

JORDAN LYNDE

AKA **wattpad** SENSATION XXSKATER2GIRL16XX

Believe Me, I'm Lying

*A little lie.
A lot of trouble.*



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About the Book

When seventeen-year-old Harley's parents are killed in a car crash, she's desperate to find work so that she can support her little brother, Elliott. Pretending to be twenty-two, Harley accepts a role as a teacher - at a school for delinquents. It's tough - but life gets even more complicated when Harley starts to have feelings for not one, but two of her students . . .

BELIEVE ME, I'M LYING

Jordan Lynde

RHCP DIGITAL

*To my family, friends, and fans. Without you there is no
me.*

Prologue

Rain has always been a harbinger of tragedy for me.

Something horrible didn't occur every time it rained, but everything bad that had happened to me throughout my life had happened on a day when it was pouring. A light sprinkle never bothered me: it was only when the rain seemed really relentless.

It started when I was seven. A car hit the cat I'd had since I was a child because the driver hadn't been able to see through the torrential rainfall.

When I was ten, I found out my grandpa had cancer. It was raining that day. Almost a year later, it was raining on the day he died. He was the only family I had besides my mother and father. My little brother hadn't been born at the time.

It had been raining the day I broke my leg in gym class when I was thirteen.

Rain fell from the sky the day my house burned down when I was fourteen, forcing my family to move across town, away from my friends, my school, and everything I knew.

At sixteen, I'd gotten into my first car accident because I'd hydroplaned on the wet road.

And it had been raining the day my parents died.

Rain had been pelting against the windowpanes, almost drowning out the sound of our math teacher ranting about sine, cosine and tangent. 'Sohcahtoa,' she said to the class, writing the word on the board. 'Sine is opposite over hypotenuse, cosine is adjacent over hypotenuse, and

tangent is opposite over adjacent. Make sure you write that down, because I promise that it will help you greatly when the chapter test comes.'

I picked up my pencil and scribbled down the foreign word, repeating it over in my head, trying to understand what a tangent was. I hated math, and math hated me. A sleepy yawn escaped my lips as Ms Black began to pass out practice work sheets, ignoring the mumbled protests. Almost the whole class seemed to be asleep today - not that I could blame them. Rainy days made everyone tired.

Suddenly the door burst open and the principal, Mr Venn, walked in, looking stricken. A slight murmur rose from the class at his abrupt appearance. I held my head up a little higher, straining my ears to hear what he was saying to my geometry teacher. An expression of alarm crossed her face and she threw a quick glance in my direction. I furrowed my eyebrows, curious. Apparently the rest of the class was too, because everyone had gone deathly silent.

'Harley,' Ms Black said, gesturing me to the front of the room. 'Come here, please.'

A weight dropped into my gut as I stood slowly, under the impression that I was in some serious trouble. My thoughts raced as I frantically thought of what I could have done. I wasn't a trouble student.

'Bring your stuff,' Mr Venn added.

I swallowed as I nodded, flipping the binder on my desk shut, not bothering to take out the pencil or calculator. Unzipping my backpack, I quickly shoved my stuff into it and zipped it back up as I made my way to the front of the classroom. A few of my classmates gave me sympathetic looks as I passed them.

Mr Venn signaled for me to follow him out of the classroom and my heart pounded in my chest as I tried to think what I could have possibly done to get myself into trouble. Nothing came to mind . . . except earlier in the day, when I'd stolen a lollipop from the secretary's office while

turning in the attendance form. But I couldn't be in too much trouble for that.

'Harley,' Mr Venn started once we were out of the room, his voice wavering. 'I'm afraid I have some very bad news for you.' He swallowed. 'There's no easy way to say this, but your parents were in a car accident and you need to get to the hospital.'

My smile dropped and I froze. 'What?'

'We received a call from the hospital about five minutes ago,' he explained. 'Your parents were listed as your emergency contacts in our records, so is there anyone else who can take you over there?'

'Are they going to be OK?' I asked, my eyes wide.

'I'm sorry; I don't know,' he responded. 'I'm afraid I don't know anything about the situation. The person I spoke to at the hospital simply told me they had been in an accident. But is there anyone who can go with you to the hospital? Come here and pick you up? An aunt or uncle, maybe?'

I shook my head. 'No, no. There's no one else. How am I going to get there? I need to get there!'

'I can give you a ride since it's an emergency,' Mr Venn said, opening the door to his office. 'I'll just grab my keys.'

I nodded, gripping my backpack tighter. He snatched the keys off his desk and then headed for the back entrance of the school. I followed without a second's hesitation, stepping out into the cold, pouring rain. Each freezing drop stung my bare skin, and I had to squint to see through it. Mr Venn guided me to his Mazda and I quickly got into the passenger seat, tossing my backpack into the back and snapping my seat buckle. He slid into the driver's side, slamming the door a little harder than necessary. I could tell he was trying to stay calm.

I pressed my head to the cool glass of the window, trying not to be sick as the world whizzed by me. My hands shook and I silently prayed for my parents to be OK. They hadn't told Mr Venn anything on the phone, so didn't that mean

my parents were fine? They had to be OK – they still had to take care of me and my brother. They *had* to be OK.

When we arrived, Mr Venn pulled up all the way to the emergency entrance, allowing me to get out of the car. ‘I’ll go park, and be in the waiting area,’ he told me. ‘If you need me, just come and find me, OK?’

I nodded quickly and rushed into the building, running up to the reception desk. I’d never been to the emergency room by myself before. What was I supposed to say? ‘Hi . . . I’m here for my parents. They were in a car accident.’

Just as the receptionist saw me, a hand was placed on my shoulder. A nurse. ‘Harley Allen?’

I turned and nodded at her. ‘We’ve been expecting you. Please follow me,’ she said, putting an arm round me and guiding me through the doors to the left of the reception desk. ‘Is it just you?’

‘There’s no one else . . . except my little brother,’ I told her, my voice barely coming out of a dry throat.

She started speed walking down the corridor with me in tow. My heart was pounding so hard I thought it was going to burst out of my chest – trepidation, anxiety and worry were the only things I could feel. My eyes watered, but I blinked back the tears. I’d be able to see my parents in a moment.

We stopped outside a hospital room with a blindingly white door. When I reached for the handle, the nurse quickly pulled on my shoulder, forcing me to stop.

‘You can’t go in yet,’ she told me.

‘They’re my parents!’ I cried angrily, narrowing my eyes at her. ‘I can go in whenever I want!’

The nurse’s eyes softened and she shook her head. ‘I’m sorry, but your mother’s in a critical condition, and no one can go in right now. We just need you close by so that when she’s able to see you, you’ll be right here.’

‘She?’ I repeated, my eyes going wide. ‘Where’s my dad? Isn’t he with her?’

She dropped her gaze as soon as I asked the question and my heart fell before she even spoke. 'Your father . . . I'm terribly sorry. We tried our best, but there wasn't anything we could do. He—'

'No,' I said loudly, covering my ears and shaking my head. 'No, I don't want to hear that! *No!*'

My dad wasn't dead. He *couldn't* be dead. He was alive and fine this morning when I left for school. It hadn't even been three hours since we'd said goodbye! There was no way he could have died in that time frame - this had to be some sick, twisted joke everyone was playing on me.

'I'm truly sorry,' the nurse said, squeezing my shoulder. 'I'm so sorry for your loss. But your father didn't suffer, Harley. He passed away—'

I tried blocking out any noise with my hands, but it didn't work. I could still hear the sounds coming from inside the room where my mom was, the rain lashing at the window, the beating of my frantic heart, the nurse's next words.

'—in the ambulance before he reached the hospital. He suffered from severe blood loss, and his neck had been broken. I'm so sorry—'

Suddenly the door to the hospital room burst open and the nurse stopped speaking. A young doctor with cropped hair appeared, looking tired. A crimson liquid covered the front of his jacket and the gloves on his hands and I stared at him in horror, my mouth dropping. He stared back at me for a second before looking around, and then turning back to me. 'Are you part of the Allen family?' he asked.

I nodded. 'I'm Harley. The daughter.'

'You can come in now,' he said urgently, moving to make room for me. 'Your mom has been asking for you since she woke up.'

I rushed into the room, bumping another doctor aside. My mom was lying on the hospital bed, an oxygen mask over her face. Her chestnut-colored hair was tangled and wet and white bandages were wrapped around her head. I

had to resist the urge to be sick as I dropped to my knees beside her. Her eyes were closed and she lay still.

‘Mom!’ I cried, gripping the edge of the bed, too afraid to touch her. ‘Mom!’

She didn’t answer. I clenched my fists tighter. Why was this happening? What did we do to deserve this? Tears started spilling down my face again and I scrubbed them away viciously. ‘Mom, it’s me, Harley.’

My mom turned her head, opening her eyes and smiling weakly at me.

‘Mom,’ I whispered in relief, my voice shaking.

She moved her hand towards mine, her face twisting in pain as she did, and I quickly brought my arm up to meet hers, grasping it tightly. With her other hand, she managed to pull off the mask.

‘You shouldn’t do that, ma’am—’ one of the doctors started to say, but my mom ignored her.

‘Harley,’ she whispered.

My heart sunk upon hearing her weak voice. I squeezed her hand, blinded by my tears. ‘Mom, save your strength,’ I told her, not knowing what else to say. ‘When you’re better you can talk to me—’

‘I love you, honey,’ she interrupted me, her voice just as shaky as mine.

‘I love you too, Mom,’ I responded, attempting to smile at her. ‘When you get out of here, I’ll take you to your favorite restaurant to prove it, and—’

My mom shook her head slightly. ‘I don’t . . . think I’ll be able to go.’ She took a shaky breath, sweat rolling down the side of her face. ‘Sorry.’

My hands were shaking so hard it looked like they were vibrating. I held my mom’s hand more firmly. ‘Mom, don’t say that! You’re definitely coming!’

‘Your father. How is he?’

Dead. My breath caught in my throat. I couldn’t tell her – I couldn’t tell her Dad was dead. Not while she was like

this. Fresh tears sprung to my eyes as I shook my head and faked a smile. 'He's fine,' I lied. 'He's waiting for you to be OK too, so don't let him down!'

'Tell him I . . .' She paused, taking a deep breath. 'I love him.'

'You tell him, Mom!' I demanded, my pitch raising a few octaves. 'I won't!'

My mom laughed weakly, but it was so quiet I could barely hear her. I felt her grip on my hand loosen. 'Elliot is too young for this,' she said with a sigh. 'Make sure he knows . . . how much I love him too.'

'Let him know yourself, Mom!'

She shook her head and I forced the lump in my throat down, wiping my eyes with my free hand so I could see her clearer. Tears were filling her eyes too, and running down her cheeks. I took a shaky breath, unable to think coherently. What was I supposed to say? Words come hard when you realize they could be the last you'll ever say to someone.

'I love you, Harley,' she whispered again, letting go of my hand. 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.'

'Don't apologize,' I choked out. 'I love you too.'

There was a brief moment of silence before the heart monitor went off, beeping frantically. Then I was being pulled away from the bed.

I fought violently against the arms that were trying to drag me away from my mom. 'Mom!' I screamed, using every ounce of my strength to try to free myself. 'Mom! No! Mom! Let me go!'

'You need to leave the room now,' ordered the doctor who was pulling me away.

'Mom! No!' I shrieked, my vision blurring. The hands gripping my shoulders were sure to leave a bruise, but I fought harder against them. 'Mom! Don't leave me! Mom, please! Please! *Please!* Hold on!'

'Get her out of here,' another doctor shouted.

The one holding onto me grunted as I tried to force my way out of his arms one last time. I couldn't see my mom any more - doctors and nurses were surrounding her bed, blocking her from sight. 'Mom!' I called again.

The clamor of the room grew and grew, and once again I found myself outside the door, the first nurse's arms around my shoulders. My shouts of protest mingled with the panicked shouts of doctors and I tried to get back inside the room, but the grip on my shoulder was vice-like.

Then, abruptly, everything went horrifyingly silent, aside from a resounding beep that filled the room. I stood stock-still in the doorway, staring wide-eyed at my mom's motionless body as doctors rushed around her bed. I wasn't sure how much time had passed, but the beeping sound eventually faded away, as did the cries of doctors. A deafening silence filled the room, and my ears - I felt like I was drowning in it.

'Harley?'

I turned my head slowly and saw one of the doctors giving me a compassionate look. 'I'm so sorry,' he apologized, sounding sincere. 'She's gone.'

Tears filled my eyes once again as I stumbled toward the bed, my legs giving out when I reached it. I landed on my knees hard, but I barely felt it. I put a hand on my mom's white cheek. 'Mom,' I whispered, touching her still warm skin. 'Please, wake up, Mom . . .'

No response.

'Please don't leave me alone,' I breathed, feeling warm tears roll down my cheeks. 'Please, don't.'

Silence.

A sob escaped my lips and I dropped my head, my arms splaying across her body. Loud sobs wracked my body as I cried, forgetting anyone was around me. I held on as tightly as I could to my mother's body, as if squeezing her would bring her back to life.

It hurt. I couldn't breathe and each sob made my whole torso heave, making me into one shaking, convulsing mess. But I couldn't stop crying. Tears poured down my cheeks like the heavy rain outside. And I knew that it wasn't only for my mother - I was crying for my dad as well. Within ten minutes, I had just lost the two most important people in my life.

My world had collapsed.

Chapter One

Ten Months Later

The pounding of rain filled my ears as I stared wide-eyed at my boss. He returned my gaze with a solemn one. 'Please,' I begged, clenching my fists. 'You don't understand. I need this job! Without it I can't support my brother and myself—'

'Harley,' my boss snapped, silencing me instantly. 'I can't have you coming to work late every day!'

'It's not every day!' I responded, my voice rising. 'My brother just misbehaves sometimes and I have to deal with him first—'

My boss's expression hardened as he cut me off. 'I'm sorry.'

'But—'

'You're fired, Harley,' he stated with an air of finality.

'If I don't have a job I can't pay the rent or buy groceries!' I protested, tears gathering in my eyes.

'My best advice is that you let a foster-family adopt you and your brother,' he said, looking uninterested. 'And you should go back to school instead of working full time.'

'I get home-schooled,' I snapped. 'And there's no way I'm going to take the chance of my brother and me being separated. He's all I have.'

'Well, then, I'm sorry.'

I glared at him. 'At least I know what kind of man you are now. The kind that would fire a worker even though her life depends on the job!'

My boss - well, ex-boss now - sighed, rubbing his forehead. 'I need to have people here who work hard and

actually show up on time. I'm sorry you couldn't follow those rules.'

'But—'

'End of discussion. Please leave my office immediately.'

I scowled at him and he motioned for me to leave. I stood up, purposefully knocking over the chair I'd been sitting on in the process. Jaw clenched, I stomped towards the door.

'This is why I shouldn't hire children,' I heard him mutter to himself.

I slammed the door as hard as I could, heading into the staff room to grab my coat from my locker. I didn't look back as I left the room, heading straight through the exit, ignoring looks from my co-workers, who'd never liked me much anyway. Well, they wouldn't be having me in here as a customer.

I opened my umbrella before stepping out into the downpour. Scowling, I made my way down the street, trying to avoid the puddles. I hated rain - everything bad happened when it rained. Today was no different.

The walk to my apartment only took ten minutes, but during those ten minutes, I became incredibly cold. It was October! It shouldn't have been this chilly out! But then again, New England, especially Vermont, had an incredibly indecisive climate. I hurried up the steps to my apartment complex, but instead of going straight to my apartment, I went to my neighbor, Will's.

I knocked on his door and after a moment Will opened it. His green eyes widened in surprise. 'Harley? What are you doing back so quick?' he asked.

'I got fired,' I muttered, pushing past him and into the apartment and trying to hold back the tears that threatened to roll down my face. It would be worthless to waste them over this.

'You got fired?' he responded in disbelief. 'Why?'

Giving him a flat look, I crossed my arms. 'Because a certain someone's little brother made her late to work one

too many times.'

Speaking of the devil, Elliot ran into the room, his mop of curly chestnut hair as messy as usual. He raced up to me and clung to my leg, a goofy grin on his face. 'Pig!' he cried, gazing up at me happily. 'You're back!'

I frowned back down at him. 'I told you to stop calling me Pig.'

'No! Pig is Pig,' he stated stubbornly.

I scowled at him. Pig was what my mom used to call me because I ate a lot, and I guess it'd stuck with my four-year-old brother. It wasn't a nickname I particularly enjoyed.

'You're early,' Elliot said, still smiling. 'Why?'

'Um, I got a day off,' I responded, not wanting to have to explain what had happened. Explaining things to Elliot was *not* fun - he asked way too many questions.

'So we can play?'

'We can play,' I said with a laugh. 'I just need to talk with Will for a moment.'

My brother nodded his head in excitement. 'I'll go get it started!'

He ran off, probably to go turn on the Wii, his latest obsession. I turned back to Will with a sigh, flopping onto the couch. 'I don't know how you can put up with his energy all the time,' I said, watching as Will took a seat on the recliner across from me.

'I'm not that old,' he pointed out. 'I'm twenty-seven.'

'I still feel bad for leaving him with you all the time. Doesn't he distract you when you have to write?'

He shook his head. 'Not at all. He's easily entertained. And you shouldn't feel bad, since I'm the one who offered to watch him when you have to work. I don't see why you just won't let me adopt you two.'

I smiled, rolling my eyes. 'I can support the two of us. You do enough. You watch Elliot almost all the time, you home-school me, and you cook dinner for us almost every night.'

‘It’s basically like I’m your father then,’ he pointed out with a grin. He and I were good friends back in the day, even though he started out as *my* babysitter. We were more alike than you’d think. ‘You should think about it again, Harley. You could go back to normal school, and—’

I shook my head, cutting him off. ‘I like my life.’

‘Really?’

‘Really,’ I responded, looking him straight in the eye. ‘After losing my parents I realized family is what’s most important. I want Elliot and me to stay together. And not going to high school, well . . . the part about not having a lot of friends kind of sucks, but at least I don’t have to deal with the drama. And I don’t have to wake up early all the time either.’

He grinned at me. ‘I like your attitude.’

‘You say that all the time,’ I pointed out, smiling.

‘But it’s true,’ he insisted. ‘Even after all the tragic events in your life, you’ve managed to stay positive. After the accident, you didn’t hesitate to drop out of high school and start working so that you and Elliot wouldn’t be separated. It’s very admirable, and not many people could do it.’

I blushed a little, clearing my throat. ‘It’s not that big a deal . . .’

‘And now you’re being modest.’

I scowled at him, crossing my arms. ‘Whatever. I need to start looking for a new job right away.’

He gave me a worried look. ‘Are you OK with this month’s rent? I can pay it if you—’

‘I have it,’ I interrupted, shaking my head. ‘Thank you for the offer, but I’m not going to take your money. I only have to do this for another year. Then I can receive my inheritance and be all set.’

‘But—’

‘So, has your editor asked about your manuscript lately?’ I asked, trying to change the topic.

His face instantly paled. 'Unfortunately, yes. She wants it by next Monday - but I'm not even close to being done . . .'

I laughed out loud. Will was always like this - waiting until the last second to finish his manuscript so it could be turned in to his editor. He was a writer - and a good one at that. That's how he managed to look after Elliot for me all the time; he worked from home. Sometimes I felt bad for unloading my brother on him, but Will had been a family friend for a long time.

'Well, keep working on it,' I urged him. 'We don't want a repeat of last time . . .'

The last time his editor, Kate, had been here when the manuscript hadn't been finished on time, I'd thought I was going to witness a murder. Kate had lectured him for five minutes straight about responsibilities and deadlines - it had actually been very entertaining. I chuckled at the memory, and Will pursed his lips at me, guessing what I was thinking about.

'There won't be a repeat,' he said stubbornly. 'I'll get it done in time.'

'Sure you will.'

'I will!'

I ignored him, getting up and walking over to the computer desk. I sat down in the swivel chair, spinning around to face his laptop. After pressing the on button, I leaned back and waited for it to load. A few seconds later Will appeared, hovering over me.

'Yes?' I inquired, looking up at him.

'What are you doing?'

'I'm going to apply for a few jobs,' I told him, typing in his password and logging in. 'The sooner I get one the better.'

'Ah. Good thinking, kiddo.'

'Pig!'

I swiveled the chair around to look at Elliot, who was frowning at me. 'Yes?'

'I thought we were playing!' he complained.

I made a face. I didn't have *time* to play with him. Turning to Will, I gave him a pleading look.

He smiled and rolled his eyes. 'Pig is kind of busy, so why don't *I* play with you instead?' he said, walking over to Elliot.

'OK!' my brother said, sounding excited.

'Don't call me Pig!' I called at them as they walked away. I heard Will laugh and I scowled. That nickname was so unfitting! I didn't eat that much any more. OK, that was a lie: most of the time I preferred food over people, so I probably *did* eat too much . . . but I wasn't even overweight.

I turned back to the computer again, gazing at the screen. Forest-green eyes appeared in the reflection, and I stared at them for a moment. My eyes were the only trait that my mom had passed on to me, and every time I saw them, I couldn't help but remember her. The desktop background appeared, making my reflection disappear, but the memories lingered. I blinked a few times to clear my thoughts before clicking on the Internet browser.

I brought up Google, frowning as I thought of places to apply to first. Tapping the keys absentmindedly, I finally decided I would start with the most known stores. Walmart was up first. Well, it was better than nothing.

Two grueling hours later, I had applied to six different stores. Hopefully ones that would hire seventeen-year-old girls full time. Not many stores did that, though - the bakery had been the exception. But now I had been fired from it . . .

'Geez, Mom, Dad. Couldn't you have just been rich and made things easier?' I joked out loud, gazing up at the ceiling.

It had been almost a year since their death. Some people called me cold for being so upbeat after losing both of my parents, but they were wrong. I missed my parents like crazy; *no one* could understand how much I missed them.

But I knew they wouldn't want me becoming depressed, and I didn't want that, either.

And so I became who I was today: independent, optimistic Harley Allen.

Who needed to find another job, and as soon as possible. I let my head drop onto the desk. 'Ugh.'

Chapter Two

'Hello, Harley, this is Sarah Goyle from SuperSaver calling about your job application.'

My ears perked up and I turned the volume on my cell phone up a few notches. Hopefully this was a good message.

'We're sorry, but I'm afraid we're looking for someone a little older and more experienced for—'

Scowling, I slammed my finger down on the delete button, not bothering to hear the rest. That was the fourth store to call over the past few days and say they were looking for someone older and more experienced. How experienced did you have to be to hit a few stupid buttons on a cash register? I'd seen teenagers younger than me working at the grocery store every time I went!

'Pig?'

I twisted around in my chair, glaring at my brother. 'I told you not to . . .'

My voice trailed off when I noticed the solemn expression on his face. I softened my gaze and stood up. He sniffled and rubbed his eyes, taking a few steps forward, and I knelt down beside him and put my hands on his little shoulders. 'What's wrong, El?'

'I had a dream about Mom and Dad,' he told me, sniffing again. 'Pig, I want to see them.'

'Oh, Elliot,' I sighed, gathering him in my arms. 'I've told you - you can't see them any more.'

'Because they've gone somewhere better?'

I nodded, rubbing his back soothingly. 'Yes, but don't forget they are always watching over you.'

'I miss them,' he told me, sounding like he was about to cry again.

'I miss them too,' I responded, my chest and throat constricting. It took a few moments for me to get my voice under control. 'But we need to stay strong for them. No more crying, OK? They won't be happy if they see you so upset.'

For the most part, when Elliot started crying I ended up crying too and it was just one big mess. However, right now I'd gone two months straight without crying over my parents' death. Elliot still cried once in a while, but that was to be expected. My mom had been right; he *was* too young for this. He couldn't understand how they couldn't come back to see him.

Elliot nodded his head against me, breaking me out of my reverie. I pulled away from him and poked his forehead and he frowned, batting my hand away. 'I heard you were on fire,' he commented after a moment.

I raised an eyebrow at him. 'What? I'm not on fire . . .'

'Will was talking on the phone, and said you got on fire.'

Now I was even more confused. 'No . . . I never got nor caught on fire. I don't know what he's talking about. What else did Will say?'

'Your job?' Elliot asked more than stated.

'Oh!' I said with realization. 'While he was on the phone he told someone I was fired?'

Elliot nodded, his eyes widening fearfully. 'So you were on fire? Pig, you're not a marshmallow!'

I shook my head quickly, trying not to laugh at his random association of fire and marshmallows. 'No, no, being fired is different than being on fire.' I didn't even bother mentioning the marshmallow part. He gave me a baffled look and I decided to change the subject. 'Forget about it. Are you hungry? You slept in pretty late today,' I commented, leading him to the kitchen.

'I want eggs,' he told me, climbing onto a chair.

I nodded. 'Sure. Want to crack them?' I added, seeing the solemn look still on his face.

He immediately smiled, nodding his head eagerly. 'Yeah!'

Together, we whipped up some scrambled eggs with a dash of eggshell, and sat at the kitchen table to eat.

'Pig, you make the best eggs!' Elliot said, digging his spoon into his breakfast.

'Don't call me Pig,' I said in an exasperated tone. 'My name is Harley. Har-ley.'

'Pig is Pig!'

I groaned in frustration. There was no getting through to him. Warily, I returned my attention back to my eggs and placed a forkful in my mouth, chewing slowly. I had to admit it, though: I was a pretty good cook. Which was why I'd been working at the bakery. Even my ex-boss had complimented me every day on my skills. I scowled at the thought of him. How could he fire me so easily?

My thoughts consumed me as I ate, a frown now appearing on my face. I needed to find more places to apply to. A week had already passed since I'd been fired, and I was just wasting my time by applying and being told I was too young to be hired. If I didn't get a job fast, I would be in some serious trouble. Renting an apartment wasn't cheap, even with the discount my landlord gave me. Plus, with the way Elliot ate, buying food could become a problem as well. I didn't want to sign up for state benefits - and they might ask awkward questions, or try and put us into foster-families - but if worse came to worse . . . Hopelessness started to well up inside me, but I kept it down. I couldn't give up yet.

A knock at my door brought me out of my thoughts. Sliding off my stool, I walked over to the front door and my jaw dropped when I realized who was standing at my door - the lawyer who had been assigned to Elliot and myself after my parents' death.

'Rob,' I said, a little surprised.

‘Harley,’ he said, smiling at me. ‘Did you forget I was supposed to come today?’

Feeling a little embarrassed, I nodded. ‘Uh, yeah. Sorry. You can come in.’ Thank God the place wasn’t a mess.

‘I’ll be quick,’ he promised, following me into the kitchen. ‘Elliot, how are you doing?’

‘Great!’ Elliot chirped, a spoonful of eggs in his hand.

‘Want some eggs?’ I offered, a little awkwardly. I hardly ever saw the guy, so it was a little strange when he was around.

‘I’m good,’ he answered, his eyes still on Elliot. ‘He sure has grown these last few months.’

I smiled. ‘Only because he eats like a cow.’

‘Well, he’s a growing boy. It’s good to see you two are staying healthy. Will must be a good guardian.’

‘He is,’ I said, keeping my eyes on the table. Rob was under the impression that Will was living with us. Which was partially true. He just happened to live *next* to us, instead of *with* us. And it wasn’t like Rob ever checked to make sure of that either. He was also under the impression that Will was now our legal guardian – which he wasn’t. I didn’t have one and neither did Elliot. I had just told Rob that Will had wanted custody of us, and so far, he’d been too busy to check that the paperwork had actually happened.

‘Anyway, I’m here to talk about your inheritance. Oh, and I brought in your newspaper for you.’ He tossed it on the table, offering me a smile.

‘Thanks,’ I responded. ‘So, what about my inheritance?’

‘Unfortunately, you still can’t receive it until your eighteenth birthday,’ he told me, frowning. ‘I’m sorry. I tried to find a loophole, but . . .’

‘That’s OK,’ I sighed. After my parents died, everything had been left to me – they’d never gotten around to writing a new will after Elliot had been born, though obviously I would share everything with him. The only problem was

that I couldn't get anything until I was at least a legal adult, aka my eighteenth birthday.

'Good news is that it really isn't too far off, right? Are you happy where you are now? You can always move in with a foster-family,' Rob suggested.

I shook my head immediately. 'No, I'm happy - I'm really happy here. Thanks, though.' Although it was tough living by myself, there was no way in hell I'd ever ask to move in with a foster-family. There was a huge chance Elliot could be separated from me and I'd never let *that* happen.

Rob reached across the table and patted my hand. 'You have a good head on your shoulders, Harley. If you ever need anything, anything at all, just let me know. I'm here to help you.'

I grinned at him. He was a good guy really. 'Thank you.'

'Tell Will I said hi,' he continued, looking around for my supposed guardian. 'I'm guessing he's out.'

'Yep, he's getting, um, groceries. I'll tell him you said hi,' I promised, standing up from the table. 'Say bye to Rob, Elliot.'

'Bye to Rob, Elliot,' Elliot parroted with a giggle.

I rolled my eyes while Rob chuckled. 'See you later, Elliot. Keep in touch, OK, Harley?'

'I will. I'll see you around. Thanks for trying to get me my money early.'

'Sorry it didn't work out,' he apologized, before leaving.

I was sorry too. Letting out a small sigh, I went back to the kitchen. While not being able to get any of my parents' money was upsetting, I knew I would get it eventually and life would be a breeze after that - I could quit working full time and go to college, whilst still raising Elliot. I just had to make it through one more year. Barely even a year.

And to do that, I needed a job. And fast.

I eyed the newspaper. Might as well give it another shot. So with a forkful of eggs in one hand and the newspaper in the other, I started my job hunt.

There were only two jobs in the newspaper that day: a line cook for a restaurant and a substitute home economics teacher for a high school. I stared at the ad for the substitute teacher. They seemed really desperate, asking for resumes ASAP. Anyone could apply if they had their high school diploma, even if their experience was limited.

'I bet I could look twenty-two,' I murmured to myself, absent-mindedly running a hand through my hair. But the problem was the BA . . .

But what if they were *really* desperate? If I could lie about that, then maybe I could . . .

Suddenly I had an idea.

Chapter Three

'I can't believe you made me do this.' Will frowned deeply at me while holding out an envelope.

I grabbed it excitedly, pulling out the items inside. A fake ID, a fake BA in liberal arts, a fake BA in home ec, and a couple of letters of recommendation – which were also fake. 'Well, *I* can't believe you managed to *do* it!'

It was a crazy idea I'd had – and I really hadn't expected Will to follow through. But he had and now I had all the qualifications to apply for the job as a substitute teacher at Wesley Academy, as advertised in the newspaper. It was all counterfeit, but Will had promised me it all looked genuine.

'I have connections,' he said, but still didn't smile. 'They've also faxed them directly to the school. Did you make sure to delete your Facebook profile or anything with your *real* information?'

'I didn't have a Facebook profile anyway, but yes. Everything else is gone,' I told him.

'And you're aware you can get into serious trouble for this?'

I looked back up at him. 'Very. But I do need the money, Will. If I can pull this off, I'll be all set.'

'I know you need the money. But do you really have to go through all this to get it?'

'Maybe not, but I'll earn more than in a minimum-wage job,' I responded, biting my lower lip. 'I know it can go horribly wrong, but I have to at least try. People do worse stuff. Like robbing banks.'

I figured Will would smile at my joke, but he didn't. 'Just be careful, Harley.'

'I don't even have the job yet; I'm just seeing if it'll work. How hard can being a cooking teacher be, anyway?' I said, holding my ID up to the light. Would it really fool them?

Will still seemed unhappy. 'I can't take the fall for you if you do get caught. You know that, right?'

'I wouldn't even think about throwing you under the bus,' I promised. 'It's just for a little bit. Just until my birthday.'

'You better hope they don't check your references properly,' he told me. 'Otherwise you're screwed.'

'They seemed really desperate. They posted an ad again in this morning's newspaper. It's been in it for a week now. I called and set up an interview this morning and they wanted me in right away, but I told them I could only do this afternoon. Four o'clock.'

'You're going *today*?' He sounded shocked.

I nodded. 'Yes.'

'This is a really bad idea, Harley. Just . . . don't get caught, OK?'

I put the papers back in the envelope, swallowing hard. Everything was all set - Will had helped me type up a compelling resume and now I had the documentations: all I needed to do now was put on some make-up and I'd be ready to go . . .

'Pig, I'm hungry!' Elliot cried from his bedroom.

. . . after I fed my little brother some lunch.

Two hours later, I was looking at myself in the mirror. My heart pounded in my chest and my palms were sweaty. I rubbed them on my skirt, trying to rid them of the sticky perspiration. Turned out I definitely didn't look like I was twenty-two. Definitely, definitely did *not*.

My chestnut hair was now thrown up into a messy bun, supposedly making me look older - or at least that's what Will had told me, but he always said I looked older than I was anyway. My eyes were hidden behind a pair of thick-rimmed glasses - another thing Will had said would help