

you put so much value into has allowed this shit to happen and if your faith could pull you through something like this?

It's probably her faith that got her into this mess and your dad along with her. God is one to "test" his believers.

Stop it... I shouldn't place the blame like that. This voice in my head is a byproduct of this fiasco. It used to be sweet and imaginative. We worked together to create poetry, reflective artwork, and songs that would bring a smile to my parents' faces. Unfortunately, since the incident, I'm stuck with what feels like a demon lurking in my head telling me all the wrong things. I'm struggling. I know I need help but when your parents separate themselves from any family they may have had, who do you turn to?

"Turn to God" is what your mom would say. Too bad God is already watching but not acting in your favor.

Why? Was it karma, or just ill will from a stranger? I don't know what the fuck it was, but it was definitely purposeful. He had a plan and he executed it. No jewelry, money, or electronics were taken. Only my father's life, and possibly my mother's.

It's cold in here but her hand is still warm. The only sign of life she's given me for some time. The EKG beeps at a steady pace but I know her heart is aching. She knows he's gone. She was conscious when we lost him. Two shots to the heart in one night. I hope she's not having the nightmare of losing her husband over and over. My nights have been troubled with those

dreadful dreams. They're unbearable. I rest my head on the backside of her right hand and slowly caress my forehead against her soft skin. Tears drip to the tiled floor from the fear of me losing her. I hear their tiny splat from below me. That's how quiet it is in this room.

Knock, knock, knock

I jump a little as the doctor assigned to my mother catches my attention. Dr. Barkley, a young guy in green scrubs stands in the doorway. "Ms. Colts, can I have a moment with you?" he asks with a somber tone. His demeanor appears far too nervous for this to be good news.

I use the sleeve on my black jean jacket to dry my eyes before lifting my head to look back at him. It's not possible to hide my bloodshot eyes but I can do something with this soggy face of mine. He uses his head to motion toward the hallway since his hands are busy holding my mother's chart. Barkley walks out of the doorway to wait for me. A veteran doctor would've waited for me to exit first. What if I faint on the way to the door? A wave of depression is enough to knock me to the floor. On second thought, why not just tell me here? It's not like there's anyone that can hear us.

"Whatever..." I mumble as I sluggishly rise from my seat at my mother's side to entertain this doctor. He's out there ready to give me the typical rundown of 'I have some bad news' or 'It hurts me to say this' bullshit. I just know it. I finally reach the hallway and Barkley is patiently waiting with his stupid little clipboard and pen. He's tapping the top of the chart with the pen in rapid succession. My feet drag across the floor as I walk up to the wall, lean against it, and fold my arms. I should try to look more presentable but I'm not looking for that type of attention at the moment. My face says it all.

A nurse passes between us. She looks at me with a smile. I don't return the sentiment. The poor thing nervously averts her eyes and continues down the hall. Had conditions been different, I would've been kind but not now. *Sorry, lady.*

Barkley waits until she gets far enough so our conversation can remain private. He sighs to prepare his little spiel to me. "You know, this is the hardest part about being a doctor." Damn... I didn't think of that one.

"Not to be rude," I interrupt, "but this isn't about you, doc. You're here to tell me my mom is dying and there's nothing you can do about it. Am I right?" My bitterness is spilling from my scowl as I feel myself glaring at him.

Instead of answering, his head lowers to his sheets and lifts a page as if an answer to my issue lies under it. Even with my small frame and stature, I am able to shake this guy.

I continue, "Thanks. I understand completely." I roll my eyes and ignore his attempt to get another word in. It's about time I leave this place *and* from the presence of this weak-willed doctor.

His hand rises and he tries to regain control of the situation. "Ms. Colts!" He says in a panic while reaching out to me.

I swat his hand away but I stop before he's out of my sight. "Look, doc... I'm gonna be gone for a while. Take care of her as best as you can." I pause for a moment to remove my silver bracelet my parents brought me when I was fourteen. Another piece of jewelry decorated with a crucifix. It's thin links pool in my palm under the heavier hunk of metal. "When she wakes up, give her this." I extend my hand with the bracelet.

Barkley stares at it and shakes his head slowly.

My nerves get bad while I patiently wait for it to be taken. I give it a jiggle to convince him to grab the trinket.

“But, Avi, she may not...” he says but is unable to complete his thought. “You've been here all day, *every day*. Minus the funeral, of course. Maybe it's a good idea to take some time for yourself. Come to terms with things and whatnot, you know?”

I turn my hand around and the accessory dangles from my fingertips. The cross linked to it sways as I continue to wait for him without a word. He finally reaches out to me to take the sentimental silver from me. Then he does the worst thing he could ever do. He tilts his head and pouts. Looking at me like I'm a victim. I'm not falling into that role. I refuse to be seen as weak. My father would not approve of that. I can't let his years of conditioning me for hard times like these fail me.

After raising my index finger to signal him to wait, I walk back into my mother's room. I approach her and kiss her gently on the forehead. “I'll be back, Mom. I'm going to find the man that did this to us.”

Barkley wanders back into the room as I expected. The disruptive doctor is disturbing my moment with my mother yet again. He's still trying to push his point that she may pass. *I get it dude. Back off!* He tries to speak again but my hand flies up faster than his lips can move. It says “stop” louder than my mouth can muster right now. I point at the bracelet he's holding and softly say, “You're gonna need that to calm her down when she finds out I'm not here.” I pat the doctor on the shoulder as I slip by him in the doorway to leave. “Have her call the station so she can find out what's going on. I'm out.”