

# Something Found

“Only half a mile left!” she called out. The problem was we were only half a mile in and I was struggling to keep up. I am not a runner, in fact until my best friend Emily and I began rooming together this year, the last time I voluntarily exercised was back in high school. Now, I was doing it to keep up my end of the deal with Emily. When the first two weeks of living together didn’t work out due to Emily’s ability to leave the dorm a mess and my inability to leave the dorm at all, we decided to draw a compromise. If she would pick up more, then I would go out with her more and try to be social. For some reason, this included these despised runs every other day.

“I don’t see how this will make me the social butterfly that you are,” I heaved as I placed my hands on my knees to catch my breath.

“Do not stop running,” Emily retorted as she spun around, still jogging in place, “I’ve explained this to you before, running releases stress, which reduces insecurities. It’s very simple, Abby. You’re lucky I haven’t created an entire marathon training program because your self-confidence seriously needs it.”

I winced in reply. I’m used to these types of comments from her from time to time, but they still sting. Plus, I can’t help that I’m not the confident, happy, beautiful person that she is. Looking at her, then at myself, I can understand why she gets all the attention. She is tall, thin and dressed confidently. While she is wearing bright pink running shorts and a tank top, I am dressed in my favorite Boston University sweatshirt and sweatpants which she says make me look like her mom. I was a sweaty mess running through Boston Manor Park during the hottest week of September to date. But why couldn’t I just take the sweatshirt off? Good question; to be short, I am just sick of it – all of it. The stares, the laughs, the finger pointing, and especially the way mothers tilted their bodies to block me from their children which were attempts at being discreet, but I noticed all of it. When I was younger, it didn’t bother me. For the first year, I was just happy to be alive. This was until middle school when I became aware of my looks and suffered from the awful tormenting that followed after going to a birthday party during the summer before seventh grade. The birthday girl, Carly, had a pool and told everyone to bring a swimsuit so I wore my favorite purple bikini. As soon as I took off my cover-up, I felt the burning of their eyes on me. I was called a freak, a monster, and one boy in particular was so upset that he pushed me down. And because of what? People hated me because of the scar that stretched across my shoulders down to my ribs, mutating my stomach

and chest. The bubblegum pink scar tissue twisted in every direction like a spider's web. There was no way to hide it without clothes, the skin bulged at the seams of the scar. I knew I looked different from the others, but that day I realized that maybe different wasn't so good after all. When I got home from the party, I went through my clothes and threw out those that gave others even a glimpse of my scar. I then convinced my mother to buy me all new clothes before school, so my closet pretty much consisted of sweatshirts, sweaters, turtlenecks, and pants. I was 12 years old.

Emily is the only one here in college that knows about my ugly secret. She has never made me feel bad about the scar, but it has become an invisible wall between the two of us since I never want to explain the crash to her. She feels left out, but I do not think there is any way she could understand. There is also the factor of embarrassment. That's why I keep my sweatshirt on, shower in the dorms at the crack of dawn when no one is up, and have confidence the size of a dust mite.

"Dad save me!" I scream as I see the red orange flames climbing up from my hip to my neck, "I'm going to die!" That's when I sit up in bed, awake immediately in a cold sweat; the nightmares have returned. They are so vivid that the scent of singed hair still fills my nostrils as I wake up. I know it was 10 years ago, but I remember every detail as clear as if it were just yesterday. The flashbacks scare me so much that for the first 5 years following the accident, I saw a psychologist to manage my PTSD. The scar is more than physical, the story behind it has left a mark on every aspect of my life.

I roll over and see that the clock reads 2:47. Since I'm already up, I decide to run into the shower before the rest of the floor begins to stir. I grab my towel, toiletries, and throw on a sweatshirt on top because you can never be too sure that everyone is asleep at this hour. Once, I made the mistake of wearing just a tank top and a girl gawked at me until I retreated into the stall.

I turn on the faucet to a lukewarm temperature because hot showers have only reminded me of the flames. Tears soon join the water and together they are channeled by the scars. The only person in the world who would understand my situation is Dad, and he is long gone. See, while many pity me for coming out of the crash mangled, I pity my dad for never coming out.

First class is theology. It is my favorite class because I use it as a time to reflect on the actions of God. Why did He let that man get so drunk? Why couldn't we have left home an hour earlier like we were supposed to? Why did the man have to be driving a semi-truck? Why did He save me and not Dad? As for the rest of my classes, I am so submerged in

learning that the rest of the day flies by. They give me something different to think about instead of what my mind usually wanders to. In the world of stoichiometry, Shakespeare, and supply and demand, my personal problems can't reach me.

Later that night, as I'm studying for a test, I log into my laptop and look at the tab I left open. It reads "Authorities Identify Victims in Semi-Truck Accident. Father Killed, Daughter in Critical Condition. Drunk Driving Suspected as Cause." I close out of it, frustrated with myself. Whenever I am bored, I always seem to find my way to that article. It's the most self-harming thing I do. I couldn't tell you why, but for some reason I read it so much that I could probably recite it. What upsets me the most is the way it talks about my father like he was just a statistic. Not a person with a real soul and a heart of gold. Not the type of person who could make you belly laugh even when you're mad at him. Not the type of person who lit up every room he walked in. Not the type of person like my father. From a bystander's perspective, however, the article is accurate, thorough, and well written. It even goes back to earlier that evening and how the two of us lost track of time playing cards and left an hour late to get to Mom's work dinner party. This background is used just to amp up feelings of pity and sadness and it works. By showing that we were at the wrong place at the wrong time, the reporter raises awareness for drunk driving which brings some peace to me. Still, I close my computer with tears rolling down my face.

The next day is Saturday and Emily has the genius idea of bringing me to the school's activities fair. Reluctantly, I agree because she has been doing a great job of picking up (and washing!) her dirty clothes and taking out the trash.

"Oh! What about Alpha Phi! We could be sorority sisters!" squealed Emily.

"Absolutely not," I replied.

She then tries with Habitat for Humanity, Educational Theatre Association, and Model United Nations. None of them sound right. Suddenly, I see her body tense up. As I follow her eyes, I see why. There is a booth with a boy in a wheelchair and two other kids. The sign reads "Mothers Against Drunk Driving Support Group."

"Bingo," Emily says in a near whisper.

She pulls me right up to the table, signs my name on the list, gets the information packets, and introduces me to everyone. It happens so fast that I don't even have the time to resist. The first meeting is on Monday.

It seems weird, but I am oddly excited for the meeting and not just because it will get Emily off my back about socializing. Emily's really helped by telling me that if it is awful, I never have to go again and that she is free all evening, so she can even come with me if I want.

I decide that it's best to go alone, however.

When I walk in the door, I see the three people from the booth and another boy I recognize from my Economics class, Michael. I'm immediately greeted by the boy in the wheelchair, who seems to be the one in charge, and told to take a seat. I plop down next to a girl who looks about my age. She has long brown hair that covers most of her face and long, thick eyelashes that accentuate the piercing green of her eyes. I remember her name is Ava. We go around the circle saying our names and stories. Ava starts. She tells the story of how her cousin was killed in a drunk driving accident. Then Lenny, the boy in the wheelchair, explains how his decision to get in the car of his friend after a party was the worst decision of his life. His friend had a BAC of 0.3 and veered off of the road into a tree. Lenny lost his legs and his friend lost his life. Next is Amy, a quiet girl who lost both of her parents at the age of 6 due to a drunk driver. Then it's Michael's turn. I look at him patiently and see the hurt in his eyes. I recognize that look, because it is what I have every time I think of the accident. He opens his mouth, ready to start, and then closes it. Finally, he shuts his eyes and a tear trickles down his cheek.

"It's ok Mike, we understand," Lenny says. Then he turns to me and says "Why don't you go next?"

"Ok, I will try," I stammered, "My name is Abby, I'm 20 years old, and the past ten years of my life have been a nightmare." I tell them everything; including things I've never told my mom. I tell them how time slowed down as I saw the truck swerve. I tell them how I felt as the heat crawled up my neck. I tell them how the sight of my father is something that will always haunt me. Every little detail, I tell them. By the time I'm done, I am crying really hard, like snot-nosed crying. Ava comforts me by giving me a hug and the others begin to clap. They are proud of me because I've gone through so much and still fight on. As I look around the room of people who were strangers an hour ago, I finally feel at home. And there is something else, something that I have not felt in the longest time and that I lost when the truck hit us. It is hope.

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