

What do you do when your world collapses around you? You wander. Aimlessly.

That's what Jessie was doing as she drifted through the streets, narrowly avoiding crowds. The bumps of shoulders were all too frequent. She didn't blame them for missing her; she never stood out. Always so discreet and small.

It was so easy for people to just... forget she existed, huh? From the way she dressed to the way she walked, Jessie was merely another dot in that made up the larger picture. Not important enough to be the center of the canvas. Nor, interesting enough for people to just stop and *look*.

She had never been the most confident person, but... she used to think she was enough. Her looks weren't exactly pageantry-tier, but she had thought herself pretty enough that she had a mousy charm about her, with her short brown locks and brown eyes.

...She never realized she was *this* plain.

Arthur certainly thought so.

He told her, in no uncertain terms, that he wanted to date other people. Right at the point where Jessie thought their relationship was progressing to the point where the next step was logical. Moving in together sounded right to her. They had fun, right? They were *good* together. Compatible.

She hadn't realized how much they had been drifting. How much Arthur had truly lost interest in her. She made the mistake of looking at his social media to see the kind of woman Arthur had left her for.

The shining golden locks, the beautiful smile, the absolutely stunning curves.

It devastated her. Now that she had something to compare, Jessie could see her own insignificance.

She wasn't even ugly; she was just... unimportant, beneath anyone's notice. A plain little thing, the vanilla of people. Jessie could get lost in that woman's shadow.

She had always stood behind people; Jessie came to realize. Always standing in the safe zone, never making waves, never doing *anything* of importance with her life. Forever kept her silence, even with the things she wanted. She lacked the confidence even to tell a waiter that they got her order wrong.

No wonder Arthur had left her.

She slipped through the crowds and into the alleyway, just so that she'd have a wall to lean against as she felt the world twist and turn while the ground crumbled around her. She held back a soft, unwilling to let herself cry out in public. Not that anyone would even notice her...

She took a deep breath, swallowing her grief and self-pity. God, what a pathetic sight she was.

She just wanted to get home and crawl into her bed, fall asleep until her pain was a memory.

But she was certain even her dreams would be filled with images of Arthur and that *gorgeous* woman.

Jessie sighed to herself, "Just keep on moping, Jessie. That'll help..." She muttered sardonically as she leaned back against the wall, idly turning her head to the side. Doing so allowed her to spot a shop's window on the other side of the alley, buried between the concrete walls of the buildings.

Huh, odd place for a location. But what did she know?

Deciding it was better to indulge in curiosity, lest her mind continue to replay these dark thoughts over and over, Jessie pushed herself off the wall, adjusted her hoodie, and walked to the shop.

From the contents in the window, she noticed that the place appeared to be an antiques shop. There were old lamps, furniture, and mantles. And once inside, she saw a bunch more things, like myriads of paintings hanging from the walls. Centerpieces and table decorations, all sorts of old-looking trinkets.

"Welcome." A mature voice greeted her, and she saw a middle-aged-looking woman behind the counter. "Can I help you with anything?"

"I'm just looking around." She softly replied.

"Please, feel free to do so." The woman invited her with a gentle smile and a wave of her hand.

Jessie roamed about, looking over the multiple items standing on display around the shop. From grandfather clocks and masterfully crafted chairs, to very detailed plates and tea sets, the sort of things you don't find anymore, with how trends and styles have shifted over the years. The whole place reminded her of her grandmother's place; her house had a lot of old-timey hand-me-downs from decades ago.

She had to admit she had a certain fondness for the style. Jessie had thought about adding one or two decorations to her apartment once Arthur moved-

But that was never going to happen now.

Jessie let out a sigh and kept browsing, going over a large vanity with a wide circular mirror. Her own image reflected back at her, Jessie couldn't help but once more assume a self-critical look. Would... Would Arthur have stayed with her if she looked different? If she tried to look more beautiful, or act more confident?

As her gaze dropped, her eyes caught sight of another item on the vanity. It was a small statue, made of creamy marble. Clearly inspired by the ancient greek statues. It depicted a woman in a rather dynamic pose. With a hand raised while the other held a spear.

The detailing was *marvelous*. From the flowing locks of hair to the crevices carved on the robe, enough of the body was left bare for Jessie to admire the lovely craftsmanship and detail of the female form. Myriad muscles etched into the stone frame to perfection. The woman depicted in this statue was a warrior, her expression locked with intensity and willpower.

Driven, powerful, confident. All the things she was not.

...But could she be those things?

Was she honestly going to spend her life feeling sorry for herself? Or... Or should she take risks, try to improve herself, forge something new and better? Make *something* out of her life.

Be strong and driven, like the woman carved in this statue.

If she never took risks, how could she be expected to move forward?

Well, it all starts with one step.

Jessie gently held the small statue in her hands and brought it over the counter.

“How much for this one?”

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Whenever someone sets out to change themselves, to put in the effort to truly improve their lives, they realize they don't actually know where to start.

Jessie mused to herself on the myriad possibilities of what to use her free time on. Previously, her hobbies involved a lot of reading and not much else, all indoor activities that kept her locked into the same static routine. She was determined to make herself a more decisive and overall stronger person, but it's not like she was going to spend her time reading self-help books. She'd just be falling under the same patterns again.

Being bold and decisive was easier said than done when your goal was vague and nebulous without a clear objective or steps.

“Hmm...” She hummed in thought as she placed the statue of the warrior woman over her living room's cupboard. She traced a hand over the fine details carved into it. Someone had taken great care and time to work on the musculature.

She wondered if perhaps there had been a real-life model for this, a woman of imposing height and physique. What a sight to behold, she must be. Jessie bet nobody could ever say no to a woman like that.

The thought prompted an idea into her head. She lifted her shirt to look at her plain stomach, pinching at the side to tug a small trace of fat. She did not have much in terms of curves. Poking at her stomach caused a dent in the soft flesh.

She remembered those bikini photos from Arthur's new girlfriend, whose stomach was flat, firm, and with the lightest lines of definition, all accenting her curves.

Perhaps getting in shape was a good way to start. Physical activity did a lot to improve one's mental state and fill the body with energy. A good way to stay healthy, yeah, perhaps that was the best way to start her journey. A way to start working on her looks to feel healthy and attractive.

Jessie looked up on her phone the gyms closest to her area.

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Her lungs burned as the treadmill came to a halt; she had to hold herself on the bars lest she fell to the ground in exhaustion.

God, she hadn't exercised like this since PE in high school. She felt like she was sweating off every last bit of moisture in her body with how sweaty and sticky her clothes were. She downed half her water bottle to quench her thirst and cool herself off.

For a moment, she felt this was all a terrible mistake. She wasn't built for this; she didn't have the strength or endurance to train like this. Jessie began questioning every single decision, thinking she might have been fooling herself from the start.

How was she supposed to change herself if she couldn't even handle a single tread run?

"Easy there, sunshine." A cheery and teasing voice spoke up, and Jessie lifted her drenched face to stare at a lovely-looking woman. Dark-skinned, nicely shaped face, green eyes, unruly curls of black hair. Her dark-pink workout top and pants highlighted a shapely figure that showed a bit of muscle tone etched into her black skin. "You gotta know when to pace yourself."

"...Yeah, I'm realizing that." She panted, trying to stand upright, but still leaned on the bar for support. "God, I'm starting to think this was a mistake."

The woman barked a laugh. "Oh, everyone feels like that the first time, honey. It's only when you find your rhythm that things really start 'clicking' you know?" She held up her hand. "I'm Emma, by the way."

"Jessica," She replied, shaking it. "Everyone calls me Jessie."

"Nice to meet ya." She smiled politely. "So, what brings you to this fine place of sweat and tears?"

Jessie had to laugh a little at that joke. "I'm... trying new things."

"Ahh." She nodded in understanding. "Getting into shape is the first step?"

"I guess? I'm honestly piecing it together as I go along." She admitted, feeling too exhausted to really guard her real thoughts and feelings from this stranger. "Guess what I'm really trying to do is to reinvent myself..."

"Gotcha," Emma said with a knowing smile. "Trust me, sunshine. It gets easier."

"Yeah, I hope so." She sighed, letting out the exhaustion flow out of her as she slowly regained her breath. "But to me, honestly, I don't know what I'm doing."

"Mhm." The black woman nodded a few times before turning around, pointing to another area of the gym. "See that hunk over there?"

Jessica did see him. And a hunk he was indeed. His arms looked like cannonballs, just positively brimming with power and throbbing with thick veins as her curled weights were heavy enough that they'd snap Jessie's arm if she tried them. With how thick and filled with muscles his entire frame was, Jessie pegged him for a bodybuilder or a gym nut.

"That's my man, Oliver." She said with a bragging smile. "And I've learned a thing or two from him. Can coach you if you'd like."

Honestly, some coaching would be appreciated. If only to stop feeling like she was dying whenever she exercised on her own. "I don't want to be a bother..." She said, feeling self-conscious about needing the help.

"Honey, we all need a bit of help from time to time," Emma said, as though she could tell what was bothering her. "Trust me, I know what I'm doing. You want a new you? We'll get you there." She gave her a smile filled with so much confidence that it made Jessie jealous. "Maybe getting a new friend is a good way to start."

Jessie was a touch... starved for connection, ever since Arthur left.

She couldn't really find it in herself to object. "Alright."

"Awesome." Emma brightly cheered. "Don't worry, that beefcake over there taught me well. You're in good hands."

"You really like pointing out he's your boyfriend, huh?"

"Hey, when you got yourself a man like that, wouldn't you wanna parade him around?" She wiggled her eyebrows.

"Heh, maybe." She softly laughed. He was a very attractive man if you liked muscles. Jessie wasn't sure she did, however. Though she could see the appeal.