

Chapter One - Long Before I Knew What Love Costs

I remember the first time pain taught me who I was.

It was a Friday in SS1, in a field that smelled of dust and smoke. We were playing - or pretending we weren't afraid. Me and MJ, testing gravity in a place where dirt and refuse were burned. An incinerator stood there, silent, daring us to jump.

I was 13 then, though I never told anyone my age. Some things are better left as a mystery.

We jumped once. Our ankles screamed. MJ stopped. I didn't.

"Just one more," I said.

He dared me to close my eyes.

I shouldn't have.

The fall was faster than thought. Faster than warning. Mid-air, I opened my eyes - and then the world broke me. My knee slammed down. My hand folded beneath it. Something inside gave way.

Bones break loudly - but the moment after is quiet. Too quiet.

I carried that same softness into everything that came after.

By the time I reached JSS3, life had grown more complicated.

HIPS was there - always there. Classmate since JSS1, familiar face in crowded classrooms, easy smile that made the quiet boy feel seen.

I started joking that I liked her. Careless words, lighthearted. But deep down, it was true. I was drawn to her in a way I couldn't explain. Her eyes, the way she moved, the way she didn't notice me as much as I noticed her - all of it caught me.

When I finally said it properly, she said no. Harshly. Certain. I didn't understand why. I still don't.

I should have stopped. I shouldn't have chased. But love doesn't work that way.

Even though there was someone else - someone closer, safer, better - my heart was already leaning toward HIPS. And so, I chased.

For months. Through exams, long walks home, late-night texts. Shy boy, only brave behind WhatsApp messages. And then, one day, she sent me a text. She liked me back.

We never officially dated. We never named it. But somehow, it became us.

The first person I told was Shannon. And I didn't know yet that my heart was about to meet betrayal.

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Chapter Two - Chasing Shadows

JSS3 felt heavier than I expected. Exams loomed, the school corridors smelled of chalk and tension, and yet, there she was - HIPS - calm, playful, always moving like the world hadn't yet caught up to her.

I started small. Words whispered behind books, jokes tossed in passing, careful glances that I hoped she noticed. My heart hammered every time she laughed, every time she tossed a playful remark back at me. She didn't know how close I was. I didn't dare tell her yet.

Some days, she seemed distant. Calm and unreadable. Other days, playful, teasing me just enough to make me feel alive and foolish all at once. It drove me crazy. I wanted to confess, to leap from my quiet world into hers, but shyness kept my words trapped.

And yet, I didn't stop.

Months went by. Texts that were casual became longer, more personal. Every "good morning" and "good night" was a small victory. She had no idea how much I counted each one.

Through all this, JH - the back-and-forth chaos of my life - existed in the shadows. We weren't close, just a pattern of breakups and reconciliations that left me tired and uncertain. Compared to her, HIPS felt steady, real, something worth holding onto.

Then, one night, after the exams were over and the world felt unusually quiet, my phone buzzed.

A message. From HIPS.

"I like you too."

I stared at it longer than I should have, heart thundering, mind racing. We never named it. We never announced it. But something shifted. The chase ended, and a fragile, quiet closeness began.

I told Shannon first - my best friend. It felt safer that way. And I didn't know yet, not then, that this closeness was only the beginning. The first cracks, the betrayals, and the heartbreak were still waiting in the shadows.

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Chapter Three - When Shadows Grew

It wasn't sudden.

Things had been... off for a while, though I didn't want to see it. Small cracks at first - a laugh that didn't quite reach her eyes, a reply that came a little later than usual, a joke that felt lighter than it should. I told myself I was imagining it. I wanted to believe it.

Then came the school break. The last day of term slipped by too fast. Desks were cleared, classrooms emptied, corridors echoing with steps that weren't hers. I walked home slowly, phone in hand, hoping for a message, waiting for the small things that had always felt like lifelines.

Even in the quiet of my room, I could feel her absence pressing in, like the world had forgotten to keep her here. And The Jiggy Man - always

close, brotherly, constant - moved through the days like nothing had changed, unaware of the storm building quietly around me.

We spoke as usual. Texts, small jokes, bits of life shared across a screen. But something lingered in every word, a shadow I couldn't name. I tried to ignore it. I didn't want to think.

And then... the words came. Simple, quiet, almost ordinary.

"Is there something I should know?"

I paused. Surely this was nothing. A joke, a misunderstanding. My heart didn't prepare me for what came next.

Her reply was quick, soft:

"I'm sorry."

I laughed at first. Nervous, hollow, because the thought of it being real was too heavy. Surely she couldn't mean it.

But then she typed again, slowly, almost reluctantly:

"I'm sorry about the kiss. I didn't know when it happened."

The world stopped.

Silence. Shock. Confusion. A weight pressing down on my chest that laughter couldn't lift.

I laughed again, absurdly, because my mind refused to believe it, because maybe if I laughed long enough, it would vanish. But when the laughter ran out, tears came unbidden, and the nights stretched endlessly.

Even after the storm of disbelief, my love didn't vanish. And somehow, my feelings for him didn't either. The Jiggy Man stayed close, brotherly, unshakable. And yet, something fragile had shifted.

We didn't break up. We stumbled through better days and worse. She seemed unhappy, but insisted she wasn't at fault. And I... I wanted to believe her.

The shadows had grown long, stretching into every small moment we shared. And I knew, somewhere deep inside, nothing would ever be the same again.