,” Will said. Our eyes met and Will hesitated a moment. Did he feel my anger too? He pressed his lips together in a grim line and then turned to walk away.

Rage erected an invisible wall around me. Even Will’s kind and supportive attention couldn’t get through.