SECRETS OF SILVER COUNTY

JORDAN'S STORY



AISLING ROBINS

Secrets of Silver County: Jordan's Story

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Jordan's Story
Advanced sample
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Prologue

"Mom! The booklet for Johns Hopkins University came in the mail today!"
I ran down the hall to where my mom was unpacking groceries. She was setting them on the little counter of our small three-bedroom ranch style house where we lived just me and her in Marion, Nevada.

"Jordan, honey… I know you're excited to apply there next year, but let's be logical and take things one step at a time. You still need to pick a few safety schools in case you don't get a full scholarship. I don't have a bucket of money for a university out of state," my mom sighed. I knew she was planning on contributing as much as she could along with whatever the FAFSA grant would cover. Her job as a state auditor paid well enough for her to afford this house, but we were still a single-income family for the most part. Dad was long-gone.

"Just take a look at the nursing program, though. It looks freaking amazing." I shoved the catalog at my mom and she grabbed it, but not before the Prom flyer I had also been holding fell out and fluttered to the floor.

"What do we have here?" Mom said, eyes squinting at the paper.

"It's just the stupid Prom flyer. Everyone got them. I'm not going." I bent down and grabbed the flyer and crumpled it into a ball.

"Jordan, princess. You MUST go to your junior prom. I had the absolute best time at mine. We could go dress shopping this weekend? My overtime check hit my account today, and I'm feeling like a girls' weekend would do us some good." She gave me an encouraging half-smile, her green eyes twinkling.

"Ugh, mom. I told you to please stop with the 'princess,' and I work all weekend, you know that. And I'm definitely not going to Prom. I have way too much studying to do if I have any chance in getting a scholarship at all."

"*Princess,* you're projected to make Valedictorian next year. You are going to do great things. And I know with all my heart that you are going to be the best nurse or nurse practitioner or doctor ever one day. But first, you are going to have some fun and

go to Prom with your friends." She grabbed the balled-up flyer from my hand and began flattening it out.

I rolled my eyes and took it from her hands. "No."

"Suit yourself. But that neighbor boy is pretty dreamy if I do say so myself."

"Ew, mom. Gross. You're like, fifty. Don't be a predator."

"FORTY-FIVE. Someone is just asking to be grounded."

"Bye." I ran down the short hallway to my room and slammed the door shut. I balled up the flyer again and tossed it in the recycling. Nope. Just no. Wells Valley Regional Highschool had exactly 456 students and no one was interested in taking me to Prom. I was the shy, awkward girl who wasn't good at anything except schoolwork. And doing schoolwork didn't make you popular.

I changed into my work t-shirt and started putting my hair in a ponytail. I glanced down at the Johns Hopkins course catalog again. What I wasn't telling my mom was that I didn't just want to be a nurse, but I wanted to be a *travel* nurse like my friend Sophia's older sister Josie. Josie's Instagram account was enviable. She worked three-month contracts four times a year, and when she wasn't at work, she was living her best life camping, horseback riding, sailing, rock climbing, and making new friends in every corner of the country she went. She even got to see the Northern Lights in Alaska last winter. I'd give anything for that kind of freedom and to get out of this dusty town. I'd been dreaming of it ever since I was eleven. Marion, was charming and all, but it was incredibly boring for a young person with big dreams. It was the kind of place people who had no aspirations stayed and lived if they were born here. But it was a 45-minute drive to any real grocery store, and an hour and a half from the closest airport. The farming community did ok, but I wasn't a farmer. We didn't even have a guinea pig anymore let alone livestock of any kind. I wanted out, asap.

I was administering some eye drops when the doorbell rang - my contact lenses were driving me crazy again. It was probably just one of the neighborhood farm kids going around selling eggs or honey. "Mom, can you get that?" Another ring. Ugh, she must be in the shower. I blinked my eyes as liquid ran down my cheeks, smearing my mascara.

I ran to the door and flung it open, expecting to see one of those dirty little Hawthorne farm kids when my breath caught in my throat.

“Hello.” It was not a farm boy. It was none other than Kyle Porter. *The* Kyle Porter. Hottest guy at school. He lived in this neighborhood, but he probably had the wrong address, for whatever this was.

“Howdy.” *Howdy? Jordan, that’s stupid. Be cool.* “I mean, Hi.” Ugh.
Kyle flashed me that million-dollar smile, complete with sexy steel-blue eyes. His dark hair was cropped short and had those cool-guy faded sides. “Hey, so… I was wondering,” Kyle swallowed audibly, “if um, you were going to Prom with anyone?”

I stood there, unable to speak. Complete deer in the headlights. This had to be some mistake. Kyle was everything I was not – confident, charismatic, athletic, and not to mention, hot. He always waved hello to me in the hallway, but I assumed he was just being friendly. I used to watch him ride his bike past the house every weekend, until he was eventually old enough to drive his car past. Not being a creeper, just… observing.

“I mean, if you’re already going with someone, that’s cool. I was just seeing if-”

“I’m not going with anyone yet,” I blurted out. Oh god, why was my face getting so hot. Be cool, Jordan. Say you’re going with a bunch of friends. The sad thing was that I was definitely NOT going with Sophia and Piper because they both had serious boyfriends, and I didn’t want to be the fifth wheel. In fact, I had already planned a solo movie marathon that night since even my *mom* had a standing weekend date with her new boyfriend, Chad.

Kyle wiped his palms on his jeans and looked at me through those long, dark eyelashes. Eh, fuck. “Well, um, I was wondering if you’d like to go with me then?”

OMG why is he asking me to Prom? Was this a prank? “Really?”

“Yeah?” Now he was the one who looked confused.

“Oh, ok sure.”

Kyle’s smile beamed, “Really? Ha, sweet! Awesome!”

“No, yeah, that would be really great.” I couldn’t stop smiling at him, but he probably just thought I looked deranged. I tried to make my face less deranged. It just kept getting hotter.

“Cool. You have my number, right?”

I fished my phone out of my pocket. My hands were so sweaty. “Um, I think I just have your uncle’s number from when your cat went missing a few years ago.” Kyle just lived with his uncle for some reason, and I was secretly happy that they were feline-free

since I was DEATHLY allergic to cats. I'm talking like, Emergency room and they need to hook me up to a ventilator to breathe allergic. I handed the phone to Kyle. He took it and entered his cell number and then sent himself a text.

"There. Now you have mine, too." He said, as he handed my phone back to me.

"Ha, thanks," I fumbled the phone for a second, and then quickly pocketed it.

"Ok, awesome." Kyle looked back at his car. "I gotta head to a game now, but I'll text you."

"Ok, thank you." My hands fidgeted as I stood there, not sure of what to do.

"Bye." Kyle jogged up the driveway as I watched his tall, athletic frame duck into his old grey Honda Civic. My heart was racing. And pounding. And hammering. I might actually be having a heart attack. And now I was definitely going to be late to work. Luckily, my boss was my aunt, and I just happened to be her favorite niece. Well, her only niece. So, favorite by default.

That weekend after work, mom took me dress shopping and bought me a beautiful light blue chiffon dress with beading detail and a halter neckline. I actually did feel like a princess… for once. I offered to pay for it with money from my part-time job, but mom insisted. The crazy lady then took us to the salon for mani-pedis. Afterwards, I pranced around vain as a peacock in the salon's foam flip flops, showing off my shiny new toes when I tripped and fell over the sidewalk and fractured my ankle – the tibia to be exact.

The doctor said that fortunately it wasn't my head, but unfortunately, I would need surgery. I was in tremendous amount of pain and devastated because the operation was scheduled for Thursday. I would miss my first ever date, and my junior prom.

Saturday night came, and I was still home recovering from surgery in my pajamas. I was having a solo movie marathon after all in my room with my tiny TV. Mom said she'd stay home with me, but I insisted she keep her date with Mr. Right Now, and that at least one of us deserved to keep date night. Besides, I was still sleepy from the anesthesia wearing off, and I wasn't going to be much fun to be around. I laid in bed TV remote in one hand, and cell phone in the other. I was throwing myself a pity party,

Jacqueline Stone
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trying to decide what to watch and scrolling through Snapchat at all the pics that people were posting at Prom. Then a text message popped up. It was from Kyle.

"Here."

What? Kyle was here? As in, at my house? I rolled over to grab my crutches on the side of the bed, shuffled to the front door and unlocked it. Standing in the middle of the driveway in his rented tux, was my Junior Prom date.

"Kyle! What are you doing here! You're supposed to be at Prom!" I felt myself grinning.

"Wow, those glasses are HUGE!" Kyle giggled.

Omg, I was suddenly so self-conscious. I hated wearing my glasses, but I was blind as a bat without them, and my eyes were still too dry from the surgery to put my contacts in. Or I was just being lazy. "Oh, yeah I guess they are," I touched the frames, mortified.

Kyle laughed, "Anyway… I couldn't leave my date all alone tonight. I'd thought we'd party!" He proudly extended his arm in the air, clutching a brown paper bag with what looked like a glass bottle sticking out.

"Kyle, is that wine?" My eyebrows shot up.

"M..maybe," he slurred.

"Ha well, ok. Come in." I stepped aside and Kyle stumbled into the hallway, just barely avoiding my crutches.

"Let's go to your room - grab a few cups. You're gonna love this stuff. I swiped it from my uncle after he passed out in front of the TV like he does every night." He gave me an eerily slow wink. It unsettled me for some reason, but I shook it off.

I went to the kitchen and grabbed a mug from the dish rack and hobbled back to my bedroom. I awkwardly held out the mug after leaning one crutch against the wall. "Here… I'm not going to have any. I don't really drink, and plus," I motioned to my cast, "I just had surgery the other day and these pain pills and muscle relaxers the doctor gave me make me feel kinda weird. I don't want to drink tonight. But here."

He walked over and took the mug from me, and then bent down and looked at my leg. "Oh man, I'm sorry. Does it hurt?" he asked, as he gingerly ran his finger along the hard green cast. I don't know why I picked green. Pink was my favorite color. Kyle had

Jordan's Story
A Novel Sample
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texted me his sympathies when I let him know why I wouldn't be able to go to the dance with him. I figured he'd just take someone else. We weren't dating or anything. Come to think of it, I wasn't exactly sure why he'd chosen me to be his date at all. I was nobody.

"Yeah, kind of. There's two screws in there now, holding the bone together." I looked at him as he stood up, and then we went and sat on the edge of my bed. My room was tiny and there wasn't anywhere else to sit. He set the mug on the floor and took a sip straight out of the bottle. He looked over at me and grinned. His teeth were stained purple from the red wine.

"Damn, that's kinda badass." He hiccupped loudly.

"It is?"

"Totally." He scooted closer to me. "Jordan…" Kyle started, seeming unsure of what he wanted to say. "I think you're really pretty. You're like, the hottest girl at school. I really wanted to take you out tonight." He brushed a stray piece of hair out of my face.

"Oh." I gasped, and I felt my pulse quicken as his warm fingers brushed the shell of my ear. "I didn't think you were going to come over here."

Kyle set the bottle of wine down on the floor next to the unused mug. "Is that your Prom dress?" He pointed towards my blue dress hanging in the open closet. "You should put it on."

I frowned. "Really, why?"

"Cuz it's Prom night! We'll match!" Kyle gestured to himself and his tuxedo.

"Ha, ok. Could you, um… hand it to me?" Kyle stood up and swayed for a second before he steadied himself. He grabbed the dress and closed the closet door. He handed it to me after I managed to shuffle to the bathroom to put it on. Getting myself undressed and dressed was a task all its own. In fact, I nearly landed in the bathtub twice from just trying to get my pajama shorts off. I got the dress on over my head and was able to zip up the tiny side zipper myself. I glanced at myself in the mirror and was mortified by what I saw. My normally vivid green eyes were dull from the drugs they had me on, and my light skin looked white as a ghost.

When I finally emerged from the bathroom and hobbled back down the hall to my bedroom, Kyle's eyes widened and traced my figure from head to toe. He let out a low whistle. Kyle stood and walked over to me, took my hand, and led me back to my bed. He reached up and carefully took my glasses off and set them on the nightstand

next to his empty wine bottle. “See? Now you’re perfect.” He smiled and winked that slow wink again. “Too bad you broke your leg. I would have really liked to take you out on a date tonight.”

“You mean to Prom?” I giggled and felt myself starting to sweat profusely and wondered if it would show through my dress. Me and Kyle Porter were sitting on my bed in formal attire. I could not have dreamed of this in a million years.

“…Or on a date anywhere. I’d take you to Taco Bell in Reno right now if you’d let me!” Kyle hiccupped again.

I laughed. “Maybe you can take me on a date some other time, when you haven’t drank an entire bottle of wine.”

“Fine, it’s a date, then. When I’m sober, and your leg isn’t in a cast anymore.”

“Deal.”

“Deal.” I noticed the moment his eyes flicked down towards my mouth, and before I could react, he was kissing me.

Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god! Kyle Porter was KISSING me! His lips were hot and wet and tasted sour grapes and tobacco. This was my very first kiss, and I cursed the pain medicine for fogging my mind and slowing my thoughts. But suddenly, there was only Kyle. My would-be first date. My actual first kiss.

Kyle broke the kiss. “I’ve been wanting to do that for a long time,” he said with a smile in his voice.

“You have?”

“Yeah,” he breathed. “I’ve liked you for a while. And there’s *other stuff* I’ve wanted to do for a long time, too.” I gasped as Kyle leaned in, this time parting my lips with his tongue. My head swam as he deepened the kiss further, tilting me back across the bed.

Icannotbelievethisishappening was all I could think as Kyle began to suck on my neck. I then heard his shoes thunk to the floor along with his coat. He groped my breasts through my dress and I tried to grab his hand, but he swatted it away. My head whirled with sensations; warm heat mixed with anxiety spreading down my body.

I jolted up when I heard Kyle’s belt buckle and pants hit the floor. Somehow, my dress was up around my waist. “Wait!” was all I could say. The medicine was making is hard to think and I couldn’t really see and I was trying to catch my breath.

Megan Stone
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"What? Tell me what you want, baby." Kyle was panting. Something hard and hot was pressing against my hip.

Baby?

"I've just," I tried to swallow and catch my breath, "I've uh… never done *this* before." My voice trembled at the confession. I wasn't even sure I wanted to do *this*.

Kyle softly traced his finger over my collar bone and confessed, "Neither have I. I just wanted it to be with you tonight."

I gasped. "Really?"

"Yeah, of course. It's Prom night, and I've liked you like, forever. Since freshman year in Mr. Garity's algebra class. I sat across from you and stared at you all year."

What? He did?

I remembered catching him looking at me from across the room every now and then, but I thought it was because I had messy hair. Or something stuck in my hair. Or my hair was too… something. My brain hurt from thinking. I leaned back on the bed. "Oh." I whispered.

Kyle let out a long sigh of relief, "Sweet!" He leaned down and sucked my neck more and untied the top of my dress. He moaned softly as he kissed further and further down. I don't remember exactly how, but all of a sudden, I was naked. In front of a boy. I started to shake from embarrassment as I soon realized he was naked, too. His hand spread my thighs open, and my heavy cast banged against the wall.

"Ouch!"

"You ok, baby? Ready?"

I looked down just as he grabbed his penis with one hand and pressed it against my entrance. "Holy shi-" I began to protest. *I don't want to do this*. I pressed my palms flat against his chest in a futile attempt to push him off. The connection between my brain and my muscles felt severed. *Stupid meds. Never again.*

"Shhh," he placed my hands back by my sides and grunted as he bottomed out, hips flushed against mine. I screamed in pain. *No no no no*. It hurt so bad that I couldn't fathom why people do this.

"Are you ok?" Kyle's face came back into my vision.

"I'm… ok." I lied as I fought to hold back tears. My head was spinning. I tried to relax, but with every thrust, I just tensed more and more. It burned – even through all

Virginia Stone
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the pain meds. But thankfully I felt Kyle shudder after about a minute before he rolled off me.

"Kyle?"

"Wow, that was amazing", Kyle was breathing heavy, "Jordan, you are amazing."

"I am?" I just felt sad and empty.

"Oh fuck, we were supposed to use a condom. You're on birth control, right?"

I shot up, my leg screaming in pain. "No? I've never had sex before, let alone go on a date! I don't even have a boyfriend!"

Hurt flashed across Kyle's face. "Oh, right. Ok then." He bent down to grab his pants. "Well, fuck. Let's just hope you don't get pregnant or something." He giggled as he tried to get his foot into his pant leg and stumbled.

I just had *sex* with Kyle Porter. Sex. I was shaking as I grabbed my glasses from the bed and put them back on. Luckily, they were still intact. Kyle helped me back into my dress and I shuffled back to the bathroom. I noticed there were a few speckles of blood on the soft blue material. Omg, I was no longer a virgin. I struggled to comprehend the gravity of everything that had transpired as I sat on the toilet. Mom was going to kill me. Because somehow, she found out *everything*.

The next few weeks at school were so incredibly awkward, and not just because of the hobbling down the hallways in crutches. Kyle winked at me whenever he passed by, and his friends were always smirking or chuckling whenever they were around as well. I decided not to tell anyone what happened. After all, nothing had changed.

Until a month later, when everything changed. I sat on the edge of my bed, massaging my aching abdomen, thinking I was having the world's worst case of PMS. I checked my phone calendar, and my period was almost two weeks late. Panic spread through my chest and arms. I couldn't breathe. I started choking. It felt like someone was shoving a hot poker through my lungs repeatedly.

"Honey, you're white as a ghost," My mom's eyes widened in alarm as she took me in from the door to my room, "Are you ok?"

"No, I can't breathe." I shook violently and clutched my chest. "I think I might be having a heart attack."

“Oh my gosh, honey – I think we should go to the hospital.” She walked in and took me by the arm until I could stand. I didn’t protest as she helped me to her car.

Three hours later, the ER doctor came into the cubicle of our room at Silver County Hospital. “Thank you for your patience. My name is Patricia Cox and I’m the on-call doctor today. Miss Kennedy, all of your bloodwork and tests have come back normal for the most part, and what I think happened is that you had a panic attack.”

“A panic attack? I thought I was having a heart attack,” I said.

“Yes,” Dr. Cox reassured, “a panic attack often mirrors the symptoms of a heart attack, even regarding pain. That’s why it’s best to always get checked out here to make sure you’re not actually having a heart attack. I’m glad you came in today, Jordan.”

My mom looked at me, concern filling her gaze as she turned to the doctor. “You said her bloodwork was normal ‘for the most part?’ What does that mean exactly?”

“Well,” Dr. Cox hesitated as she looked between me and mom. “Her hCG panel came back positive for pregnancy.”

Mom laughed, “Oops, better run that test again. My daughter isn’t pregnant.” Worry crept across the doctor’s face as she turned to me. “I’d be happy to have the nurse come in and do a urine sample instead.”

“Please do.” “NO!” Mom and I exclaimed simultaneously.

The doctor hesitated a second, mumbled “I’ll get the nurse,” and left the room.

“Jordan,” mom turned to me, brows furrowed, “is there something I should know about?”

“No! It’s just a mistake!” I began to cry as I slumped over in the narrow hospital bed. Just then the nurse walked in with the urine cup and gave me the instructions on how to collect the sample.

Thirty minutes later, Doctor Cox reappeared with some paperwork in her hands, her face neutral. “Jordan, your urine sample came back positive for pregnancy. I’m writing you instructions to follow up with your Primary Care Provider as soon as possible, as well as a pamphlet on how to deal with anxiety. It was a pleasure treating you today, and I hope everything goes well for you.” A look of pity glossed over her face as she handed mom the paperwork.

The next few days were a blur of confessions, guilt, and the hardest decision I ever had to make in my life. My PCP told me that I could take Mifeprex – a pill that would terminate the early pregnancy if that's what we thought would be best for me. So, I texted Kyle.

"Hey."

"Hey, what's up?"

"Um. Well. Remember prom night?"

"Hell yeah. That was awesome."

"Well. Fuck, Kyle. I don't know how to say this. We definitely should have used a condom... "

I stared at the screen, tears blurring my eyesight. My fingers trembled as I typed the last line and hit send:

"I'm pregnant."

Even though the message immediately showed it was read, there was no response from Kyle after that. So after six continuous hours of the hardest sobbing I've ever done in my life, I made the appointment for the abortion. Mom took me to the women's clinic and then held me as I cried for the next several months. I mourned for my innocence lost, the life that was lost, and most of all, the guilt and shame that consumed every molecule of my existence. And that's the first time I truly and utterly wanted to die.

Jordan's Story
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Chapter One

Eighteen Months Later…

The first semester at Silver County Community College went pretty well, all things considered. I hadn't stood a chance against Johns Hopkin's slim acceptance rate after my grades tanked during my senior year, including my projected path to Valedictorian. So, I had enrolled in the two-year LNA program and just focused on the travel nurse gig and one day being able to get the fuck out of Marion. Everything here was boring. Fortunately, or unfortunately depending on how you looked at it, SCCC was only a 30-minute drive from home. I didn't have to waste a single penny on housing. But that also meant that I got to live with mom and her new boyfriend, *Chad* for two more years. Eye roll. Chad was ok I guess, but he was just boring. My mom met him at a state auditing conference. There was lots of talk about numbers at the dinner table each night. I wanted to scream every time one of them mentioned the phrase, "financial statements."

On the weekends, I still worked the same job I'd had since high school – Aunt Linda's shop, Second Chance Antiques, here in town. It sold various old knickknacks, as well as electronics and vehicle parts. My Aunt Linda was my mom's older sister, and she was awesome. Linda and Leah were night and day. Where my mom was precise, calculating, and a little scary, Aunt Linda was all rainbows and unicorns. Linda was extremely lucky that my mom did her taxes and had a better sense of business. Together, they kept that store running and kept Linda out of jail for accidental tax fraud.

Between classes, homework, and work-work, my social life was non-existent. But that was ok. Senior year had been pretty depressing, with my thoughts continuously falling back to what went down with Kyle that previous spring. I never saw him, thank God, thanks to vocational school that had fast-tracked him to being an auto mechanic. And dating was the last thing on my mind after all that trauma with the abortion.

Driving home from final exams, I noticed a car crookedly sitting in the middle of the road on a patch of ice, not five minutes from home. I pulled my Subaru Outback off

to the shoulder, and a rush of dread filled my stomach as I gazed at the grey Honda Civic. From what I could see, a deer was most of the way under the passenger side of the vehicle. The entire front right corner of the car was crushed, and there was blood and bits of hair all over the fender and out into the road. Just as I was processing what I was seeing, Kyle swung open the door and climbed out. He appeared unharmed.

"Fantastic." I murmured to myself as I unbuckled my seatbelt. I zipped up my coat and strode over in the cold to the ruined vehicle and what was left of the deer. "Are you ok?"

Kyle jumped when he heard my voice.

"Shit! Jordan, did you see that thing! It just came out of nowhere and then I skidded on the ice to get around it!"

"Are you hurt?" My eyes swept over Kyle and then the deer. The deer definitely did not make it. "Do you want me to call 911?"

"NO!" Kyle reached out his hand to stop me from dialing. I raised an eyebrow at him. "I mean, no thanks. I'm just going to get it towed. I can call my uncle."

"You sure?" I asked, confused as to why he was being sketchy in the aftermath of an intense automobile accident.

"Yeah, um. I'm fine and the car just needs a little reconstruction on the front end. I can do it."

I looked at the deer. "What about him?" The poor buck laid to the side, body mangled.

"Oh, um. Don't suppose you want to help me drag it off the road?"

I sighed and was about to roll up my sleeves when a massive black pickup truck approached. The truck slowed to a stop in front of us and began to back up.

"Hey man, do you need help?" One of the Hawthornes from the house across the street from mine jumped out. Nathan… or maybe Nick or Nolan – I couldn't remember. There were so many of them. They all had N names, and all had some shade of ginger hair courtesy of their mom. Nancy and Neil Hawthorne had half a dozen kids, and they'd all been homeschooled and helped run their family farm, especially after Neil was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and his tremors kept him from doing a lot of the manual work.

"Hey Noah, thanks I appreciate it, buddy."

Noah. Right. He was the oldest one.

"…Wanna help me lift this thing and get it off the road? I think if we drag him into the woods, the coyotes will take care of the rest." Kyle seemed relieved to have someone else there who wasn't me.

"Sure man, I'll grab the back legs if you wanna grab the front." The two men hauled the deer a little ways into the woods and walked back to their vehicles, panting and smeared in blood. "I can tie a rope to your front axle and pull you the rest of the way, if you want to leave the car at your house," Noah offered to Kyle.

"Thanks, that would be great, actually."

"No problem. Are you riding with Jordan? I'd take you, but I already have too much stuff in the passenger seat. Christmas stuff."

Kyle looked panicked, "Oh right," as he turned to me, eyes pleading.

"Yeah, ok. Get in." I said as I opened my driver's side door. I didn't wait for Kyle to buckle before driving him to his house.

Awkward tension permeated the air in the car on the thankfully short drive. "Look, about last year," Kyle started.

I furrowed my brows as I gripped the steering wheel. "What about last year, Kyle?" I felt my stomach turn over.

"I, I…." Kyle looked down at the blood staining his hands. "Look, I'm really sorry." Wow. Just wow. An apology – a year and a half too late. I was fuming.

I pulled into Kyle's driveway, breaking harder than I intended. I twisted in my seat to face him. "Do you know what it's like to have an abortion, Kyle?" He froze; eyes filled with shame as he continued to stare at his hands. Hot tears threatened to burst from my eyes as I opened my mouth to speak, but just then Noah pulled up next to us with the busted Civic towing behind.

Kyle finally looked at me briefly as he opened the door and stepped out. I glared at him as he mouthed, "I'm sorry," to me before he walked back and started helping Noah with the car. Without saying a word, I peeled out of the driveway without looking back.

That evening, my phone buzzed with a text from Kyle.

"I'm SO sorry. I was an ass."

I put my phone down and grabbed my new library book. My phone buzzed again. I glanced over at it.

"I was seventeen! I was scared. My uncle would have killed me if he found out."

I paused to think if I wanted to block his number.

"I was a jerk, and I should have been there for you."

I opened the book to the first chapter.

"What can I do to make it up to you?"

I slammed the book shut and grabbed the phone and placed it on Do Not Disturb. I turned out my light, laid down, and closed my eyes. After hours of tossing and turning, I finally fell asleep and dreamt of blood, car wrecks, and Kyle.

In the morning, mom went to the store to run some last-minute errands while I assembled the Christmas tree in the living room. Mom and I had been team fake tree for years now. Less mess. Less drama. I took out the gifts that I needed to wrap for her and Aunt Linda, who we'd be seeing later on at dinner along with my grandparents who were visiting from Tahoe City, when there was a knock at the front door. Figuring it was my aunt arriving early, I flung the door open with a smile. It was Kyle. My smile vanished.

"What are you doing here?" I hissed. Did he walk here?

Kyle held out a potted poinsettia. "Peace offering?"

I looked down at the red and white flowers and let out a shaky exhale. "Fine. Come in if you want. But if my mom sees you here, she will literally kill you." I said. I walked into the kitchen with him in tow, and I set the plant down on the table. After a few seconds of silence, I took a few deep breaths and finally said, "It's my favorite plant, thank you. I mean, it's my birth month flower. I love these. You shouldn't have gotten me this."

"You're welcome. I just…Wait, when's your birthday? I thought it was a Christmas-y plant."

I sighed. "It is. My birthday was last week."

“Oh.” He looked at me awkwardly, like he just realized for the first time that he knew absolutely nothing about me. He ran a nervous hand through his hair. “Jordan. I should have been there for you last year. I’m really sorry, and I know you’ll never forgive me. I was such a dick.”

Regret filled me as he slumped into a chair at the kitchen table. I could tell that coming here took everything he had in him. I pulled out the chair next to him and sat down. “It’s ok… We’re different people now. I forgive you for ghosting me when I told you I was pregnant.” I still gave him an angry look, just for emphasis.

His eyes shot up and met mine. “What, really? Jordan, I’m not expecting you to forgi–”

“Kyle, just listen,” I interrupted. “We were seventeen. I wasn’t thinking straight. All those meds I was on made my head weird, and you were super drunk. It was an accident. A really, REALLY unfortunate accident.”

“Yeah, I was like, wayyy drunk that night. I may have puked in your driveway when I left,” he confessed. Then he paused for a bit, looking unsure if he wanted to say the next thing, “There hasn’t been anyone since you, you know.”

“What? I thought…?”

“I was pretty hung up on you for a while. I mean, I messed around with a few girls here and there, but…”

I put my hand up to stop him. “I don’t want to know.” Of course there were other girls. Kyle was gorgeous, and he was even more gorgeous these days now that he looked more like a man. He must have shot up at least two more inches, and his chest and arms were all broad and muscle-y. Oh god, was I ogling him? *Snap out of it, you idiot!*

Kyle laughed. “Well yeah. I guess I just haven’t found anyone I liked quite as much as I like you.”

I looked at him and shook my head. “But, I’m nobody.”

“But you’ve always been somebody to me.”

Kyle’s words were doing strange butterfly things to my stomach. “Kyle, I…”

“Give me another chance, Jordan. Please. Let me make it up to you.” His eyes seemed hopeful.

“Kyle, my mom would absolutely kill me. She hates you.” I remembered how I had to BEG her not to call Kyle’s uncle (or the cops), the night we left the hospital.

Kyle sighed, “Well. I guess I’ll just have to be extra nice to the both of you now.” He reached over and squeezed my hand. I felt a jolt of nerves travel up my arm.

I smiled. Could I really give Kyle another chance at being a decent person? I mean, we were nineteen now – no longer dumb high school kids. I decided to think on it. I stood up and motioned to the doorway. “We have people coming over soon, and I have to finish wrapping some gifts.” We slowly headed towards the front door. “And thank you for the poinsettia. Truly, those are my favorite flowers.”

“Ha really? Lucky guess then!” He leaned over and kissed my cheek so quickly that I barely had time to register it. “I’ll text you tomorrow.”

Heart hammering in my throat, I shut the door. *Ugh, what is wrong with me!?* Why did that boy, that man, have me so much power over me? I put my hand to my cheek over the spot where his lips had quickly brushed my skin. My mom was actually going to kill me this time.

The holidays passed by, and the second semester started. Kyle managed to wiggle his way into my stupid brain. He had a knack for distracting me when I should have been reading and studying. After class, after work, when mom was gone, Kyle was at my house. It started out with just chatting and maybe drinking a wine cooler or two. He’d usually walk here, climb through my bedroom window that faced the back of our house, and climb back out before mom’s alarm went off for work. My school work was slipping, because Kyle was busy teaching me all sorts of ‘other’ things. I told him I wanted to take things slow, but it turned out that his definition of slow was much different than mine. We were having full blown sex nearly every day despite what happened junior year. Even Aunt Linda was annoyed with me when all I’d do at work was look at my phone or stare off into space instead of helping customers. It was a problem. I was becoming Kyle’s plaything.

Our wall of secrecy came crashing down the night after finals, when mom came home early and caught him sneaking out the bedroom window. Honestly, I don’t know how we hadn’t gotten caught sooner – we were getting sloppy. His repaired Honda Civic sitting in the driveway was also another big tell. I hated how much it angered my mom,

but I tried to reassure her that it was two years since the 'incident' happened, and that Kyle was totally different now. Besides, we were both legal adults.

Things remained tense with mom after that, and Kyle and I ultimately decided we should start looking for our own apartment. It crushed mom when we signed a lease for July 1st. I think she wasn't expecting me to leave the nest so soon, *especially* to live with Kyle. But Chad lived at the house now, so I didn't think she'd be too lonely. At least that's what I told myself to deal with the guilt I felt for moving out.

Now that he'd graduated with his Automotive certificate and had a decent job at the Toyota dealership, Kyle was able to pay the majority of the rent on our new place. I was excited to continue nursing school, having salvaged my spring grades, and I was back on track to becoming a travel nurse. Kyle would often catch me daydreaming about all the places in the US I wanted to apply for contracts at. I wanted ALL the things. The cities, the nature, and all the different people. My mom and Aunt Linda were even starting to warm up to the fact that I had a boyfriend… as long as he didn't come into the store to distract me. I was the happiest I'd been in two years. That was, until I got pregnant for the second time.

Untitled Story
© Author Name
Publishing Robins 2026
Publication sample

Chapter Two

I felt like my body was being ripped apart from the inside out – and I wasn't even close to giving birth yet. No one talks about the excruciating pain radiating from your abdomen, or the fact that each breast feels like it is being squeezed in a vice. They talk about the nesting – the picking out bassinets, the trips to the hardware store for the perfect color nursery room wall paint. But we lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and our lease didn't allow us to repaint the walls, or even nail anything up for that matter. I managed to find a few stick-on animal decals for the wall opposite our bed, where the baby would sleep.

Instead of being happy about the baby coming like I should have been, my anxiety and depression were ramping up at full speed. Not to mention the brain fog. I was trying to keep up with my classes and schoolwork, but my focus was nonexistent, rendering it impossible to absorb any information. In other words, I was failing both biology *and* chemistry.

In a last-ditch effort to salvage my grades, I emailed both of my professors to see if there was anything they could do to help me pass. They both wrote back saying I needed at least Bs on my final exams to pass each class. Aunt Linda was graciously allowing me to take as much time off from work as I needed to let me focus on school. She even hired little Nellie Hawthorne part time to cover my missing shifts.

The date of the exams came and went… and so did my twentieth birthday. I didn't even get to enjoy my birthday cake because I was so nauseated from the pregnancy and the worry about my final grades. I stood at the kitchen table and opened my email on my laptop to see that the grades were finally posted. I had failed both exams, and thus both classes.

I couldn't breathe. I was five months pregnant, and I had just failed out of my nursing program. I slowly walked to the sofa, sat down, and began to cry. By the time Kyle came home from work later that night, my hands and face were feeling numb and tingly, and I had severe chest pains.

“Hey, baby. Whoa, you don’t look too good,” Kyle said as he walked into the apartment.

“I… don’t?” Sheer panic gripped me further as I processed his observation.

“No, you’re white as a ghost.”

“I-I… I failed Biology. And Chemistry. I needed those classes for the program. I think I’m going to get kicked out.” I started choking as I throat tightened and I gasped for air.

“No you won’t. It’ll be fine. You can just retake them in the spring.”

“Kyle, you don’t understand! I needed to maintain a passing GPA for the program.”

“Baby, it’ll be ok,” he sat down beside me and started rubbing my back and kissing my neck.

I looked up at him, irritated. “Where were you? It’s almost nine.”

“It’s fine. I just had to run a few errands.”

He was unbuttoning my shirt now and I swatted his hand away. “Cut it out! You smell like weed. We were supposed to have dinner together.”

He stepped back, looking slightly offended. “We can still have dinner! What do you want?”

“I want a supportive boyfriend that comes home on time and doesn’t stop to buy *drugs!*”

“I didn’t buy drugs!”

“Then why do you smell like them!”

“I DON’T smell like DRUGS Jordan, for Godsakes! Don’t be CRAZY!”

“DON’T tell me what I smell! And I know when you’re LYING!”

“How!?”

“Because you lie. All. The. God. Damned. Time.”

“Fuck you, you crazy bitch!”

“FUCK YOU KYLE!” I stood there frozen and shaking.

He reached into his front pocket to pull out a pack of cigarettes and a lighter. He slowly put one of the cigarettes to his lips and lit it with a slight tremor in his hands. He took a long drag, stepped in front of me and blew the smoke directly into my face. I winced as the sharp chemical smell burned my nostrils. I absolutely HATED the smell of

Jordan Storm Sample
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cigarettes. They reminded me of someone I knew a lifetime ago. “Go have another abortion, Jordan. You’re too fucked up to have a kid. All you do is sit around crying and having panic attacks every fucking day.”

I let out a blood-curdling scream, and Kyle stormed out, slamming the door so hard it shook the wall. I wanted to break something, to hurt something. Instead, I just curled up in a ball on the floor and waited for it to swallow me whole.

I didn’t know how long I laid on the living room rug, shaking and sobbing, before I heard a loud knock on the door.

“Who is it?” I slowly stood up and walked into the entryway.

“Police. We received a call about a woman screaming. We want to make sure everything’s ok in there. Please open the door ma’am.”

Shit. Of course someone in the apartment building called. I had just been screaming bloody murder and sobbing.

I opened the door, tears streaking down my puffy red face. “I’m sorry.” I took a long, ragged breath. “It was just me. I was screaming. I’m really sorry.”

“May we come in, ma’am?”

“Sure, if you want.” I was too tired to care at that point.

“I’m officer Murphy, and this is officer Sullivan. We’re just doing a welfare check to make sure you’re ok. Would we be able to sit down with you?”

“Sure. Let me just clear off the kitchen table.” I walked over to the table and closed my laptop that was still open to my class grades. I motioned for the officers to take a seat before sinking into the nearest chair.

Officer Murphy sat down and took out a small pad of paper and a pen. “May I have your name please?”

“Jordan Kennedy.”

“Thanks, Jordan. How old are you?”

“Twenty.”

“Thank you. Is anyone else here in the apartment?”

“Not right now, no.” I was surprised at how sad and defeated that sounded.

“What seems to have been the problem tonight?”

“I just… I just have really bad anxiety, and I had a fight with my boyfriend, and he stormed out. That’s all. I’m sorry for all of this.”

"May we get his name, too?"

"Yeah, Kyle Porter."

"Did Mr. Porter hurt you in any way tonight?"

I sucked in a shaky breath as more tears streamed down my face. "No. I just… I just…"

"It's ok, Jordan, we're just trying to help." Officer Murphy sounded like he really meant it.

"I just think I'm *crazy*." I began to tremble.

"Crazy how?"

"Uh, I don't know. I'm really tired of all this. Sometimes… I just want to *die*." The last word was barely a whisper.

I noticed the officers exchanging a glance.

"Jordan. Do you ever feel like you want to hurt yourself?" Officer Sullivan stepped towards me; his face was filled with concern.

I met his gaze. "I, I don't know. Maybe? Yeah. But I don't know." My chin quivered and I felt another tear slide down my cheek.

Officer Murphy stood up, turned around, and walked towards the door, muttering a series of codes and commands into the radio on his shoulder. Officer Sullivan stayed standing next to me.

"Miss Kennedy, I think it might be best if we take you to the hospital tonight. There's really great resources there that can help you with what you're going through."

"Really? They can help me with all my anxiety?"

"Yep. Trust me. I know many, many people who have been just like you, and have gone there and gotten help."

"Ok… yeah, sure." This seemed like a really good idea all of a sudden, especially since I was currently commitment-free. Well, except for growing a tiny human inside my body. No more schoolwork to study for, and I didn't exactly see a boyfriend around right now to answer to. "Let me just get my purse." I grabbed my bag, a water bottle, and a portable charger for my phone. "Do you know how long I'll be at the hospital? Should I bring a change of clothes?"

"It varies. Pack whatever you'd like. The ambulance isn't here yet, so you have time."

“Ambulance?” That seemed a little dramatic.

Sure enough, when we got outside, an ambulance was waiting in the parking lot to take me to the hospital, lights flashing for the entire apartment complex to see.

“Oh, do I have to get into an ambulance? I can just drive there.”

“It’s standard procedure,” assured officer Murphy. “This here is my buddy, Dave, and he’s going to take good care of you. Hope you feel better, Miss Kennedy.” He gestured to an older EMT who had white hair, an impressive mustache, and a kind smile.

Dave came over and helped me up into the ambulance. He began strapping me to the stretcher. Once I was fully buckled in, Dave placed a thin blanket over my legs. Through the back window I could see the two police officers drive off.

“Is all this really necessary?” I was getting very nervous.

“Yup, we just wanna make sure you don’t fly out and hit your head if we go over a bump.” He laughed, and I forced a half smile in return.

When we arrived at the hospital, Dave helped me down from the ambulance and into a wheelchair that had been brought out by a middle-aged woman, who whisked me inside and into an elevator to take me to an upper floor. I was wondering how late it was. I should probably let Kyle know where I was. I selfishly hoped that he was beginning to worry about me.

“Oh, can you please get me my cell phone? I think it’s in my purse.”

“Sorry, ma’am. No cellphones allowed in this area.” The woman sounded like a robot. Apparently, there was no personality allowed in this area either.

“I’m not allowed to use my phone?” If I didn’t let Kyle know where I was soon, he’d be really angry. “Is there a phone here I can use instead?”

“No, ma’am. You can use the phone here once you’ve seen the doctor. Psychiatric ward policy. Here, please put these on.” She handed me a pair of paper scrubs. “You can go in there. An attendant will help you.”

“I don’t need help changing.” I protested.

“It’s standard procedure, ma’am.” It sounded like she had said that exact phrase a thousand times before.

Suddenly, I had a sinking feeling that this was more of a jail instead of a hospital. I felt a little betrayed by the two police officers. A staff member was waiting in the room when I entered. The room was cold, too brightly lit, and large. There was a desk, a computer, and a small printer in the corner. A stack of clear plastic boxes, lockers, and a small curtained off area for changing lined the back wall. Next to the desk was a large windowless door with a keypad next to it.

The attendant stood up from her desk and grabbed a clipboard and one of the boxes. “Please take everything off and place it in this box here. All your belongings will be kept safe in one of these lockers. You can go behind the curtain if you prefer more privacy.” Yep. This was most definitely a jail. I felt dehumanized.

I bent down to untie my sneakers first. “Even these?” My voice sounded small in this sterile room.

“Yes, ma’am, especially those. We’ll give you some nice socks to wear.”

I took off my shoes, went behind the curtain, and stripped down to my bra and underwear and looked down at my swollen belly. I peeked around the curtain at the attendant, who was watching me as I motioned towards my abdomen. “I’m pregnant.”

“We’ll note that in your chart, ma’am.”

“I just didn’t want you to think I’d just eaten two large pizzas all by myself.” My horrible attempt at humor landed flat. It was late and my overnight… guard… didn’t seem amused. I scrambled to put my tissue paper scrubs on. She handed me some socks with rubber nubs on the soles that she had pulled out from one of her desk drawers. Yep, this was definitely jail.

When I emerged from behind the curtain, she took the box and put it in one of the lockers, and then handed me the clipboard on her desk. There was a small pen attached to it by a thin string. “Please sign here and confirm your name and date of birth.” I signed away my belongings to the safe box, and the guard printed me a bracelet with my information on it from the small printer on the desk and placed it around my wrist. The bracelet was tight, and I could feel it dig into my skin.

“Any allergies?”

“Cats and peanuts.” Were they planning on giving me dinner? It had to have been at least 11pm and I hadn’t eaten anything since the bagel I’d grabbed this morning. God, that seemed like days ago at this point.

The guard put the clipboard on the desk. She punched some numbers into the keypad and opened the door. “Come through here please.” I walked through the door and into an open area, the guard following behind. The door closed behind us with a loud click and an audible beep. “Your room is down this hall on the left. Room 506. You’ll be sleeping here tonight. The night staff and I are here to help in case you need anything.”

“Wait!” I stopped and turned around to face her. “Sleeping?”

“Yes ma’am. This is an in-patient facility, and we cannot let you go until you’re evaluated by the doctor. He will be here in the morning. He works 9-5.”

“I can’t sleep here! I need to go home! My boyfriend doesn’t even know I’m here!” My mind was racing and I started feeling dizzy and nauseous.

“From what I gather,” the guard lowered her voice and leaned in a bit, “your *boyfriend* is part of the reason you’re here.” She gave me a knowing look, mixed with what seemed to be pity, and put her hand on my shoulder. “Take the night off from him. You’ll be able to use the phone in the morning.”

Apparently, my fight was now common knowledge. I shoved the embarrassment down. A half-whispered “ok,” was all I could muster.

“There’s a bathroom through that blue door over there, with a cupboard filled with toothbrushes and toiletries. Let me know if you need anything else. I’ll be here at this desk all night.” She gestured off to the right. “My name is Amy, and I’m a licensed counselor here.” Oh. So not a guard. But still kind of a guard.

“Thanks.” I watched Amy walk over to her station. Was I the only patient here tonight? It was eerily quiet. Maybe everyone else had already gone to bed. I went into the bathroom and found some toothbrushes and mini tubes of toothpaste. No floss or mouthwash though. I finished brushing my teeth and looked at myself in the mirror. My dark blonde hair was a mess, my eyes were bloodshot, and my skin was all blotchy from crying. I felt like I was swimming in my paper scrubs, and they were itchy and uncomfortable. I lifted my shirt up to look at my torso, and I cradled my belly. “Five more months.”

I walked to my room and sat on one of the two beds. There were two thin blankets and a small pillow on each one. I looked up and noticed a security camera mounted up in the corner. I halfheartedly waved and lay down, letting out a big sigh. At

least I could be thankful for the pregnancy hormones that left me exhausted no matter what. Even through pangs of hunger, I fell asleep fast.

Jordan's Story
Advanced Sample
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Chapter Three

I awoke abruptly to a man screaming somewhere nearby. Jumping out of bed, I tiptoed slowly out into the hall. I could see him lying on a couch in the open area, staring up at the ceiling and yelling obscenities at the fluorescent light overhead. Amy didn't seem concerned enough to bother him, so he just continued to shred his vocal cords. Welcome to the psychiatric ward, I guess.

Still sleepy, I walked back into my room, closed the door, and laid down on my bed. I closed my eyes and was asleep again within seconds.

Sometime later, a hand on my foot made me jolt awake.

"Good morning, Jordan. My name is Melissa. I thought you might like to come down and get some breakfast. It's already ten o'clock, but I thought I should wake you before your food is sent back to the kitchen."

I sat up. "Ten!?" Kyle would be so worried about me by now. And angry. My stomach growled loudly. That's right, I didn't have dinner last night. Because Kyle had come home late, and then we started to–

"Come this way." Melissa said, thankfully interrupting my spiraling thoughts, and led me to the common area which included a kitchen table and chairs. There was a young man sitting at the table drinking an orange juice. His eyes were looking at something far away.

I sat down at the end of the table in front of a tray that read, "JORDAN KENNEDY. PEANUT ALLERGY. PREGNANT." On my tray was a box of orange juice with a straw attached, a carton of white milk, yellow plastic-looking eggs, some sort of sausage link, two pieces of hard toast… and a packet of peanut butter. I actually just felt kind of bad for the security staff. They went to great lengths to make sure I didn't hang myself with my shoelaces last night, but then some kid making minimum wage in the kitchen would be the one to make me go into anaphylactic shock. I laughed to myself and tossed the peanut butter packet off the tray.

"Hey," said the guy at the other end of the table, as he waved at me.

"Hi," I responded with my mouth full of fake eggs, but I was starving so I didn't give a shit. I poked the little plastic straw into my orange juice box and took a swig. Sweet. WAY too sweet. Were they trying to poison me AND give me gestational diabetes? I swallowed, feeling the juice and lumpy eggs slide down my throat. "What's with the guy yelling over there?"

"Oh, that's just Benny. He's always like that." *Always?*

"How long have you been here?" I tried not to sound concerned.

"A week? Maybe a little longer." *A week!?* My hands started feeling clammy. "I'm Chris. I tried to kill myself. It didn't work."

Talk about an ice breaker. "Oh. I'm sorry. I'm Jordan." I tried thinking of something comforting to say back to him about his unexpected introduction. "I'm… sorry you tried to kill yourself."

"Yeah, no worries. That's why we're all here, right?" Chris chuckled and shrugged. Realization hit me smack in the chest. "I didn't try to kill myself." I said, offended.

"Oh." Chris said, getting up from the table and grabbing his tray. "Ok, see you later." *Later!? Oh no. No, no, no. Not later*. I needed to leave immediately. I got up, almost knocking my tray off the table, and went over to where Melissa's station was.

"Hi, can I please have a pink tablet for my stomach? I'm nauseous. I'm pregnant. And also some drops for my eyes. I accidentally slept with my contacts in last night, and my eyes are super dry. I didn't think to bring my glasses.

"I'm sorry, we're not allowed to give you any nausea medicine until you've met with the doctor, but I can find some drops for your eyes." Melissa said. I wondered where Amy was, and if they had compared notes about me already. Of course they had.

"Then I need to see him now. I have to get some medicine. And I have to leave. I feel horrible, and I need to go home."

"Let me look to see if you're scheduled to meet with him today." *TODAY!? WHAT!?* Melissa clicked through something on her computer. "Oh good! Looks like he was able to schedule an appointment with you today." *Phew*. "It's at 4pm." *What*.

"Four?" My heart sank and my throat tightened. I couldn't even get a Pepto tablet, let alone make a phone call, until after I spoke with the doctor. My stomach turned over.

"Yes. You're welcome to any of the games and art supplies in the common room until then. Oh, and here," she opened a cabinet drawer next to the computer desk. "For your eyes." She handed me a small bottle of artificial tears.

I thanked her and went back to my room. I sat on the bed and looked up at the clock. 10:35am. I shook the little bottle, poured a few drops into each eye, and blinked. This was going to be a very long day.

A little while later I went out into the common area where 4 different men sat. Besides Chris and Benny, there were two others. One looked like a homeless guy, with a long grey beard and greasy, unkempt hair. The other one was a guy with dreadlocks and a gnarly looking scar that snaked from his wrist to his elbow. He and Chris were playing a card game. The grey-bearded guy was reading a book, and Benny, having finally stopped yelling, was looking catatonic on the couch. Everyone wore the same blue paper scrubs as me.

Feeling suddenly self-conscious that I was the only woman here, I went to find the art supplies. I wouldn't ever call myself an artist even though I was a huge fan of art, but the feeling of paint soothed me. I made myself a little painting nook in the corner and splashed the non-toxic watercolors around on the paper with a small plastic brush, until it was time for lunch.

Lunch was similar to breakfast, except now all five of us were at the table together. I learned the names of the two other guys – Robert and Tom. Robert in fact *was* homeless, and social services was apparently trying to find housing for him. Tom had been found in the woods with his arm splayed open like a gutted fish, as he so eloquently put it. And then there was Benny, who no one knew anything about, because he didn't speak at all. Except for when he would yell and scream. But then he'd just be yelling and screaming nonsense at no one in particular.

After lunch, I tried to kill some time by taking another nap. I was just starting to wake up when I heard a knock on my door. When I opened it, I saw Chris standing there, shifting a bit from one foot to the other.

"Hey, can I come in and sit down?" He asked. I noticed that far away daze was back in his eyes.

"Uh, yeah, sure." We each awkwardly sat on a separate bed, and I turned towards him. "Are you ok?" I said.

“Yeah. I just…” he giggled. “I get a little woozy after med-time, and I have a hard time focusing on cards.”

“Med-time?”

“Yeah, didn’t they give you Xanax too? I figured that’s why you were napping.”

“No, I’m pregnant. My body is working around the clock to build a human. I’m always tired.”

Chris smiled, “That’s cool.”

“It’s cool?” I couldn’t tell if he was being sincere.

“Yeah, I mean, that’s awesome. The ‘building a human’ thing.” He smiled.

“Oh. Yeah. I guess it is. But I guess it means now I can’t have meds?” We both giggled.

“Well, um. I think you seem really cool.”

“You do?” Unease swept through me as I realized his intentions for being in my room. I looked up at the camera on the ceiling. A couple seconds later, Melissa came storming in, as if on cue.

“Chris, you know you can’t be in any women’s bedrooms – we’ve talked about this!” She hissed.

“I must have forgot. Sorry! I’ll see you later.” He waved goodbye to me as Melissa swept him out.

I sighed and looked at the clock. 2pm. Two more hours. I laid back down.

Four O’clock FINALLY came, and I went to my appointment with Dr. Patel.

“How are you feeling today, Miss Kennedy?” Dr. Patel was a friendly looking older man. Time to charm him into that phone call, and into letting me out. And maybe a nausea pill or five.

“I’m feeling ok. Anxious, I guess. You can call me Jordan.” I shifted nervously, as my paper outfit crinkled against my chair.

“Can you tell me a little bit about your anxiety, Jordan?” he asked me in a kind voice. He must be a grandpa. Grandpas are notoriously friendly.

“Yeah, I just… I just failed school. And then I got in a huge fight with my boyfriend. And I’m pregnant, and I yelled at him. I think it’s the hormones.”

Jordan's Story
Revised Sample
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Dr. Patel looked down at his notebook and wrote something.

"Jordan, can you please tell me if you've ever wanted to harm yourself?"

I gasped, "No! I mean, I wouldn't – I'm pregnant." I placed my hand around my belly for emphasis.

"I see. And do you feel safe in your relationship at home?"

I paused to think about it. Sure, Kyle and I fought a lot, but that's probably just because of the current circumstances and stress from school and work. "Yeah, I think so." *Shit, I took too long to answer that question.*

Dr. Patel wrote something else down before he spoke again, without looking up from his notes. "I'd like you to stay one more night. The team is having a group therapy session in the morning, and I think it would be helpful for you to attend it. We'll meet again tomorrow afternoon and see how you're feeling then."

"What? Another night? I'd like to go home, PLEASE. Please. This is a mistake. Everyone is here because they tried to kill themselves, but that's not why *I'M* here." I began to shake and I looked towards him with pleading eyes.

His eyes raised up and met mine. "Then why are you here?" He asked softly.

I looked down at my hands, at the bracelet around my wrist, and began to sob. "I don't know." I let out a long, shaky breath. "I just don't know how to stop having all this anxiety."

Dr. Patel handed me the box of tissues that I now realized had been sitting in the middle of the table the entire time. This is what happened in this room. Appointment after appointment. I wondered what Dr. Patel felt like when he went home every day. I took the tissues and blew my nose, pathetically. I crumpled the tissue into a ball and squeezed it in my hand.

"Can I please use the phone tonight? I want to at least call my mom."

"Yes," he said, his kind smile reaching his eyes. "You should call your mom. She can even come visit you here if you'd like."

"I can have visitors?" I felt myself perking up a little.

"For right now, just your mom. She can stay for up to an hour, but no later than 8pm."

"Thank you." I sniffed, using the tissue ball to dab my nose.

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“See you tomorrow afternoon, Miss Ken- Jordan.” For some reason, him saying my name made me feel safe.

“Thanks, see you tomorrow Doctor….”

“Patel.”

“Doctor Patel. Thanks.” I walked out of the room and went back into my bedroom, tossing the tissue ball into the little garbage bin in the corner. I realized just how sticky I was and decided to try out the shower in the attached bathroom. The soap was cheap motel head and body soap, and there was no conditioner. There was only a small plastic comb, so I cut my losses and just let my hair air-dry in whatever clumps it wanted to arrange itself in. I put my paper scrubs back on and went to Melissa’s station to ask for the phone.

“Here you go. Dial 9 to get out.” She handed me a cordless phone. I thought back to what Chris had said this morning. Of course it was cordless.

I took the phone and sat on the couch. There weren’t too many people within earshot, and this looked like as good a place as any. I dialed mom first. As soon as she picked up the phone, I told her EVERYTHING.

“Jordan, you know I’m here for you if you ever want to talk about anything – even Kyle. I just want you to feel better.” Mom sniffled on the other end of the phone. She had been making her famous Christmas berry pies with Aunt Linda and Mrs. Hawthorne… and Chad… when I called.

“I guess I’m just so embarrassed… they took me to the *mental hospital* in an ambulance. I mean, it was so dramatic.”

“It was probably just protocol, to get you there safely. It’s nothing to be embarrassed about. Speaking of, do you want Aunt Linda and I to drop your car off for you in the hospital’s parking garage, so you’ll have it whenever you’re discharged?”

“Oh my god, I didn’t even think of that. And yeah, I have no idea when I’m going to get to leave this prison.” I laughed, feeling a bit stupid for not thinking about how I was going to get back to my apartment. “You are seriously the best.”

“*You’re* the best, Princess. You just get back to focusing on getting better.”
I sighed. “Thanks, mom.” A thought jolted me back to reality, “I guess I have to call Kyle now and explain to him why I’m here.”

“You don’t owe that boy an explanation for anything, honey.” Mom was stern. I knew that deep down, she still despised Kyle, and for good reason.

“Thanks, mom. I love you. Hopefully I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“I love you too, princess. Remember how strong you are. I’m so proud of you, my baby girl.”

“Thanks, mom. Bye.” I smiled to myself as I wiped away a tear. Mom always knew exactly how to make me feel better. I paused. I forgot to invite her to visit me at the hospital. Oh well. She’s busy making pies, and she’ll see me tomorrow anyway. Probably.

I dialed Kyle’s number. It rang six times and went to voicemail. I hung up without saying anything. He probably wasn’t picking up because he didn’t recognize the number. I waited five minutes and called again. Same thing. I hung up.

It was almost dinner time, so I gave Melissa the phone back and went to sit in the common area. Chris had just come out of his appointment with Doctor Patel.

“How’d it go?” I asked.

“Great! I get to leave now! He said all I have to do is take these 3 different meds every day that they put me on while I was here, and I’ll be all set.”

“Wow, really? That’s it?” I was skeptical.

“Yep! I’m going to get my stuff!” I watched as Chris nearly *skipped* down the hallway. I was very jealous that he got to leave.

A few minutes later, he walked by dressed in jeans, a white t-shirt, and a green corduroy jacket. He was wearing hiking boots. He looked… normal. I was suddenly extremely self-conscious.

“I wanted you to have this,” he handed me a piece of paper with his number scrawled on it. “Text me.” He winked as he turned and walked away.

I waited until I heard the door down the hallway beep, open, and latch close, before I stood up and tossed his number into the nearby trash can. Bye, Chris.

Dinner was quiet. I poked at something that vaguely resembled a shepherd’s pie. It smelled like it was made from an actual shepherd. I was hungry for mom’s Christmas berry pie. Not this slop. I forced myself to take a few bites and then heard some kind of commotion down the hall. We all turned our heads to the sound. A young woman was

screaming, and there was a sound of something crashing to the floor. Nobody moved from their seats. I pretended to keep eating.

After dinner, I went to my room and found a stranger sitting on my bed. Amy was also there, standing just inside the door. Apparently, the night shift had begun again.

“Jordan, this is your new roommate – Sloane.”

Jordan's Story
Advanced Sample
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