

Chapter 1

Before the Storm – Life before anxiety and depression

I used to think I understood what depression and anxiety was. Not in a deep way, not in a way that lived in my bones, but in the way you understand things that happen to other people. I never judged it. I never thought it was weakness. I listened when people talked about it. I nodded. I felt sympathy. I believed them when they said it was heavy, when they said it was exhausting, when they said it changed the way the world looked. I just didn't know it would change my world. Back then, my mind felt like a place I could trust. It wasn't always quiet, but it was familiar.

If I was sad, there was a reason. If I was nervous, there was a cause. Feelings came and went like the weather, and I never once questioned whether the sky might stay dark for weeks, months, or years at a time. I didn't analyze my own breathing. I didn't wonder why my chest felt tight for no clear reason. I didn't wake up already tired of existing. Life felt... linear. One day led to the next. Problems had edges. Solutions felt possible. I thought resilience meant getting back up after something knocked you down, not learning how to stand while something invisible pressed against your ribs all day long. I remember hearing the words "anxiety" and "depression" and picturing them as storms that passed through other people's lives. Loud, destructive, real — but temporary.