

That Night

I've heard people say you never know what you have until it's gone.

I never really understood what that meant. I mean I thought I was always grateful for what I had, and I didn't need to lose it to know that I was lucky. I had a great family; I never had to worry about having food on the table or having to save my own money for college. I went to a nice school. I was happy and I knew how fortunate I was.

I think I understand now.

I've also heard people say you never know when you're going to see someone for the last time.

I don't necessarily think that one is as true. I understand that it's true in some cases but just not in mine. Not in Jessica's. I had a feeling that night. I couldn't explain it at the time, and I still can't but I knew something bad was going to happen. I told her that. I asked her not to go.

"I'm gonna go meet him now" she told me, putting on her converse.

"Are you sure you want to? It's kinda late." I asked looking at the clock on my phone.

"Relax, I'll be fine. This isn't the first time I'm doing this" she smirked.

"I know but I just have a bad feeling. I mean you can just stay here and cancel. We can watch a movie or something" I suggested.

"What do you mean? Why are you acting so weird?" She asked defensively.

"It's nothing, just forget I said anything" I said, brushing off the feeling in my stomach and hoping she's not that mad at me.

"No obviously it's something" she snapped, waiting for me to continue.

I sighed. There was no getting out of this. "I just feel like something bad is going to happen to you" I told her honestly.

"You don't think I can handle myself?"

"No it's not that. I just feel like what you're doing is dangerous."

"We've done worse things before, together."

"That's not what I mean, I'm not saying you're doing something bad. I'm just worried."

"You're being ridiculous, I'm just meeting him at the lake. I've done it before and I don't need you to worry about me." she said as she brushed past me towards the door.

"And you're my friend, not my mom. I don't need you judging my choices."

"I'm not judging you."

"You are. And I'm just trying to have fun this year. Sorry you don't want to do the same."

"Whatever, I'll see you later."

"Yes, you will."

That never happened.

It's been a year today and I still can't believe she's gone. People swear they've seen her since that night; around town, New York, Florida, Canada. I even thought I saw her wavy brown hair once, trying on sunglasses at the beach. It wasn't her.

Sometimes I think they might be right, that she's travelling the world. She always said she wanted to do that, and when Jessica said she wanted something, she always seemed to get it.

That's why it felt so special to be her best friend.

I put on some leggings and a sweatshirt, what I wear everyday now, and brush through my hair. I walk out my bedroom door, checking to make sure my necklace was still there. We wear them everyday. Wore.

"I know it's stupid, but I thought they were cute" she said as I set aside the card that said 'happy sixteenth' and focused on opening the small box in front of me. Silver shines back at me. I pull out the necklace with half of a heart attached that had the letters ST NDS engraved. "Here I have the other half" she said pulling out hers.

She put them together and formed the words 'BEST FRIENDS'.

"I love it, thank you" I said, giving her a hug.

"I can return them if you want. I know they may seem a little cheesy and childish" she said giving mine back to me.

"No, not at all" I respond with a smile. "I honestly love it."

"Good, I'm glad you do." She pauses for a second looking down at hers and back up. "I just know we'll be friends forever."

“Me too.”

“Bye mom” I say as grab my keys off the kitchen table.

“Leaving so soon?” she asks standing up from the chair she was in.

“Yes, can’t be late again. I already have two.” I retort, taking a granola bar out of the kitchen cabinet.

“Will you be home after school” she asks standing between me and the door. She always asks where I am and who I’m going with, texting me constantly. At least, for the last fourteen months anyway.

“Yes I’ll be home” I answer, stepping sideways and walking outside.

“Have fun at school, and be careful” she says standing at the door as I walk to my car in our driveway. “And I love you”.

“Love you too” I call back to her.

When I get to school and walk through the doors, I have to stop for a second. I look around and see everyone talking without a care in the world. It’s like they don’t even remember that there’s someone missing.

Obviously, when it first happened that’s all everyone talked about for months. Everyone wanted to know what happened to her. I can’t blame them because I did too. I still do. That was all people talked about the first few months.

"I'm so sorry about your friend" a girl with straight blonde hair said coming up to me. It was a week since that night and my first day back at school. I thought I remembered her from my chem class last year.

"Thanks" I said, closing my locker and trying to move past her.

"It's just so horrible, not knowing what happened to her" she sighed.

"Yeah, I have to get to class."

"The must be so hard, being the last to see her" she followed me down the hallway.

"Allegedly."

In the beginning, most people thought she had probably just run off somewhere. Some people eventually even started asking me where she went, but I never had an answer. As months passed, people began to accept she wasn't coming back, even though they never actually found her body. They all still speculate about that night, but either way they've stopped talking about it. It's old news for them.

I walk to my locker and put in the combination that I've had memorized for four years now. "Hey Han" I hear besides me as I turn to see Taylor. She's a good friend. She was friends with Jessica too.

"Hey" I reply grabbing some of my books from my locker.

"How's your day?" she asks.

"It's okay"

"I know it's a rough one" she asks seemingly nervous now.

"I'm fine" I say. She gives me a look. "Really, I am."

"Good, I am too" she says with a smile.

Just at that moment I see him walking down the hallway and suddenly I'm not fine anymore. Daniel. "Hey Taylor, Hanna" he says. He knows what I think about him.

"Hey Daniel" Taylor responds for the both of us. But I don't say anything.

"She told me she was going to the lake to meet Daniel" I told the police officer.

"And what was his relationship to the victim?" he asked as he wrote down my last answer.

"They were seeing each other."

"They were dating?" he asked with a scowl on his face.

"No not exactly, they weren't exclusively dating."

"Did she want to be 'exclusively dating'."

"I don't know."

"Did he and Jessica ever fight?"

"I think they might've. If I'm being honest, she didn't talk about him much." I answered. "Which was unusual."

"How so?"

"She told me everything."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes."

He almost keeps walking and then he stops. "Are you okay Hanna?" he asks. Before I could even respond he sighs loudly. "I know it's been a year since she went missing today, and I know that's hard for you, it's hard for me too." I see Taylor take a deep breath from the corner of my eye.

"You don't know anything about me" I respond calmly as I feel my heart beat out of my chest. I feel my fingers instinctively wrap around the half heart around my neck.

"I thought at this point you would realize you were wrong about me last year"

"I'm not wrong."

"She wasn't meeting me that night. I know that's what she told you and I'm sorry she lied to you, but I wasn't the only guy she was seeing."

"She never lied to me."

"I was working, like I told you last year and like I told the police. They checked the records."

"That doesn't mean you weren't there."

"And where were you that night?"

"Hanna we have to go now" Taylor states dragging me away from the conversation.

I know he has something to do with what happened to her. Maybe he killed her or maybe he helped her run away somewhere. It could've been an accident. I don't know. My other friends, and practically everyone else at school, think I'm crazy.

And he's here. He's going to Homecoming, applying to colleges, going to parties, and she's not.

“I don’t understand why he won’t admit what he did” I say to Taylor as we walk to first period.

“He might not have done anything Hanna” she responds. I ignore her and walk ahead.

The rest of the day goes by as they always do. I watch him through the classes we have together and the rest of the time I try to remember any of the conversations we had that Summer.

“Did Ashley tell you what happened last week?” she asked. We were suppose to be studying for our first french test, but that never really happened when we hung out to study.

“No what?”

“Well apparently she had to buy a pregnancy test but it was a false alarm” she said. “But you can’t tell anyone else. It’s suppose to be a secret.” Jessica always liked to gossip. I guess I did too.

“I won’t.” I responded, looking back at my paper with the vocab we needed to know.

“So what’s new with you?” she asked, distracting both of us again.

“Nothing much, and shouldn’t I be asking you that? You’re the one talking with a new guy.”

“Daniel? That’s nothing.”

“Really?” I asked in disbelief. She seemed to be texting him all the time.

“Yeah. Why are you asking about?”

“Well we’re best friends, and I haven’t really heard much about him from you. I just want to know how things are going.”

“There’s not much to know, we’re not dating.” she said looking down at her paper for the first time.

“You just seem to talk to him pretty often.”

“It’s nothing.”

That was really one of the only times she talked to me about him.

She usually told me everything about the guys she was talking to, and I did the same. I don’t really talk to many guys now. It’s not as fun when you don’t have someone to talk about it with.

I drive past her house on my way home. As I stop at the stop sign in front, for a split second I thought I saw her in her bedroom window. I turn back and realize I didn’t. A year ago I dropped her off there so she could get her car to come over my house. We used to spend all of our Friday’s after school together. That’s what we were doing that night.

When I finally get home, I put my bag down in the kitchen and I head up to my room. I dodge the clothes on the floor and lay down on my bed, looking at the picture frame on my nightstand of the two of us. It still feels like she’s everywhere all the time. It’s been a year and I still feel like I’m in the same place.

“Mom? What’s going on?” I asked, slowly opening my eyes. She never woke me up early on Saturdays.

“Honey, it’s about Jessica” she said worriedly.

I felt my stomach drop. The feeling from the night before had returned. “What’s wrong?”

“Have you talked to her last night or today?”

“The last time I talked to her was when she left last night. Did something happen?”

“Her parents can’t find her.”

“What do you mean?”

“She didn’t go home last night and she’s not answering her phone. They think she’s missing.”

I hear my mom call me for dinner, not realizing how much time I’ve spent laying here. That’s happened pretty often.

I try to do some of my homework but it’s pretty useless so instead I curl up in my bed.

When I wake up I don’t even realize I’ve fallen asleep. And that’s when I see her sitting in the chair across from my bed. At first I think that my eyes are just playing tricks on me. Like they did this afternoon or just about a million times in the past year. But when I blink she’s still there. Her brown hair, her blue eyes, the purple tank top she always used to wear. She’s right in front of me.

“How have you been?”

“Is this real?” I ask in disbelief. This has to be a dream. It’s been so long since she’s been in my dreams. I blink again and she’s still sitting there.

“It’s as real as you think it is.”

“This can’t be happening” I say sitting up.

“I’ve missed you so much Hanna” she says standing up and walking over to my bed.

“I need to wake up.”

“You are awake” she says reaching out and touching my hand. I haven’t felt her in a year. I feel my breathe hitch in my throat.

“What is going on, are you actually here?” I ask in complete disbelief.

“I’m here” she says sitting down.

“Are you alive?” I ask. She looks at me and smiles slightly, looking down. She doesn’t say anything.

“I can’t believe this, what happened to you?” I ask reaching out to her again. I feel her hand and everything feels so real. It’s like this past year hasn’t even happened. It’s like that was all a dream and this is the first real thing that’s happened, like I finally woke up.

“It’s like you said that night, something really bad happened to me.” she says looking back up at me, all traces of her smile gone.

“What was it?” I ask again.

“I’m not here to talk to you about that night.” she responds.

“Then why are you here?”

“You never realized but I’ve been here the whole time. I laughed at the amount of times you’ve passed me and haven’t even seen me standing there, right in front of you. I’ve been watching you this whole year.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’ve seen how hard you’ve fought for me. And you’ve constantly reminded me why we were best friends.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I know you think Daniel had something to do with it all. I know you’ve begged him to confess, and I really appreciate it.”

“So he really did have something to do with it?” I ask confused. I mean I’ve thought it this whole time, but no one else believed me. Finally I’m going to get the answer I’ve been waiting so long for.

“I never said that.”

“What?”

“I didn’t say he had anything to do with it.”

“So he didn’t?”

“I know how much you want to know what happened to me.”

“Can you tell me?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“It wouldn’t make a difference if I did.”

“Yes, of course it would.”

“I would still be gone.”

I feel my heart drop. My hand instinctively goes to that necklace again. I feel that lump in my throat again, and I don't respond. Jessica seemed to always be right.

“I'm gone. And I'm not coming back. Nothing you do will ever bring me back.”

She pauses waiting for me to say something. But I don't have anything to say. We sit there for what seems like forever.

“And you can't blame yourself for that” she says, standing up and walking towards the doorway to my room. She begins to walk out but then stops suddenly, and turns around one last time.

“I have to go now. For good. I love you Hanna and I always will.”

I open my eyes and immediately sit up looking around my room again. But she's not there. I look to the clock beside my bed. 5:30. I don't think I'll be able to fall asleep again. But that's okay because I have something to do.

I find myself at the foot of that lake with that half heart in my hand. I look at it one last time, and I smile. For the first time in just about a year, my heart doesn't feel like it's in my stomach and I feel like I can breathe. I close my eyes and throw it.