

jojo
moyes
after
you



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CHAPTER ONE

A voice in the dark

I watched the big man at the end of the bar staring nervously into his large glass of **wine**. It was a quarter to eleven on a Tuesday night and East City Airport's Irish pub, the Shamrock and Clover – which was about as Irish as Mahatma Gandhi – would soon close for the night. Right then, it was just me in my silly Irish green **uniform** and red **wig**, two laughing women at table two, and the man drinking wine. They were all waiting for the last two **flights**: either the SC107 to Stockholm or the DB224 to Munich, which was late to **board**.

I had been at work there since midday. Outside the bar, the airport shops were closing for the night and the lights went off at gates three, five and eleven. The two women heard the call for their flight to Stockholm and left.

I collected their glasses before looking up to see that the Munich flight was boarding, too. Then I noticed the drunk man's coat on the back of his empty chair. I walked quickly to the gentlemen's toilets and entered. The man was standing by the door and his face was white. "Is my flight boarding?" he asked.

"Yes, it's just been called," I replied. "You've probably got a few minutes."

The man looked up at me. "I've got to meet my new boss, and I can't do it," he told me. "I'm scared of flying."

“It sounds like an important meeting,” I said.

“Yes, I’ve been working for it for a long time,” he replied. “I’m sure that you’ve never seen an adult man act like this, have you?”

“About four times a day,” I answered. “And I always tell them that no flight from this airport has ever had an accident.”

“Really? Not one?” he said, surprised.

“Really. It’s quite boring. People fly off and come back again a few days later.”

He smiled. “You think that I’ll be OK?”

“You’ll be OK,” I said. “It’s like getting on a bus, but probably safer.”

“Thanks. What’s your name?”

“Louisa.”

“Louisa.” He looked at me. “You’re very kind. If I . . . I mean . . . Would you like to go for a drink sometime?”

“Your flight is boarding, sir,” I said, and I opened the door to let him through.

I arrived home at a quarter past one and let myself into the silent flat. I pulled a bottle of white wine out of the fridge and **poured** myself a glass. On a shelf opposite me were two cards. One was from my parents, wishing me a happy birthday. The other was from my sister Treena, **suggesting** that she come and stay for the weekend. It was six months old.

I finished the bottle and thought about buying another

one, but realized that what I really wanted was air. I opened the hall window and pulled myself out, then I carefully climbed the metal steps of the fire escape until I was on the roof.

The first time that I had been up there, nine months earlier, the **estate agent** had shown me how the last owners had made a small garden, with plants in pots and a wooden seat.

“It doesn’t actually belong to you,” the estate agent explained, “but no one else really uses it.”

The plants were dead now because I’m not good at looking after things. I stood on the roof staring at the lights of London. Around me a million people were living lives that were a thousand miles from mine. The city felt as foreign as it always had.

I **paused**, then took a step up on to the wall, my arms lifted on each side. After I first moved here, when Will’s death hit me the hardest, I once made myself walk all the way along the wall. When I reached the other end, I laughed and said aloud to him, “You see? I’m still here – staying alive – right on the edge. I’m doing what you told me to do!”

“Eighteen whole months. So when is it going to be enough?” I said now into the night, feeling the anger rising up. I took two more steps along, looking down at my feet, and began to cry again. “Because this doesn’t feel like living. You can go to **hell**, Will, for leaving me.”

And that’s when a voice said from the shadows said, “I don’t think that you should stand there.”

I turned and saw a small, white face on the fire escape as my foot missed the wall. Then, like a terrible dream, I was in the night air, my legs above my head as I heard myself scream.

And then all was black.

“What’s your name, **sweetheart?**” said a man’s voice. “I’m going to give you something for the pain.”

A hand gently felt around my head. I wanted to speak but there was blood in my mouth. A woman’s face appeared above me. She told me that her name was Donna.



“She’s got some **fractures**,” the woman said. “But her eyes and heart are OK. She’s lucky. What are the chances of falling on a **day bed**?”

The man put a hand on mine. It was dry and warm, and I didn’t want him to let go. He had kind eyes.

“Am I **paralysed**?” It came out as a whisper.

“What?” He moved his ear down to my mouth.

“Am I paralysed?”

He reached down and touched my foot. Pain shot up both my legs, and I cried out.

“You’re all right,” he said. “Pain is good. You’ve **fractured** your **hip** and your shoulder, but I don’t think that you’re paralysed.”

“Please don’t let go of me,” I whispered.

He moved his face closer. “I’m not letting go of you.”

I wanted to speak, but his face was disappearing. Then everything went black again.

Later, they told me that I fell on to a very expensive day bed that belonged to a lawyer in the flat two floors below mine. My hip was fractured and so was my shoulder.

I kept hearing the voice of the **paramedic** who treated me. I was, the doctors told me, very lucky. But I didn’t feel lucky. I didn’t feel anything.

I opened my eyes to find my mother and father at the end of my hospital bed.

“She’s awake, Bernard,” my mother cried. “Should we get the nurse?”

“Oh, it’s my mother,” I thought. “My mother doesn’t talk to me any more.”

She talked so fast that I couldn’t answer, but it didn’t seem to matter. All that I had to do was lie there.

“We came as soon as the hospital called us. Treena’s looking after Granddad. Oh love, what were you thinking?” Mum was crying now. “Oh, **thank God** she’s OK, Bernard.”

Dad looked down at me. “Of course she is. She’s like a football, this one.”

We had last spoken on the telephone two months ago, but I hadn’t actually seen my father for eighteen months, since I left Stortfold, my home town. He looked big and **familiar**, and very, very tired.

“Sorry,” I whispered.

They both **leaned** over me with worried faces.

“You look beautiful,” Dad said, and kissed my hand. He’d never done anything like that before.

I began to cry, realizing that they thought I might die. I shut my eyes and felt Dad’s large hand around mine.

“We’re here, sweetheart,” he said. “It’s all going to be OK.”