

# The Fight

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Anyone driving on the highway who looked to the old cemetery where a large mass of black loomed would have been unaffected. For most of the universe, it was a normal September day. Of course, it wasn't for me, or any of the others in the Carver family, or any of the family friends.

I was dressed in black at the Greystone Cemetery. My hands were in the two beside me; to my left, my father in his best suit, silent tears streaming down his aged face. To my right, Chris Carver, my older brother, sobbed. The wind blew, smacking my face with my short, blonde hair, and rudely drowning out my Grandma Carver's voice at Kara Lynn Carver's funeral.

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"Abbey Lynn Carver. You aren't going," my mother said as she walked around the island counter in our kitchen, gathering her things for work. She bustled around hurriedly, trying to find-

"Where are my keys?!"

"I don't know. Why can't I go? It's Friday night, what else am I supposed to do?" I raised my voice at her, always a mistake. From my mother, I inherited my looks, along with my stubbornness.

"No, and that's final. I don't care if you spend every Friday night at home. In fact, when you come home from school, you'll have a chore list to keep you busy tonight. And if I find out you went tonight anyway, you will never step foot out of this apartment for the rest of your *life*."

My anger was bubbling.

"Why are you being like this?!" I almost yelled.

She looked at me, silently telling me she was resolute, unwavering. She didn't answer, just stared at me, until I could stand it no more.

"I hate you," I said quietly, then turned and walked towards the door.

"What did you say, young lady?"

I murmured, "Nothing," and went to catch the bus. I almost apologized.

The bus screeched around the corner, making up my mind.

The first few hours passed uneventfully. When my friend Rainee who was going tonight asked if I could go, I sourly told her no. Sitting in Biology II, we griped about my mother's ways until the class phone rang.

Mr. Greene picked it up, and put it back on the receiver.

"Abbey Carver, they need you in the office. You're leaving. Make sure to get your homework," he told me dismissively.

As I shoved my things into my messenger bag, I was puzzled. Why was I leaving?

A sick, unwelcome feeling that I couldn't understand balled in my stomach. I now know that it for the instinct indicating that something had gone very wrong.

Going to Jersey City High School all my life made navigating the halls easy. Today, the trip seemed long. The uneasy feeling intensified when I saw my dad in the office. He had never picked me up from school before. He never left the office during the day.

As I opened the door, he turned around. My heart stopped. My father, crying? He walked out silently, the lady in the office looking on with pity. What was going on?

Once in the car, he silently turned the key in the ignition but never moved from park

"Dad?" I asked cautiously, "What's wrong?"

Without looking at me, he replied, "There's been an accident."

Oh no! I thought of my brother, my partying hard, no consequences brother who was only twenty-four years old. I started to hyperventilate.

"Is Chris okay? Oh God, Dad, what happened? What happened to Chris?"

My dad choked. I had a feeling I wasn't going to be able to handle what he said.

"Abbey, honey, it wasn't Chris," looking at me with his wet, bloodshot eyes.

My dad's parents had both already passed away, and my dad was an only child. Who was left? My dad had friends, but why would he take me out of school for it?

"Then who, Dad?" I asked, selfishly comforted Chris was okay.

"Your mother."

My mind went blank. "Who?"

"Your mother, Abbey."

The three words didn't make sense. Try as hard as I could, it was impossible to fully grasp what my father was saying.

I stumbled over what I said next. "Who-wait-what?"

The tears stopped streaming from his face as he studied me with the eyes that knew me so well, only second to my mother. The thought brought me back to what he was saying.

"Abbey, your mother was on the highway headed to a conference, and some drunken idiot hit her head on. The police say the man must have entered the highway on an exit ramp and was fighting against traffic. The police think your mom may have been looking for something and didn't notice the drunk coming straight at her." His voice broke, and he didn't say anything else. The way he was talking...

"So... are we going to go see her in the hospital now?"

He sobbed, and managing, "No."

Huh? Something wasn't clicking.

"Dad?"

"There's nothing they could do. After the drunk hit her, she got hit by another person behind her. The car flipped and caught on fire. There was nothing anyone could do."

My mind was still foggy, desperately trying to grasp what my dad was saying. "What?" I asked again.

He finally raised his voice at me, to break through my stupor, to make me understand. "She's *gone*, Abbey. Dead."

It clicked, like a light bulb turning on to show me reality.

No wonder my brain refused to grasp this.

I realized I was not breathing, but I didn't really care at the moment.

"Abbey?" My father's voice called, growing distant. "Abbey?!" He called again, going farther away.

I eventually realized I should start breathing, but it was too late. Everything went black.

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I was dimly aware I was lying on the couch in my living room. I could feel the cool leather through my clothing. It was pitch black.

From another room, I heard my dad's voice, and Chris's. Why was Chris here? He was supposed to be at college.

"Why hasn't she come around up yet? It's been, like, seven hours," I heard Chris say, in his casual-yet-worried voice. He sounded very upset.

"The doctor said her mind is protecting itself. She'll come around when she's ready. She'll have to face it eventually," Dad replied solemnly.

"I suppose..."

I realized why it was so dark; my eyes were closed. They flew open.

So, Dad and Chris were closer than I thought, in the two armchairs opposite the couch. I couldn't pretend I didn't wake up; they were watching me, cautiously, waiting for something.

In a flash of images, the situation hit me. This afternoon, all of it. For a moment, I was sure my dad saw the catastrophic change in me. I'm sure, for just one moment, the pain had shown on my face, for my dad's pain seemed to mirror mine. Before my brother could catch it, I composed my face and sat up slowly.

Chris looked worn, his eyes red as if he had been crying for hours. His long, curly brown hair was disheveled, not looking unnaturally cool like always. The brown curly hair was our Carver signature, for my dad had it as well as my mom, and as a result, Chris and I had the most beautiful brown, wavy hair.

Dad and Chris looked nearly identical, except for the wrinkles in Dad's forehead. They had the same strong jaws, thin lips, and big, brown eyes coated with thick lashes. They were both very handsome; most of my friends had a thing for Chris.

I looked like my mom. We both had natural beauty that didn't require make-up to look attractive. I had a small, delicate face with exceptionally long, wavy brown hair that many admired. My eyes, the perfect almond shape, were green with hints of gold, exactly like my mother's. My lips were full. Mom and I had the same small, petite build, with long legs. She was occasionally confused for a sister.

I saw my mother's face as clearly as seeing my own reflection, and the pain rippled over me. They both saw it this time, and their eyes teared up.

"Abbey?" Dad asked, breaking the silence.

"What happened to me?"

"You blacked out honey. The doctor said it was shock, to let you come around on your own."

"Oh," was all I could manage.

He cleared his throat. "The funeral is scheduled for Tuesday and visitation tomorrow night."

I nodded.

"Are you okay, Abbey?" Chris asked, concerned.

Although his words were meant with kind intention, something inside me snapped.

"Of course not!" I screamed at him, at the world. I got off the couch and flew to my room, slamming the door behind me, feeling like a prisoner to myself.

I went over to the corner and grabbed the guitar, which had gotten me through anything; fights with friends, broken relationships, unrequited love... I unplugged the amplifier, went into my small walk in closet, and turned on the light.

Sitting on the floor, I played the songs the band I would have seen tonight played. Remembering the last conversation I ever had with my mom ate at my heart. Thinking how I'd been so childlike almost made me vomit right there. I played until my fingers ached. Afterwards I played harder songs, concentrating on hitting perfect notes, not caring how loud I was playing, not caring if I woke up the whole town or the grouchy old man who resides next to us.

It could have been minutes, or hours.

Either way, I stowed away carefully my feelings, repressed them, until I had no emotion at all. I then fell asleep, my head against the closet wall, light on, and guitar resting in my lap.

The next morning, I awoke in my bed. Dad must have moved me.

I looked over at the clock. It was Saturday. I should not be awake at eight in the morning. A dull, aching feeling in my chest echoed all I had felt in the last twenty four hours. Subconsciously I decided to store away my feelings and go on. I walked into the kitchen in the clothes I wore yesterday, unsurprised to see Dad and Chris sitting at the table in their pajamas, sipping coffee. They looked at me expectantly.

I fake-smiled. I went over to the refrigerator and faltered. Our family smiled happily out of our Christmas card from last year taken at Grandma Carver's house. Under the picture was a message: "Greetings from Kara, Chris, Chris, and Abbey." Chris had been named after Daddy. The similarities between my mother and me were painful, so I looked away. The rest of the refrigerator was decorated with pictures, tests, notes, and lists. My attention was drawn to a particular yellow post-it note. Luckily, I wasn't facing the others, so they could not see the new dampness in my eyes.

Abbey,

I'm sorry. I know you are too.

We'll talk it over tonight.

Love,

Mom

I carefully lifted it off the fridge and crammed it in my stiff jeans pocket. I exited quickly and quietly, running to my room.

I sat on the bed and wiped away my tears. Putting on my head phones to my iPod, I turned it up all the way, the exact way Mom had hated me to do. I did not cry another tear. I had closed my eyes and was startled when someone shook my shoulder.

"Abbey, I know you're devastated, but you're not handling it well. You've got us concerned," Chris said.

"I'm fine," I said in a cool way.

"Abbey, you can't ignore your feelings. I know you're crushed, we all are."

"Chris? I'm fine. Really," I said, lacking enthusiasm.

"No, you're not. I know you better," he said, getting frustrated.

"Chris, just leave me alone."

And so he did, telling me with his eyes just how hurt he was as he left. I couldn't apologize.

Once he was gone, I dragged myself to the mirror. I wasn't coping properly; I knew that. How was one to cope with a lost mother?

Looking at myself, I suddenly I hated my reflection. Not really knowing what I was doing, I picked up a shoe and threw it at the glass with my image, an image too like my mother.

Looking in the broken shards, I got an idea. I grabbed my purse, put on my shoes, and headed to the salon.

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I went in with long, luxurious, wavy brown hair, and left with short, choppy, bleached blond hair. The hair dresser looked at me as if I was terminally insane when I told her what I wanted. I said it was time for a change.

When I looked in the mirror, I was nearly unrecognizable.

When I got home, Chris wasn't pleased.

"Dad! Look what Abbey did to her hair," he said, horrified, as soon as I walked in the door.

My Dad emerged from the kitchen and dropped what he was holding. The full drinking glass made a thud.

"Abbey?"

"Yes, Dad?"

"Well... wow? I guess that's where you've been all afternoon. Um, you need to go get dressed for your mother's visitation."

"I'm not going," I replied defiantly.

His face got hard. "Yes, you are. I can't believe you'd even say that."

I didn't bother arguing. Chris looked at me, baffled.

I got that look all night from others at the visitation. Several of our family members asked kindly who I was and didn't care to hide their shock when I told them.

Seeing them cry was hard. Seeing Mom was harder. I held her hands, crumpled inside, but didn't let a tear escape.

I had never despised someone as much as I despised Grandma Carver when Dad told me the brilliant idea she had planned for the funeral on the way home.

"She thinks you should write a song for the funeral. And she thinks it should be the last performance. I agreed."

That was the end. Chris ignored me because of my cruel indifference to him and everything else.

After watching the ceiling and a midnight trip from my room Sunday night, Monday morning rolled around with Chris screaming. "What did you do with them?! I know it was you, Abbey."

I knew what he was referring to, but pretended I didn't. I just looked at him, not speaking.

Dad came in, putting his hand on Chris's shoulder. "Chris..." he muttered softly.

He ignored him. "What did you do with them? *Where are Mom's pictures?*" The previous night, I had taken them all down. Each one was now in a box under my bed. I still didn't talk. I hadn't spoken since Saturday night.

"Chris, she's coping in her own way. Let her be."

"She's going about like Mom never existed! Is that coping, Dad?"

He nodded, and Chris threw me a dirty, calculating look, spun, and left.

I sat on the bed, still and quiet. Dad sat down on the edge of my bed.

"We're all sad, honey. My sweet, loving Kara is gone, forever." He choked, and his eyes started to tear up. I knew if he cried, my wall could break.

Instead of trying to comfort him like I yearned to, I seized up. I looked at him through dull eyes, wondering how he saw me.

He reached over and patted my hand.

I found my voice. However, the words I spoke to him were not kind ones like I wished they could be.

"You're right, Dad. She's dead, not coming back. But I'm not going to mope about it," I said, attempting weakly to appear strong.

He looked at me, extremely troubled. "Maybe you need to talk to someone else about this."

I didn't respond then—nor when he told me I was going to write Mom a song or poem to be performed at the funeral—nor when he slammed the door behind him, finally fed up with my lack of communication.

Thinking back, I realized why I was acting this way. If I pretended she was still alive, she would be alive.

Monday night, without really knowing it, I started to write on a sheet of paper, a piece called "Dear Mom." Playing it on the guitar, it sounded good to me, very in tune and appropriate, but I realized I could never play this in front of people. So, I crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. I didn't think I could stand one more minute of being someone dealing with the death of Kara Carver. I put in my headphones and willed the ceiling to fall.

I don't think I slept an hour Monday night, but during the early hours of Tuesday after rereading my mother's note with her love, sleep caught up with me.

I awoke with a jolt Tuesday afternoon, around one.

"What are you doing?" Chris shook me.

"What?"

"Ugh! Get dressed. It's Tuesday. Remember, a funeral?"

I didn't want to go. But something told me I should. I washed my short hair, put on a black dress, and was ready to go within twenty minutes.

Dad had apparently been crying, as had Chris.

"Wh-where's your guitar?" Dad struggled to say. I almost argued but went and got it. I didn't plan to perform, but I grabbed the crumpled up paper just in case.

For the beginning, someone had prepared a slideshow. I watched picture by picture without a tear. Some spoke, but I didn't break down. Dad and Chris both did. Finally, we left for Greystone Cemetery, and lowered the casket. Just then reality hit me, worse than ever, and huge sobs escaped my chest.

Dad put an arm around me. "Honey, you couldn't pretend it never happened forever," he whispered, wiping his eyes.

I put my hand in his, and Chris's, all family tensions forgotten. We held hands firmly as the final speakers talked and then Grandma Carver.

She spoke briefly, saying, "And I'd like to introduce the most special young lady I've met, next to Kara, who is going to play a song for you."

I met Dad's eyes, then Chris's. This song could help them as much as me.

Appearing strong is hard, but dealing with things is much, much harder, I realized as I walked to the microphone, guitar in hand. I had fooled no one, not even myself, pretending my mother had never died. But I also realized she would always be a part of me, and I could learn to live with that.

At the podium, I began to play my first notes.