

Chapter One of *A Love Like Lilly*

The last thing in the entire world I'd wanted to do that day was attend a funeral. And I definitely hadn't wanted to go straight from the church to the cemetery for the dedication of the grave. I shivered, crossing my arms and clutching the funeral program. A cold wind always blew at this cemetery. Every time I'd had to come here, either to visit a grave or bury another relative or family friend, that was the one thing I could always count on. This day was no exception.

Seated on the end of the row of hard white folding chairs on the right side of the casket, I smoothed my wind-tangled hair behind my ears for the millionth time, only to have the wind toss strands back into my eyes again while I irritably rubbed my upper arms. Besides the fact that funerals weren't exactly happy, fun occasions, going to one meant wearing a dress, something I was never comfortable in. Especially with the wind blowing and me in flat sandals with no nylons or socks. I owned three skirts that I alternated wearing to church on Sunday, but Mom had insisted on buying me a true dress--a dark, straight-skirted cotton dress--especially for the funeral. I'd drawn the line at a pair of black high heels, though. I didn't care that I was fifteen and that according to my nineteen-year-old sister, Sarah, I should be wearing heels whenever I wore a dress or skirt, the way she did. In my opinion, wearing a dress all day long was bad enough. At least one part of me deserved to be comfortable, since the rest of me definitely wouldn't be. At the moment, I was wishing I was in shorts or jeans and sneakers, shooting hoops at home in the driveway, or riding my bike. Or high in the mountains camping. Anything but sitting quietly in a dress. At a funeral. My grandmother's funeral.

I still couldn't wrap my head around the fact that she was gone. Although my grandma was almost seventy years old, she was in great shape because she took care of herself. Better than most people half her age. But even the healthiest people in the world can develop brain tumors. At least, that's what her doctor had told us when she was first diagnosed.

“ . . . on behalf of the Addison family, especially Brother Harold Addison, thank you for your attendance at the services for Sister Lilly Grant Addison. The grave will be dedicated by Harold and Lilly's son, Ben Addison.”

I watched my father wipe his eyes and nose with a handkerchief and then quickly stuff it back into his suit pants pocket before rising from his chair farther down the row from me to stand by the bishop from Grandpa's ward. The bishop briefly patted Dad on the back before moving to his seat while Dad bowed his head and folded his arms.

I should have listened to my dad's prayer, but as I folded my arms and bowed my own head, the wind whipped my program out of my nearly frozen fingers. While everyone else was listening to Dad pray with folded arms and closed eyes, I was off my chair, grabbing for my program. I was so rattled by the time I made it back to my seat that I couldn't focus on the words Dad was saying. Instead, I caught my seventeen-year-old cousin, Blake, and his fifteen-year-old brother, Maxwell, grinning, seated together on the folding chairs on the other side of the casket directly across from me. I glared at them both before sticking my tongue out. I only had a moment of satisfaction over seeing Aunt Gracie, Dad's sister, sternly poke them both into good behavior before my seventeen-year-old brother, Trent, seated on my left, jabbed me hard in the

side with his elbow. I jumped and glared at him, but he didn't even open his eyes. He only leaned forward until his elbows rested on his knees. Sarah, seated on the other side of Trent, stared at me meaningfully before slowly and purposefully closing her eyelids at me. I rolled my eyes before looking down at the root of the moment's evil in my hands. I stared at the words "In Loving Memory" before I soundlessly opened the funeral program and scanned the words inside:

Funeral Services for

*Lilly Grant Addison
April 10, 1985
11:00 A.M.*

*Born
December 12, 1915*

*Daughter of
Emery and Ida Barbara Grant*

*Married
Harold Alfred Addison
June 25, 1937*

*Died
March 31, 1985*

" . . . , amen."

I jumped at the sound of Trent's deep voice near my ear, but I didn't look at him or anyone else around me. When I did look up, I could see Blake and Maxwell standing now, the wind whipping their longish hair nearly into a frenzy, but neither seemed to care. They looked so much alike, both being tall, blond, and blue-eyed, that they could almost pass for twins. Aunt Gracie motioned to both of them to get their attention, and as her blonde head moved close to theirs, I was struck by how much my cousins looked like their mother. They even had her smile. I could see Sarah approaching my aunt now--Sarah, as blonde and blue-eyed and small and petite as Aunt Gracie. The wind gusted again violently, throwing wild brown and red strands of hair into my eyes. Sarah, of course, would never allow her hair to be blown all over her face. She'd artistically combed her hair into a neat French twist and managed to walk in the grass in her high heels without getting a heel stuck in the ground. I watched Aunt Gracie gather Sarah into a hug before both began babbling away as if they'd been best friends their whole lives. I didn't know how Sarah could do that--talk to adults, especially older adults--as comfortably as she did her own friends. I'd never been able to do that. Ever. I could only mumble and stutter and act like an idiot around adults. I was a pro at that."Move out of the way!" I stumbled back as Trent nearly pushed me into the chairs, trying to get around me and a horde of people making their way over to my parents.

“Don’t let me get in your way there, Trent!” I muttered angrily as I watched him hurry over to talk with Blake and Maxwell. To see skinny, short Trent with his dark hair and eyes standing next to Blake and Maxwell, it was hard to believe they were cousins. It was even harder to believe that Sarah, Trent, and I were brother and sisters, with Sarah so blonde and petite and Trent being on the short side with dark hair and eyes. And me--I had a strange combination of reddish brown hair and bluish green eyes and skin that wasn’t fair and perfect like Sarah’s or a great-looking tan color like Trent’s. And I was tall. I wasn’t overpoweringly tall, though, and in fact, I liked my height when I was playing basketball. And when I was running track at school. Even so, I would’ve been happy to hand some of my height over to Trent. I hated being the tallest, especially since I was the youngest.

“Jamie, darling, go over with your sister and say hello.” Mom had moved briefly from Dad’s side to harass me into being sociable, even though from the tired way she was looking at me and the defiant way I was looking back at her, it was clear who was going to win. Mom was one of two people who called me by my real name, Jamie, instead of my nickname, James. The only other person who’d refused to call me James had been my grandma.

“I hardly know any of these people, Mom!” I griped.

Mom frowned and shook her head at me before reaching up to her hair as another cold gust of wind blew through, causing more than one woman to hold her skirt down. Mine, luckily, was too straight for me to need to worry about that. But my hair blew in my face again, causing me to push strands back behind my ears for the umpteenth time that afternoon.

“Oh, Jamie, why wouldn’t you let me put your hair up like your sister’s?” Mom complained, trying to smooth my hair herself.

“Because my hair’s thick, and putting it on top of my head would give me a headache.” I’d wanted to wear a ponytail, but Mom and Sarah had both thought that would look too casual. So I’d let it hang straight down my back instead. Which had been fine during the funeral but didn’t seem like such a good hairstyle choice now that I was stuck in the middle of a wind storm.

Mom sighed and nudged me forward. “Look--your great-aunts are by Sarah now. You know all of them--you need to go say hello. I’m sure they want to say hello to you.”

I looked over to where Sarah was and saw her surrounded by my grandma’s sisters. The best way to describe my three great-aunts and my grandma was in terms of volume. Aunt Vivian, who loved to dye her hair its original brunette color and was four years younger than my grandma, was Loud. My grandma had always been Medium. Aunt Beth, who kept her hair dyed a light blondish brown and was three years younger than my grandma, was Soft. Aunt Rachel, the youngest sister, who was born seven years after my grandma and didn’t worry about dying her hair, was Softest. Although Aunt Vivian wasn’t the oldest, being the Loudest, she had always been the ring leader of the four sisters, even though all of them could be pretty stubborn and bossy.

A moment later, Aunt Vivian moved away to draw one of the older men into her circle with Sarah. It wasn't until he smiled--the smile that belonged to my grandma, Sarah, Aunt Gracie, Blake, and Maxwell--that I realized it was my Great-Uncle Marshall, the oldest in my grandma's family. An only boy with four younger sisters. Knowing how much it annoyed Trent to be sandwiched between two sisters without any brothers, I could imagine how horrible it must've been for Uncle Marshall growing up. Great-Uncle Landon, Aunt Vivian's husband, and Aunt Beth's husband, Great-Uncle Robert, slowly approached the circle of women and Great-Uncle Marshall while my great-aunts were all taking turns hugging Sarah and admiring her navy blue suit. She'd bought it on a dress shopping trip with Grandma for her nineteenth birthday last year. It was something the two of them had done together every year for her birthday since she turned twelve. And for Trent's birthday in October every year since he turned twelve, Grandpa had taken him deer hunting. Just the two of them. As for me, my birthday tradition with my grandparents didn't extend much beyond getting together for cake and ice cream, but I didn't mind. I wasn't into killing deer, and I definitely wasn't into dresses, but I was very into chocolate cake and fudge ripple ice cream. Besides--my birthday was in August, and summer was the time when my family would go camping a lot with my grandparents and an assortment of extended family, usually to strange, out-of-the-way areas up in the Uinta Mountains or down in southern Utah that my grandpa was crazy about. He'd point out roads and dams and reservoirs to all of us kids, but I never paid much attention to what he was saying. I was always too busy catching lizards and trying to scare Sarah with them.

“You've been awfully quiet.”

I must've stood clutching my program with my arms folded tightly against the cold wind, deep in my own thoughts, for longer than I'd thought. I jumped before turning to face the person who'd crept up on me to bump my elbow with his. Kyle. Kyle Jansen. After my mom, he was the first to venture over and talk to me since the grave had been dedicated.

“Yeah, well, I guess I don't feel like talking much today.”

I watched Mom walk back over to Dad's side to talk to more relatives I hardly knew, and then I turned to stare hard at my grandma's coffin, ignoring the sympathetic eyes of all the friends and relatives who had gathered around for the dedication of the grave. I could hear a small group of hushed voices near me whispering softly about how lovely the funeral had been and how much my grandma would have liked it. She probably would have, too. One of the speakers had been an old family friend from their ward--Clay Anderson--who'd talked about how much my grandparents loved to go dancing, and how from the day they met, they'd never stopped dancing and had worn out many pairs of slippers dancing to old records in the living room of their home. I wondered then how it must be for the person who's passed on--to look in on an event that's all about her, hearing all kinds of things about her and her life, having to watch everyone being all sad and crying, and not being able to say anything or do anything about it.

“Well, funerals aren't for the person who's died. They're for everyone left behind.”

I turned to look at Kyle with a raised eyebrow. “You mean, all of this is supposed to make me feel better?”

Kyle shrugged. "It's not such a bad idea--everyone getting together to remember the person and just be there for each other."

"And it provides a wonderful opportunity to cry in front of people you hardly know. That's always fun. Especially since there are hordes and hordes of people here."

"I know--I can't believe how many people your grandparents know. They've got to be the most social people ever. Unlike some people I know," Kyle grinned, giving me a light shove with his shoulder. "How'd you miss out on that gene?"

"I don't know. Just lucky, I guess," I grumbled back. It was true. My grandparents were friends with just about everybody within fifty miles of them. If people weren't visiting at their house, then my grandparents were usually off visiting someone. They'd always been hard people to track down. Both of my grandparents were "people people," but where my grandma had been more of a no-nonsense, stubborn person who liked to boss my grandpa around, especially in front of other people, my grandpa loved to joke and laugh and do what he could to make everyone around him laugh, too. He'd really beam if he could make my grandma laugh.

"How's your grandpa doing, anyway? He's been pretty quiet all day."

"Yeah, well, he hasn't exactly been himself since my grandma got sick. It's hard to be happy and social and talkative all the time when your wife's dying." I hadn't meant to sound curt and bitter, but I knew I did. I couldn't help it. It'd been a hard day. It'd been hard ever since my grandma had been diagnosed with a brain tumor a few short months ago, to be exact. And it was hard to think about my grandpa. I wasn't worried too much about how he was handling her death. It was thinking about how he was going to handle life without her--and whether he'd actually be able to handle life without her--that bothered me the most. He loved my grandma so much. I knew him well enough to know that no one would or could take my grandma's place in his heart or in his life. Ever.

Kyle didn't say anything else but only nodded before looking at my folded arms, unattractively covered with goose bumps.

"Do you want to wear my jacket? You look like you're freezing."

I shook my head. "Nah--I'm sure we'll be heading back to the church for lunch in a second. But thanks anyway, Kyle."

Because I was on the tall side for a girl, and Kyle leaned towards being an average height for a guy, I could easily look straight into his eyes to talk to him. It hadn't always been that way. In fact, until we were fourteen, I'd always had to look down to look into his face, but over the past year since we'd both turned fifteen, he'd started a major growth spurt, and I knew if it continued, it wouldn't be long before I'd have to look up to see into his eyes. I glanced at Kyle but quickly looked away when he turned his head back towards me. Kyle would be taller than me some day. That fact for some reason was unsettling.

Kyle and I had been friends--practically best friends--since we were about eight years old. We'd gone to the same schools since kindergarten, but it wasn't until we turned eight that we discovered a bizarre thing we had in common that few people could boast of.

I'd known for forever that my grandma's best friend was June Jansen and that they'd met when my grandparents moved in next door to June and her husband when my dad and Aunt Gracie were little kids. But Jansen wasn't an uncommon name, and I'd never made any connection with Kyle until Mother's Day Sunday when I was eight years old. I'd been at my grandparents' house visiting with my family when there'd been a knock on the door.

"Jamie, honey, will you get that, please?"

I'd run to the door at Grandma's request, and after flinging the door open wide, stared in surprise at the dark-eyed, brown-haired, eight-year-old boy with a light dusting of freckles across his nose. He was holding a clean, empty casserole dish and staring back at me with just as much surprise.

"Kyle? What are you doing here?"

Kyle's surprise had turned into a happy, elf-like grin. "I'm bringing this pan back to your grandma, that's what!"

"How do you know my grandma?"

"She's my grandma's friend!"

Grandma had joined me at the door then and invited Kyle in as if he was one of her grandkids, too. She started to introduce us before we both cut in and said we already knew each other. Grandma, of course, thought it was just amazing and wonderful to find out that I knew her best friend's grandson. She'd even run to the phone to call June and tell her that Kyle and I knew each other from school. Grandma had insisted that Kyle stay for dessert with us, and since Kyle has always been a friendly, constantly smiling, laughing and joking person who, unlike me, had no problem talking to anyone and everyone, he was more than happy to stay.

We'd spent the evening playing all kinds of games with Trent, and even Sarah had joined in for a game of Hearts. She'd refused to play colored Easter eggs outside with us, though, since that required running around Grandma and Grandpa's yard, and unlike me, she was still wearing her Sunday dress, something I always changed out of as fast as I could once the final amen was said at church. So the three of us had run around outside playing colored Easter eggs, kick the can, and a few other old games my parents had played when they were kids--until it started to rain. Trent had run back inside then, but Kyle and I had jumped into the white painted, double-bench wooden swing with a canvas canopy Grandpa had made for Grandma years before. Seated across from each other on the two benches, we'd taken turns pushing against the wood floor boards to make the swing rock back and forth. It'd been hard work, since both of us had had to sit on the edges of the benches, nearly standing up, to reach the floor boards. We finally got the swing to rock gently back and forth after we'd figured out that we had to work together, but we

both couldn't push at the same time. I'd pushed from my end, and then Kyle had pushed from his end, see-saw fashion, and we'd both laughed, loving that we'd figured out how to make the swing work.

That day was the first time I'd sat on the swing with anyone but Grandma. She loved to sit on the swing with me all snuggled up beside her while she pushed the floorboards herself to make the swing rock gently and ask me how I was doing and what I'd been doing. She'd ask if I'd like her to make me something to wear. I knew my grandma could sew better than anyone, and I actually did agree to let her make a dress for me for Christmas a couple of times. She'd listen to me babble away for what seemed like hours, feeding me handfuls of candy. My grandma loved to cook and made the best homemade candy ever. Better than stuff in the stores. Sometimes she'd sing funny campfire songs to me, and when I'd laugh and ask her about the song, she'd say, "Oh, it's just one of your grandpa's silly old songs." We spent time on the swing together almost from the day I was born until she was too sick to go outside.

Kyle had stayed on the swing with me until his parents came to get him. I was actually sad to see him go, but I didn't need to be. Kyle's family visited his grandparents a lot--practically every week--so Kyle came running over every time he saw my parents' green Oldsmobile pull up at my grandparents' home. I didn't dare go over to his grandparents' home, because his grandpa was really sick. But after his grandpa died when we were eleven years old, his grandma invited me over to come see Kyle while I was visiting my grandparents, and we'd switched back and forth, going to each other's grandparents' home when we were visiting our own grandparents, ever since. Sometimes we'd shoot hoops at his grandparents' house, or play catch with a football, or run races against each other, or ride the old bicycles in my grandparents' garage. All kinds of things that my sister Sarah would never want to do in a million years, but because I had a good dose of tomboy blood in me, I not only didn't mind doing sporty stuff with Kyle, I usually preferred it. Although chatting with Kyle and his incredibly awesome grandma--Grandma June--while we ate her famous double chocolate chip cookies was stiff competition.

Our at-home lives had changed after that, too. I still remembered the first time we ran into each other at school after that first day at my grandparents' when we were eight years old. We'd been out playing at recess, and Kyle had been throwing a ball around with some friends. When he saw me, he'd stopped playing to run over to where I was climbing around on the monkey bars with my friends to say, "Hey--your grandparents live by my grandparents!" I'd laughed and said no, his grandparents lived by my grandparents. It'd become a standing joke way of greeting each other ever since.

But not on this day. I'd almost forgotten Kyle had come to the funeral, which was stupid, because he'd sung a solo for the service. Kyle could sing like nobody else could and was more interested in being in every choir and musical deal Central High had going than in taking time for any serious competitive sports. He'd run track with me in junior high, but he didn't have time for that now. Too many choir concerts and things. And he'd become incredible on the piano. In fact, he'd played the piano while he sang at my grandma's funeral, which was great of him to do, since--besides the fact that no one in my family had any musical talent whatsoever--we would've fallen apart bawling all over the place if any of us had tried singing anything.

“So--are you holding up okay?”

I tried to smile, but it was hard, because as I made myself look into Kyle’s concerned face, what I really wanted to do was to start bawling. No one else had asked how I was doing or wondered if I was having a hard time dealing with everything. But Kyle had had a grandparent die of something horrible. He knew what this was like.

“I don’t know. I guess so. It’s all just so--weird. I thought my grandma would be around longer than this. I mean, I hadn’t thought at all that she would have to die sometime. I thought there’d be more time.”

Kyle nodded. “Yeah, I know. That’s how I felt, too.”

Kyle turned his face away to look at the casket thoughtfully while I watched him out of the corner of one eye. He looked nice in a suit. The wind was ruffling his hair, but it didn’t ruin it the way it ruined mine. His hair actually looked good windblown. It was the same dark brown it’d always been, his eyes the same warm, deep brown, and he still even had some freckles across his nose. The only thing that was different was that he wasn’t smiling and joking and laughing the way he usually did, and as he turned to wipe his eyes for a moment, it struck me then that he’d loved my grandma, too. I’d always thought of his grandma as a second grandma. Surely that was the way he thought of my grandma as well. And then I was ashamed of myself for not asking him the same question he’d asked me.

“Kyle--what about you? Are you okay?”

Kyle took a deep breath before turning to me with sad eyes and an attempt at a smile. “You’re the best, James, you know that? Just like your grandma.”

Before I could think of what to say, Kyle’s grandma hurried over and with tears in her eyes, swallowed me up in a gigantic hug that if I could’ve breathed, would probably have made me cry. A second later, she released me to hug Kyle, and then she put an arm around each of us.

“How are my kids doing?”

“Fine,” I said, smiling up into Grandma June’s kind but sad face.

“We’re ready to head back to the church. Do you want to ride back with us, James?”

I shook my head. “I’d like to, but I better go back with my family.”

Grandma June smiled and nodded, and after waving good-bye to Kyle, I watched them cross the grass to Grandma June’s car.

The wind had turned colder and stiffer, so I hugged myself tighter, rubbing my arms hard, before turning around to find where my family had run off to.

There was only one person left by the casket. My grandfather was seated on one of the white folding chairs, pulled close to the casket, with a red rose in his hand. I knew I should go to him and try to comfort him. I knew Sarah--even Trent--would have, but I couldn't. I tried to turn away instead, but I couldn't do that, either. And so I watched, spellbound, hardly daring to breathe, while he kissed the rose and carefully placed it on top of the casket before slowly letting his hand slide down the casket to grip one of the side handles, his shoulders hunched and shaking with soundless sobs.