Picking Up the Pieces

Jesse McDowell
As the warning bell rang, everyone rushed to their classes, hoping to get a seat next to their closest friend in that period.

Lillian, a girl who had just turned sixteen, sat in her desk in Mr. Harrison’s history class as she prepared for the class. She accidentally knocked her pen off her desk.

When she looked around for it, she turned around to find Jared, a boy about her age holding it up to her. She smiled at him. He handed her the pen, then turned to look out the window, giving Lillian no response in return. Her smile faded as she turned back around to listen to their teacher. Lillian looked back at Jared again, a bit of worry that cascaded the sides of her mind and heart.

Lillian had known Jared since the third grade. They were really good friends until junior high when she had joined the drama team. Their whole friend group had drifted apart at that time, never really keeping in contact, even though they all lived within the same two square mile town. She had never really thought about how sad that really was, but as she looked at Jared now, she couldn’t help but feel something was wrong. Over the past couple years, she had seen him all over town, smiling and content with a book in his hands, just like when they were kids. As she looked down at his backpack, all she saw was an empty bag. In this moment, she knew something was eating at him. Turning back around, she clutched the glass and gold intwined cross around her neck. Memories of her childhood spent running around town with Jared drifted through her mind. She smiled, remembering how simple those times were, how her face so innocent and kind that he couldn’t help but want to nod in agreement.

“Jared, do you have any events to add to the list,” Mr. Harrison asked.

Jared lifted his head and looked around the room at everyone who was staring at him, many of which were raising their hands to answer the question. Lillian stared back at him and gave him a kind smile, encouraging him to speak up. He shook his head and laid his head back down, moving his stare towards the clock. Mr. Harrison picked up the phone on his podium.

“Towers, and other such atrocities that involved mass casualties. Everyone thought of the worst things, but no one seemed to think of any events that didn’t involve death or destruction. Mr. Harrison then turned to Jared, who was laying his head down, looking out the window at the heavy clouds that rolled over the school and into the horizon in every direction.

“Hey, do you want to work together?”

“Okay class, I would like to start off this semester by compiling a list of world events that have happened within the last century. Can anybody name an event?”

Hands instantly raised, naming event after event. These events consisted of World War II and the Holocaust, the attack on the Twin Towers, and other such atrocities that involved mass casualties. Everyone thought of the worst things, but no one seemed to think of any events that didn’t involve death or destruction. Mr. Harrison then turned to Jared, who was laying his head down, looking out the window at the heavy clouds that rolled over the school and into the horizon in every direction.

“Okay, Mr. Harrison,” Lillian said as she turned back around in her desk and joined her other classmates. She watched as Mr. Harrison and Jared left the room and stood out in the hallway next to the lockers. Mr. Harrison closed the door part way so their conversation couldn’t be overheard. She tried anyways, wanting to know what was going on with her old friend.

She heard Mr. Harrison speaking to Jared, but couldn’t make out what he was saying. She stood up and walked over to the pencil sharpener, pulling out a pre-sharpened pencil. As she did, she watched Jared nod to whatever Mr. Harrison was saying to him.

The door opened and Jared returned to his desk, slumping down into his chair and putting up his hood. Mr. Harrison soon followed, eyeing Lillian as she put her pencil into the sharpener. She smiled, hoping Mr. Harrison hadn’t noticed the sharp tip of the pencil. He walked to the front of the classroom and straightened his papers on the podium.

Jared peered back at Jared over her shoulders as he stared out the window again. She felt like she should do something, but wasn’t sure what. Even though they hadn’t actually spoken to each other for about a year, she still considered him a friend.

She returned to her desk and tried to hold her focus on the front of class and Mr. Harrison’s plan for the semester. Any other day it would have been easy, but her mind was consumed with worry for Jared.

After the bell rang at the end of class, Lillian waited for Jared to pack his stuff up before getting up from her chair. She started to follow him out of the room, hoping to talk to him, but Mr. Harrison stepped in front of her.

“Jared, I want to talk to you for a moment.”

She froze, thinking that he had caught her eavesdropping on his conversation with Jared. “Don’t worry, you’re not in trouble,” Mr. Harrison said. “I just want you to be patient with Jared. He’s been through a lot in the past couple months and may be unwelcoming to people at the moment.”

“Okay, Mr. Harrison. I just want to help him,” Lillian said as she twirled her cross in her fingers. “I’ve known Jared for some time. I’m sure he will talk with me.”

Jared nodded to Lillian, but just be patient, don’t push him to talk.” Mr. Harrison looked up at the clock. “You should probably get to your next class. I’ll call up to Mr. Lendon and tell him I had kept you after class for a minute.” Mr. Harrison picked up the phone on his desk and dialed the extension.

“Thanks, I’ll see you tomorrow,” Lillian said as she walked out the door and rushed towards the stairway.

A couple hours later, Lillian was walking to lunch when she saw Jared walking over to his locker. She smiled as she diverted towards him and away from her friends a few feet in front of her. They stared at her confused.

“Hey Jared.”

Jared peered around the corner of his locker door and nodded at her. He pulled his books out of his backpack, placing them on the shelf of his locker. When his backpack was empty he flung it over his shoulder and closed his locker. Lillian was still standing there smiling at him. He waved at her then walked past her towards the stairway to the cafeteria. She followed, walking right by her friends. One of her friends grabbed her wrist, causing Lillian to turn around.

“Lilly, what are you doing? Why you talk- ing with that weirdo?”

“He’s not a weirdo Stacy, he’s my friend,” Lillian said, pulling her wrist away. “He deserves the same amount of attention as anyone else here.” Lillian’s tone calmed as she stepped away from her friends and followed Jared. “Jared! Jared, wait up!”

She caught up to him as he entered the cafeteria. It was still early, there wasn’t much of a line yet. The aroma of the school lunch filled the room.

“Smells like your favorite. Grilled cheese and tomato soup.”

Jared shrugged as he looked at the line of food in front of him. Lillian knew for sure that there was something wrong now. Jared would always get excited for grilled cheese day.

“Hey, do you want to sit together?” Lillian waited for an answer, but only got a shrug. “Cool. You can tell me about your summer. I’m sure it was pretty cool.”

Jared stopped and took a deep breath. His heart began pounding and he felt like he couldn’t breathe. He looked around at all the people that were sitting around him or stand-
Jared drifted through her mind. She smiled, recalling her childhood spent running around town with her cross around her neck. Memories of being kids. As she looked down at his backpack, she saw an empty bag. In this moment, she knew something was eating at him. Turn right when you see your favorite day at school.

Jared now, she couldn't help but feel something. What? Even though she hadn't actually spoken to each other for a year, she still considered him a friend. She returned to her desk and tried to hold her focus on the front of class and Mr. Harrison's plan for the semester. Any other day it would have been easy, but her mind was consumed with worry for Jared.

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"Lillian, I want to talk to you for a moment." Mr. Harrison said. "I just want you to be patient with Jared. He's not a weirdo, Stacy, he's my friend," Jared shrugged as he looked at the line of people in front of him. "Hey Jared. He's not a weirdo Stacy, he's my friend," Jared said as he walked out the door and rushed to his locker.

"Thanks, I'll see you tomorrow," Lillian said as she walked out the door and rushed towards the stairway. A couple hours later, Lillian was walking to lunch when she saw Jared walking over to his locker. She smiled as she diverted towards him and away from her friends a few feet in front of her. They stared at her confused. "Hey Jared.

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"Okay, Mr. Harrison. I just want to help him," Lillian said as she twirled her cross in her fingers. "I've known Jared for some time. I'm sure he will talk with me." Jared shrugged. "Jared sounds nice, Lillian, but just be patient, don't push him to talk." Mr. Harrison looked up at the clock. "You should probably get to your next class. I'll call up to Mr. Lendon and tell him I had kept you after class for a minute." Mr. Harrison picked up the phone on his desk and dialed the extension.

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Her dad began to serve everyone. Her brother tempting everyone to just dig in right away. The smell filled the room in seconds, eat. Her mom came in with a whole lasagna with dinner with her parents and siblings. They were to decide how to fix whatever she had broken. said or did, her eyes were drawn to Jared, trying when she realized that was the most they had a lot more than that. It sickened her even more but she had a feeling that this time would take was heartbroken at his masterpiece being shat her, but he never was so abrupt even though he glass sculpture that Jared had spent hours form the cafeteria.

Lillian was taken aback. She just sat there as when she saw him in the hallway by him. She clutched her cross, whispering.

Lillian's parents looked at each other, knowing exactly what was wrong. Lillian picked up on their solitary understanding looks.

“What is it? Do you know something?”
“Lilly we didn't want to tell you until you had settled back into school and home. You only got back a week ago” her dad said, his voice hesitant.

“What is it? What are you not telling me?” Her voice raising to frustration. Lillian's dad cleared his throat as he looked at his wife. “Jared's father died this lastsummer, he had a heart attack.”

Lillian was struck silent, her face scrunching from confusion to disgust in a few seconds. “How could you not tell me that Daniel died? Jared is one of my oldest friends, and Daniel used to be yours,” Lillian said as the astonishment of her parents' oversight and her own anger rushed to the surface.

“That's no excuse. You should have told me! I deserved to know!”

“Jillian. How dare you talk to your father like that,” her mom said, a scowl on her face.

“Because, he's the reason that Jared and I are no longer friends!” She turned to her dad, staring in the eye and said with a direct tone, “I was there when he told Daniel that I was no longer allowed at their house. You're still afraid that I am closer to him than I am to you.”

Her dad sat back in his chair. Embarrassment covered his face as he tried to hide it with his hand on his head. He looked everywhere but at his daughter before standing up and walking out of the room.

There was silence in the room for several minutes until Lillian spoke again. “Can I be excused? I'm no longer hungry.”

Her mom gave her a solemn nod, then turned to the living room where her husband sat. Lillian pushed back her chair and ran to her room. Throwing herself onto her bed, she began to think about what she had said. Her heart still beating heavily, she clutched her cross and closed her eyes, whispering a prayer of forgiveness.

The next day, Lillian tried to sit next to Jared in all the classes they shared. Many of which she didn't get the opportunity. In the classes she did get to sit next to him, they had no group exercises, so it didn't give her the opportunity to work her way into a conversation. That didn't stop her from showing any other such compassion that she could. Every time he looked up, she would smile at him, trying to reassure him that someone was there for him. He would often look away without returning an expression.

Finally when she saw him in the hallway by his locker, after their last class of the day, she got the courage to say something to him. She walked up to him and placed a kind, gentle hand on his shoulder.

“Jillian, I asked you to leave me alone,” he said shrugging off her hand. “Why do you even care anyways? Go back to your perfect life and ignore me like you have for the past four years.” Jared's tone drew the attention of the people around him. He glared at them to keep walking. Lillian pulled back her hand.

“I know I haven't been around, but I want to change that. I want us to hang out again, to be friends like when we were kids.”

“I'm sorry Jared. I didn't mean to abandon you. What matters is that I am here now. I am here right in front of you, asking you to forgive me and be my friend again. We can go down to Mr. Williams shop and get some licorice and orange soda.”

Jared's body and demeanor relaxed as the memories of their childhood flashed through his mind. A smile peaked from his face before his eyes narrowed in on something. His body tightened again as he looked down at her hand that clutched her cross.

“You'll just abandon me again. Just like He did,” Jared said, slamming his locker as he flung his backpack over his shoulder. He walked to the front door of the school, people avoiding him, hoping to not get caught in his rampage. Lillian ran after him, apologizing to some of the people that had tripped while trying to get out of Jared's way.

“Hey Jared, I wanted to say that I'm sorry about your dad,” Lillian yelled as she tried catching up with Jared. He stopped, his breathing quickening with anger.

“What do you care now? You've ignored us both for the majority of four years. What's changed,” he said turning to her.

She was silent. There was no difference between yesterday and today besides she knew of his dad's death. She tried to think of something, but nothing she thought of would sound right.

“That's what I thought. You're just like everyone else, pitying me.” He walked off. Any other time, she would have brushed it off and walked away, not thinking of it again. This time she wasn't going to let it end like that.

“I'm not everyone else!” She ran after him again, this time blocking his path. “I'm your friend Jared. I'm here to help you.”

“A friend doesn't abandon someone because they're going into a new school,” he said brushing past her. “You all abandoned me, I just didn't see it until this summer.”

Lillian looked at Jared, her eyes filling with tears as she realized he was right. She had abandoned him. He clutched her cross, whispering. Tears blinding her sight, a Jared shaped blur in front of her.

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Her dad began to serve everyone. Her brother pesto that she had spent all day making from dinner with her parents and siblings. They were said or did, her eyes were drawn to Jared, trying when she realized that was the most they had died! Jared is one of my oldest friends, and Dan!erons. “How could you not tell me that Daniel left me? Lillian said as the astonishment of her parents’ oversight and her own anger rushed to the surface. “That’s no excuse. You should have told me!” Lillian’s mom said, placing more food on the table. “I can’t stop thinking about Jared. He looked so sad today. When I asked about his summer, he almost broke down crying.” Lillian’s parents looked at each other, knowing exactly what was wrong. Lillian picked up on their solitary understanding looks. “What is it? Do you know something?” “Lilly we didn’t want to tell you until you had settled back into school and home. You only got back a week ago” her dad said, his voice hesitant. “What is it? What are you not telling me?” Her voice raising to frustration. Lillian’s dad cleared his throat as he looked at his wife. “Jared’s father died this last summer, he had a heart attack.” Lillian was struck silent, her face scrunching from confusion to disgust in a few seconds. “How could you not tell me that Daniel died? Jared is one of my oldest friends, and Daniel used to be yours,” Lillian said as the astonishment of her parents’ oversight and her own anger rushed to the surface. “That’s no excuse. You should have told me! I deserved to know!” “Lillian. How dare you talk to your father like that,” her mom said, a scowl on her face. “Because, he’s the reason that Jared and I are no longer friends.” She turned to her dad, staring him in the eye and said with a direct tone, “I was there when he told Daniel that I was no longer allowed at their house. You’re still afraid that I am closer to him than I am to you.” Her dad sat back in his chair. Embarrassment covered his face as he tried to hide it with his hand on his head. He looked everywhere but at his daughter before standing up and walking out of the room. There was silence in the room for several minutes until Lillian spoke again. “Can I be excused? I’m no longer hungry.” Her mom gave her a solemn nod, then turned to the living room where her husband sat. Lillian pushed back her chair and ran to her room. Throwing herself onto her bed, she began to think about what she had said. Her heart still beating heavily, she clutched her cross and closed her eyes, whispering a prayer of forgiveness. The next day, Lillian tried to sit next to Jared in all the classes they shared. Many of which she didn’t get the opportunity. In the classes she did get to sit next to him, they had no group exercises, so it didn’t give her the opportunity to work her way into a conversation. That didn’t stop her from showing any other such compassion that she could. Every time he looked up, she would smile at him, trying to reassure him that someone was there for him. He would often look away without returning an expression. Finally when she saw him in the hallway by his locker, after their last class of the day, she got the courage to say something to him. She walked up to him and placed a kind, gentle hand on his shoulder. “Lillian, I asked you to leave me alone,” he said shrugging off her hand. “Why do you even care anyways? Go back to your perfect life and ignore me like you have for the past four years.” Jared’s tone drew the attention of the people around him. He glared at them to keep walking. Lillian pulled back her hand. “Jared, I know I haven’t been around, but I want to change that. I want us to hang out again, to be friends like when we were kids.” “I’m sorry Jared. I didn’t mean to abandon you. What matters is that I am here now. I am here right in front of you, asking you to forgive me and be my friend again. We can go down to Mr. Williams shop and get some licorice and orange soda.” Jared’s body and demeanor relaxed as the memories of their childhood flashed through his mind. A smile peeked from his face before his eyes narrowed in on something. His body tightened again as he looked down at her hand that clutched her cross. “You’ll just abandon me again. Just like He did,” Jared said, pointing at the cross. Lillian looked down, then at Jared. She knew what had been missing, Jared wasn’t wearing the glass and gold cross that his dad had made him, almost an
exact replica of hers. Jared shook his head again, then ran off across the high school lawn, leaving Lillian standing with her heart sinking and her hand still clutching her cross.

After he was out of sight, she walked over to her car and got inside. Sitting there, she broke down into tears. The realization of all the wrong she had done to Jared, how she abandoned him, left him without any friends, began to catch up with her. She was letting it all sink in, letting it all into her heart, in hope of finding a way to fix the parts of Jared’s life that she had broken, or left broken for so long.

She leaned on her steering wheel as the tears slowed and she was able to see again. Wiping away the remnants of the tears she closed her eyes and prayed for forgiveness, help, and guidance. She prayed that Jared would forgive her so that she could help him through the pain and heartache that he was going through.

When she looked up from her steering wheel, an idea came to her. She started her car and drove away from the high school.

Lillian pulled up to an older half brick, half siding styled house. The lawn was green, but a faded green, like it hadn’t been taken care of. She pulled over to the driveway and got out of the car. She took a deep breath and walked to the front door. She knocked loudly, hoping to persuade Jared to forgive me with her. She was letting it all sink in, letting it all into her heart, in hope of finding a way to fix the parts of Jared’s life that she had broken, or left broken for so long.

“Hey, he’s in his room. He’s not in a good mood right now though.” “That’s mostly my fault,” Lillian said, her tone becoming more somber.

“I don’t believe that. My brother has been very hostile since our dad passed, don’t take it personally,” Sarah said as she wrapped her arm around Lillian. “Why don’t you come in and sit?” Sarah led Lillian into the house, closing the door behind them.

Nostalgia hit again as Lillian looked around the inside of the house. There was barely anything different about it since the last time she was there years ago. The whole place smelled like ocean breeze scented candles and chocolate chip cookies. It was very comforting being back in this place after so long, so many memories.

“How would you like something to drink? Maybe some cookies?”

“No thanks, I brought some stuff with me. I was hoping to persuade Jared to forgive me with some old fashioned orange soda and some hand made licorice bits from Mr. William’s shop.” A muffled laugh came from the kitchen as Sarah entered the room with a cup of tea.

“That’s all you two would eat and drink as kids, licorice bits and orange soda.” Sarah walked over to the empty fireplace and sat down on the couch. She looked up at the pictures that sat on the stand beside her. “My dad had to always wrestle you two to the ground to get you to stop bouncing off the walls.”

Lillian smiled as she looked around. There was a faded drawing on the wall, hiding behind one of the chairs. Jared and her had drawn it the week after they met in first grade. It was five stick figures, and they were all labeled, mom, dad, Sarah, Jared, but it was the last one that hit her the hardest. It said my new sis, Lilly. Lillian looked away, pulling herself back to the present moment. She turned to Sarah, whom was still staring at the pictures of her father.

“I’m sorry for your loss Sarah. Your dad was a great man.” She took a deep breath and looked at her cross. “He brought me to my faith, which is something I’ll never forget.”

“Thank you Lilly, I know he was pretty fond of you too.” Sarah picked up a photo of Jared, Lillian, and Jared’s dad from the stand. With a tender smile she thought about the day it was taken. They were building a tree house and Jared was trying to be strong and carry a board all by himself, but Lillian had to help him. Jared’s dad was looking over his shoulder at them as the picture was taken. A moment that says more than a thousand words.

Sarah turned her concentration to Lillian again. Lillian was still running her fingers against her cross. “Is that the cross my dad made for you?”

Lillian’s eyes shot upward as she was pulled back from her memories. “Yes, I’ve worn it everyday since.” She fiddled it in her hands. “It feels kind of weird wearing it, especially when he is no longer around.” This was the first time that thought had occurred to Lillian; that she would no longer see him in passing or wave from across the street.

Sarah moved closer, sensing the grief that was taking hold of Lillian. She could see the tears at the corner of Lillian’s eyes.

“You know, my dad thought of you as a second daughter, especially when you came into the faith. He raised us in it, but you grew into it. He was always very proud of seeing you grow in your faith,” Sarah paused for a moment as a thought came to her mind, “I was sometimes jealous that he didn’t pay as much attention to me as you. It wasn’t until after Jared and you got into junior high that I began to miss you. It has been too quiet around here.”

“I’m sorry Lilly, I miss it too,” Lillian said, sitting down in a chair across from Sarah. “I wish I would have been here for Jared. I’ve missed him over the years, but I justified that he was okay without me somehow.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Jared was happy. Him and dad spent so much time working on the truck that I barely saw them when I visited. That’s all that Jared does now. I had to force him to go to school this week. He’s lost in his grief.” “I bet it’s hard with all this going on.”

“Yeah, my faith and patience has been tested, but I still believe. I still have hope. Dad hid his sickness from Jared and everyone else, but you can’t trick a med student. I knew there was something wrong. I drove back in the middle of pre-med finals when his health hit a rapid decline in May. I got to spend about three and a half weeks with him before he died. We knew it was coming though. Most of us were ready.” Sarah turned her focus to the room at the end of the hallway. “Jared not so much, he refused to believe that Dad was dying.”

There was a silence in the room for several minutes until Lillian leaned forward and placed a hand on Sarah’s. “How are you doing?”

“I’m fine, really. I knew it was coming, that’s why I didn’t worry about leaving college. I knew that Jared was going to need me.”

“You quit college? Does Jared know?”

“No, not really. I told Jared that I’m taking a semester off. Right now, he’s got enough to worry about, he doesn’t need to be guilty about that too.”

Lillian could sense that Sarah was more worried about Jared than anything else, she always had been. She was always selfless, but Lillian didn’t know much until now.

“Sarah, is there any way that I could talk with Jared? I want to apologize for all that happened and let him know that he has a friend.”

“Lilly, I don’t think so. At least not today. Give me your number and I’ll let you know when he is in a better mood.”

“Okay.” Lillian wrote her number on a sketch pad next to her, then handed it to Sarah. “Don’t be a stranger, come around tomorrow. I’ll be here, even if Jared isn’t,” Sarah said as she hugged Lillian tight, holding on for longer than usual. When she let go Lillian smiled. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” Lillian walked out of the house to her car, but as she opened the driver’s side
“You’ve grown up so much. You look so beautiful, your hair is so much more blonde than I remember. I bet you have a handsome boyfriend.”

“Thanks, but no. I’m still single. I haven’t found the right guy, yet.” “Well, whoever it ends up being will be one lucky guy,” Lillian shrugged and let an embarrassed smile cross her face. A second later, she remembered what she was doing and the smile faded. “Is Jared here?”

“Yes, he’s in his room. He’s not in a good mood right now though.” “That’s mostly my fault,” Lillian said, her tone becoming more somber.

“I don’t believe that. My brother has been very hostile since our dad passed, don’t take it personally,” Sarah said as she wrapped her arm around Lillian. “Why don’t you come in and sit?” Sarah led Lillian into the house, closing the door behind them.

Nostalgia hit again as Lillian looked around the inside of the house. There was barely anything different about it since the last time she was there years ago. The whole place smelled like ocean breeze scented candles and chocolate chip cookies. It was very comforting being back in this place after so long, so many memories. “Would you like something to drink? Maybe some cookies?”

“No thanks, I brought some stuff with me. I was hoping to persuade Jared to forgive me with some old fashioned orange soda and some hand made licorice bites from Mr. William’s shop.” A muffled laugh came from the kitchen as Sarah entered the room with a cup of tea.

“That’s all you two would eat and drink as kids, licorice bites and orange soda.” Sarah walked over to the empty fireplace and sat down on the couch. She looked up at the pictures that sat on the stand beside her. “My dad had to always wrestle you two to the ground to get you to stop bouncing off the walls.”

Lillian smiled as she looked around. There was a faded drawing on the wall, hiding behind one of the chairs. Jared and her had drawn it the week after they met in first grade. It was five stick figures, and they were all labeled, mom, dad, Sarah, Jared, but it was the last one that hit her the hardest. It said my new sis, Lilly. Lillian looked away, pulling herself back to the present moment. She turned to Sarah, whom was still staring at the pictures of her father.

“I’m sorry for your loss Sarah. Your dad was a great man.” She took a deep breath and looked at her cross. “He brought me to my faith, which is something I’ll never forget.”

“Thank you Lilly, I know he was pretty fond of you too.” Sarah picked up a photo of Jared, Lillian, and Jared’s dad from the stand. With a tender smile she thought about the day it was taken. They were building a tree house and Jared was trying to be strong and carry a board all by himself, but Lillian had to help him. Jared’s dad was looking over his shoulder at them as the picture was taken. A moment that says more than a thousand words.

Sarah turned her concentration to Lil- lian again. Lillian was still running her fingers against her cross. “Is that the cross my dad made for you?”

Lillian’s eyes shot upward as she was pulled back from her memories. “Yes, I’ve worn it everyday since.” She fiddled it in her hands. “It feels kind of weird wearing it, especially when he is no longer around.” This was the first time that thought had occurred to Lillian; that she would no longer see him in passing or wave from across the street.

Sarah moved closer, sensing the grief that was taking hold of Lillian. She could see the tears at the corner of Lillian’s eyes.

“You know, my dad thought of you as a second daughter, especially when you came into the faith. He raised us in it, but you grew into it. He was always very proud of seeing you grow in your faith,” Sarah paused for a moment as a tear came to her eye. “I was sometimes jealous that he didn’t pay as much attention to me as you. It wasn’t until after Jared and you got into junior high that I began to miss you. It has been too quiet around here.”

“Yeah, I miss it too,” Lillian said, sitting down in a chair across from Sarah. “I wish I would have been here for Jared. I’ve missed him over the years, but I justified that he was okay without me somehow.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Jared was happy. Him and dad spent so much time working on the truck that I barely saw them when I visited. That’s all that Jared does now. I had to force him to go to school this week. He’s lost in his grief.”

“I bet it’s hard with all this going on.”

“Yeah, my faith and patience has been tested, but I still believe. I still have hope. Dad hid his sickness from Jared and everyone else, but you can’t trick a med student. I knew there was something wrong. I drove back in the middle of pre-med finals when his health hit a rapid decline in May. I got to spend about three and a half weeks with him before he died. We knew it was coming though. Most of us were ready.”

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Lillian walked out of the house to her car, but as she opened the driver’s side
Jared pulled away, looking at Lillian, a single tear of blood had traveled down to her eyebrow. “I should be asking you to forgive me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive.” She embraced him again as Sarah came over with a wet rag, licorice bites, and orange soda. Both Lillian and Jared laughed as they took the licorice and soda from her and leaned back against the wall.

Sarah wiped the blood from Lillian’s face and reassured them both that it was nothing serious, then went into the house. Lillian and Jared sat in the garage without saying a word. They just drank soda and ate licorice bites.

After about twenty minutes of silence, Jared turned to Lillian.

“Thank you. I didn’t realize how much I really missed you until today. I’m glad you’re here.”

“Me too,” she said. She leaned her head on his shoulder and looked around the garage at all the tools and car parts. “We should probably pick this up.”
door, she saw that the hood on the chevy pick-up
was open. Knowing that it had been down
when she arrived, Lillian walked over to in-
tigate.

When she reached the pickup, she noticed a
greasy rag hanging from the side of the hood.
Then she saw something move at the front of
the pickup and heard wheel rolling on the pave-
ment.

“Can I help...Oh, it’s you. What are you do-
ing here?” Jared said as he stood up and saw Lil-
lian. His face and hands were covered in black.

“I came to see if you were okay. I didn’t
want the way we left things at the school to be
the way they were. I brought you som...”

“I don’t care what you brought me. It
doesn’t matter, I’m busy.” He turned around
and opened the large garage door, then walked
inside. There was tools and car parts cover-
ing the various work benches and shelves. He
walked over to a red tool chest and slid one of
the drawers open. Rustling around for a mo-
ment he turned back around with a wrench.

“I just want to make sure that you’re okay.
Can I help you?”

“Yeah, you can go home. I can fix this on
my own. I don’t need anyone’s help,” he said
sliding underneath the pickup again.

Please, Jared let me help. I could hold a
light or something. I want to fix this between
us. I want to be friends again.”

Jared slid from underneath the pickup and
walked back into the garage. “You can’t fix any-
things, all you do is break things and leave them
that way.”

“I get it Jared, I abandoned you, but please
listen to me when I say I’m sorry.”

“...I’m not talking about me, you abandoned
him too. He loved you like a daughter and you
just walked out of his life. You could have made
the decision to ignore your parents, told them
that you made the decision to accept the faith,
that he wasn’t forcing it onto you.”

Lillian stood there. He knew too, he knew
what her dad had done. Thinking through that
fact as she watched Jared shuffle through more
tools, she knew that he was right. Her parents
seemed strict, but they wouldn’t have restricted
her if she would have spoken to them.

“Yeah, that’s true. I could have said some-
thing, then maybe there wouldn’t be anything
to fix. But there is, and I am here to fix whatever
I can.”

“Don’t you get it, you can’t fix anything!”
Jared knocked over the tool chest, cascading
tools all over the garage floor. Lillian jumped,
stepping back out of the garage as he continued
to knock shelves and tables over. “No one can
fix me, not you, not Sarah, not God.”

“Jared just calm down. Please, stop. You’re
going to hurt yourself,” Lillian said as she ap-
proached Jared and grabbed his arm. He turned
around, pushing her back. She fell to the
ground, hitting her head on a shelf.

“Jared, what is wrong with you,” Sarah
said. She had entered the garage before he had
pushed Lillian. She rushed to Lillian’s side,
checking for any head injuries. There was a
small cut on the side of her head, it was bleed-
ing, but it wasn’t serious. She helped Lillian to
her feet and held her steady until she regained
her balance.

Jared stood, staring at her, then at the ga-
rage around him. “Lillian, I didn’t mean to...”
Tears started coming to his eyes. He leaned back
against a workbench, breathing heavy. His eyes
were no longer filled with anger, but regret and
disgust for himself.

Lillian stepped towards him. “Jared, it’s
okay. I’m fine, right Sarah,” she said turning tow-
ards Sarah. Sarah nodded. “I’m okay. It’s just
a little cut. It’s not your fault.”

Jared turned to Lillian.

“Thank you. I didn’t realize how much I
really missed you until today. I’m glad you’re
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