

All night long, I had been checking my phone to see if she had texted me back, but no answer. I knew in my heart getting involved with him was a bad idea; Madi had a massive crush on Jacob, but I liked him too. If he and Alexa were supposed to be together, they would, but he chose me in the end. The thought of being placed over Alexa gave me an unsuspected thrill, but at the same time felt shitty. She was my best friend, yet I was over here screwing her over by trying to be with the guy she had talked my ear off. I tried to shake the thought out of my head and concentrate on the party. My best friends and I were all at my friend Jennifer's house hanging out, celebrating all of us graduating from high school. We had just finished spending time in her jacuzzi, where I completely drowned my phone, so here I was wondering if Alexa ignored my apology message or if I just didn't have an alive telephone to receive a response.

It was getting late, and we were all starving, so Jennifer proposed the idea of us going to In-N-Out for dinner. My best friend Taylor and I drove in our car. The whole drive there, the lot of us, around 10, fucked around, bypassing each other on the street between lanes. We all hung our bodies halfway out the window to try and high five our friends in the other car, and even resorting to trying the fire drill game and beat the other vehicle at who would be fastest. The winner bought the other car's dinner. We ordered our food, our team lost, so I paid for my friend Jack, and we went to sit at a large table towards the back. Everyone was playing on their phones, and since mine drowned in the jacuzzi earlier, I took it upon myself to entertain everyone and get them off their phones. It worked for a little bit as we sat talking about grad night and how horrible it went, laughing at the fact that we all could have died on that sketchy amusement park ride that shook on its metal track. Our order numbers were called, and for a few minutes, we were silent, stuffing our faces with animal fries and burgers. Sat in front of me, scrolling on his phone in one hand, and eating his burger in the other, taking a large bite from his double-double.

"Does anyone know Jacob Schwartz?" he asked with a mouth full of food, breaking the silence of our group feast. Taylor glanced at me, and I felt her eyes watching me as I stared at Jack.

"Yeah, I might know that name," I responded, my hand slightly trembling as I nervously gnawed on the french fry, waiting to see what he had to say about Jacob. He had stopped responding to my texts about a few days ago, and it hurt since I believe he liked me just as much as I wanted him. I kept thinking maybe it was for the best that he had stopped responding; it would allow Alexa and me to rebuild our friendship if she were open to it. It was my fault we were no longer friends in the first place: stupid Jacob and his charming smile and suave demeanor. I understood why she liked him so much because they were all the reasons I did as well.

“Oh, well, he died,” Jack announced so casually, taking another large bite from his burger while continuing to scroll Instagram. It felt as if at that moment, everything stopped. I felt the pace of my heartbeat start to quicken as I just stared at Jack.

“No, he didn’t. Where did you see that?” I demanded from him, my hand reaching for his phone. He slapped my hand away in annoyance, putting his phone down. My eyes began to well up with tears, and my whole body began to shake. Everyone’s eyes were on me, staring at me like I was crazy.

“He died, okay? Got hit by a car or something,” He muttered as he continued to stuff his face. In my head, I tried to process the thought he indeed might be dead. My brain attempted to rationalize his behavior towards me as my heart refused to accept the fact.

“Where did you see it?” I shouted at him, leaning into his face. I felt the hot tears streaming down my reddened cheeks as I tried to make sense of the information overload Jack had weighed onto me. I felt all eyes on me from everyone at our large table as I was standing over Jack, my small frame peering into his face forcing him to look at me. I’ve never seen him look so little before.

“His friend Chelsea posted it on Instagram. I didn’t know you knew him, strange you didn’t know he was dead. It’s on her page, Jesus, just look,” Jack threw me his phone, and I immediately began reading Chelsea’s words. She went on about how great a friend he was, how much she would miss him, and what a great photographer he was. She was right; his photos were incredible. I found myself deep into searching other people’s posts about his death. Jack was right. He was in a car accident. Jacob miraculously survived and walked down the road for assistance but was hit again. He died instantly.

I handed Jacob back his phone and felt entirely numb. Taylor lay her hand on my shoulder and just brought me in for a hug. I sobbed into her neck while everyone around us stared at me, confused about how this sudden death impacted me so much. It caused such a scene an In-N-Out employee came over and gave me a free shake once he saw how much I cried. No wonder he didn’t text me back. He was dead.

Taylor sat me at a table outside and patiently waited until I calmed down. I refused to accept what was, but also felt such devastation at what a loss this was. He was only twenty years old, three years ahead of my seventeen years. He had his whole life ahead of him. He was supposed to finish college, create a successful photography business, travel the world, and capture amazing sights, but he would never be able to accomplish any of that. The school was talking about how tragic his death was. The students who knew we were friends came up and said their condolences about him and

how much they would miss him. That's when reality set in about how I would never see him again. I went over our texts on my phone, re-reading past conversations before his accident. They helped me cope with accepting he was truly gone. I knew I wasn't the only one in pain. Alexa was suffering too, but neither of us was ready to contact the other quite yet. I decided to give her some time to process and grieve just as I was.

A couple of weeks had passed, and I was feeling slightly better. Jacob's death impacted me in ways I didn't understand. I was more focused on how it made me think rather than him being dead. It scared me how attached I was to someone I had barely known, but also, we were just starting to date when he died. None of it made sense to me, but I pushed myself every day to go on with my life and accept what happened. It was his time to go, but I always questioned why considering he was so young. A young and talented man with his whole life ahead of him just ripped away in one night. I no longer began to envision what we could have been if he were to stay alive, but I expected who I imagined he would be. I pictured him still doing photography, hanging around his friends, and finishing up college. He would have moved to Los Angeles and taken amazing photos at abandoned warehouses and on top of roofs along the Los Angeles skyline. His friends would be surrounding him, encouraging his skills, and all his friends would pay him for creative photoshoots to post on Instagram. That's the way I think he would like to be remembered by everyone, and that is the way I will remember him for the rest of my life.

A year passed, and I was entirely at peace with him. I still thought about him now and then, but not as frequently as I had before. I had heard of another death from someone I used to know well. Emily was my friend, Austin's ex-girlfriend, in high school. My high school boyfriend and Austin were best friends, and once Emily entered the picture, we all used to hang out. I remember her being the sweetest girl around, always able to make you smile or laugh when you needed it. She indeed was a great friend. I debated on reaching out to Austin once I heard since it was a similar situation, only I was active with Jacob at the time of his death, and Austin wasn't, but still, death is a death. That type of death hits you where you least expect it. Sometimes it always does. Every so often, I think about Jacob and if he would be happy with how friends' lives went or how his family is doing. Alexa and I patched things up and were so close again, we were thinking of being roommates once we went to the same college. Naturally, it was Alexa who brought us back together also. We both cried to each other about him and how sorry we were that we let him get in the way of friendship. If Jacob didn't pass away, I don't think Alexa and I would have been friends again. I like to think he looks down on all of us and sees us progressing with life as he's taking photos of everyone to show once we meet him when our time comes. I hope he's happy and at peace wherever he is with a camera around his neck, getting the perfect shot he always wished to capture.

He was the first love of my life, whose life ended in tragedy. Two lives, our relationship and his, ended not because he did not want to be with me. That type of heartbreak, a loss due to death, left cracks in my heart, which differed from a standard break up. He came into my life right after my high school boyfriend of a few years, and I had ended our nearly two-year relationship. It was reliving a different heartbreak all over again, and I still think about him six years later.