

FIGHTING BACK

I mean, I *had* already warned her about it. So obvious she was just staring off into space. What's the whoop? She always does that.

Yes. Kristen was the most conceited person you would ever know. Now she, well, it's hard to explain. I will save that story for another day.

What am I even talking about? Another hard topic to cover. I think Kristen was a little too full of herself that day. Or full of Garrett. He's a dead subject. Not gone, but most certainly dead.

Now, let's cover my story. My name is Lori Taker. Garrett was my brother, *is* my brother, actually. Kristen and I were best friends until she decided to maul Garrett's face out. It sort of went downhill from there. Her mom is a mastermind criminal, her dad an illegal from Mexico. Her brother was kidnapped and never spotted again. Kristen didn't want to be anything but normal. She didn't want to be in her silly little criminal family. Instead, like her brother, she wanted to be a normal teen that went to the mall with her friends. Somewhere in that flimsy body of hers were her mother's genes. The "if you don't hand me the money, I kill you" gene. She one day clicked and everything her mother had ever done made sense to her. She realized that killing is not a bad thing at all. Especially killing your best friend's brother. I could not relate, personally.

"Lori," said my mother in a calm, toned down voice. She appeared in the attic where I was currently throwing any memories of Kristen out the window. I understand that she was my best friend, but she was a killer, a criminal. Just like her stupid mother. I threw our boxes, friendship bracelets, photos, and our stupid teddy bear. She gave it to me as an "I'm sorry about killing your brother I just hope we can still be friends" gift. Um, no. It was sent in the mail, so why she didn't come over and give it to me was not clear.

"Lori, read the daily newspaper. You might find it interesting," my mother

said. I did not respond, just spent the rest of the half hour she was trying to convince me to let it go sitting and staring out the window. "Listen to me, Lori! I did not come to be ignored, I came to do something for you." She threw the newspaper, which nailed me in the head. I had been used to that treatment. This one particularly pissed me off, though. I had been used to this with Kristen. It was typical for her. My mother's footsteps became fast and loud. I could tell she was running towards me. "I don't know what came over me, I didn't mean to hit you! I guess I- I'm sorry Lori!" Yeah, my mother never had great aim. I stood up, picked up the newspaper and read the bookmarked story. It was about Kristen. About how her mother was killed, and that she had killed Garrett. I already knew all of this. Not about Kristen's mother, but the killing of my own brother, how could I not know that? I had no way of knowing why my mother was giving this to me. I threw the newspaper out the open window of the attic and took my jacket and walked out of the attic. I was running away.

The newspaper was pretty beat up on the ground of our front yard. I picked it up and stuffed it in my jacket. Kristen was not the only strong one. I could fight back, too.

"Lori! Where the hell are you going?" I knew that voice. I stopped in my tracks and turned around. Great, Garrett had made it into my mind. I was going crazy, I knew. I didn't respond, having enough sense to know that nobody was actually there, but for some reason, I kept staring into his eyes. I didn't know what to do; I wanted to tell him everything as to why I was running away, tell him that Kristen was dead, and tell him that I was leaving to save him. How could I save someone that was already dead? I could tell that tears were welling up in his eyes. "I know why you are leaving. Lori-" he looked away at a tall tree next to him. He felt the bark and hung his head in sorrow. "I killed your best friend. I killed Kristen." This information came on a little too strong for my liking. The only thing I could think was, but, how? How could he if he was dead before Kristen was? Was he? As I was processing this in my brain, I realized there was only one way this could happen. Kristen did not kill Garrett. Someone else did. I was blaming Kristen for all of this, when it was someone else. But who?

I looked at my brother. He nodded and his image vanished. I went to grab it before it could go. I had so many questions to ask him. I just figured out that Kristen didn't kill Garrett. I needed more. I started to shriek. I cried and screamed. My best friend was dead, but innocent.

The next few days were quite rough, but Garrett made quite a few appearances in Kristen's house with me. I slept there, ate there, and watched TV there. Kristen always had really good food. She also had cable. Yes, I was being selfish. What choice did I have? My mother thought I was possibly dead, and if I came back, there would be some sort of security system set up in the front yard to keep me from leaving. That would be annoying. Over time without Kristen, Garrett became my best friend. It's stupid, I know. Who else would want to talk to a psycho 13-year-old who thought about death all the time? I know, I know. I had a reason to think about it, but still. I had no conversation starters, so I tried to steer clear of real people.

I was eating crackers when the idea struck my mind. Everything became crystal clear, and suddenly, I was waltzing my way up the stairs, dropping crackers down my shirt. The stairs creaked with every step, and I was glad the police had abandoned the case saying Kristen did it, and that was that. I would go to the police and tell them Kristen didn't do it, but I needed proof. Nobody can just say, "My dead brother is making appearances in my psycho brain telling me Kristen is not the one who killed him." I really wished it were that easy.

When I got to the top of the stairs, I went down the hall to Kristen's room. I turned the knob, making a pause like in those dramatic movie scenes. I could just hear the people in the theatre saying quietly "don't open the door!" to their neighbor. I opened the door, and all of a sudden wished I had listened to them. Splotches of blood on the walls, and various bloody handprints on the furniture. I covered my mouth to stop me from screaming, and slowly walked in. I headed to her desk and opened the bottom drawer, one hand still clamped over my mouth. With my free hand, I rummaged through the various pencils and pictures until I

reached something that made a single tear escape from my eyes. I forced my hand away from my mouth and picked it up, studying it. It was a paper that Garrett had taped to a picture of Kristen and me at a third grade costume party. The paper read:

Sorry there won't be as good a friend as Lori in hell when I take you there myself.

-Garrett

I threw the paper and slid back on my chair. My brother was even plotting to kill her. How could he? How *could* he? I froze in my spot and listened, not brave enough to get up. Downstairs, I heard footsteps. I wondered who it could be? The police? My mother? Imaginary Garrett? I took all of my courage up in a deep breath and said,

“Hello?” The footsteps stopped. They slowly walked towards the stairs. After a long pause, they were walking up the stairs. When they got to the top, they walked towards the room I was in. When I was sure the stranger could see me, I shot out of my seat, grabbing the first thing I saw as a weapon. Yeah, a pen was going to get me really far facing up to an enemy. It was no enemy, though. It was Terryn, Kristen's twin brother. The one who was kidnapped. The one who had been stolen from her at the age of 10. The one whom the police had been searching for over the past two years. He was not the happy Terryn, though. He was the bloody, vigorous Terryn who had a knife in his hands. I had personally never seen this side of him. He would always just hang out with Kristen and I, and do whatever we did. That's why Kristen was torn apart when he went missing. That's when something inside of her clicked. Her need for revenge against the world turned on, but then I remembered. She killed no one. Or as far as I knew.

Terryn looked me in the eye. He had a large scratch running down his left cheek. He had this look in his eye. A mix between “I'm going to kill you” and “I'm so happy to see you.” His next sentence cleared everything up for me.

“What the hell are you doing here?” He gripped his knife a little harder when I took a step towards him. “And-and you better start talking or I'll throw it! I'll nail

you! Like your brother, you'll be dead!" Like me, he was going crazy. His scratch bled, making him quiver. I slowly took a step away.

"Terryn, listen to me." I said. I put the pen down on the desk, trying hard to keep my eyes on him. "I mean no harm. I just want to hear all that you know about Garrett's death." He wasn't as tense, but still threatening.

"I don't know anything, Lori. Nothing!" said Terryn. He placed the knife on the desk and relaxed a bit.

"Oh, yes you do," I said. It sounded like I was one of those police officers who question the suspects on television. Garrett had always said I would be great at that job. I liked the idea. "Obviously you know something. Listen, Terryn, I'm not the bad guy. It was *my* brother's death, after all."

"It was *my* sister's death, too," he said. He lunged himself on the bloodstained bed. I stepped back. "And I know that Garrett killed Kristen. Only obvious." He picked up the note I had thrown. It landed on the bed when I had thrown it, and now was in Terryn's hand. I swung my arm to grab it, but he pulled it away. I didn't realize he knew about Garrett killing Kristen. When he started to read the letter, I bolted. I could not be with him when he read it. I got to the top of the stairs, but he threw something at me, which nailed me in the back. Searing pain. That's all I remember.

When I woke up, I was uncomfortable, and bloody. There were bandages on my back, and I realized I was feeling more pain than I had ever felt before. When I took my mind off of how hurt and uncomfortable I was, I realized that I was laying in the back seat of a car. It had to be a car Terryn stole. I knew it. I tried to sit up in my seat to jump out, but I couldn't. The pain had overcome me. I realized I heard sirens. I looked out of the window to find them. They were very close, I knew that much. Then I realized I was *in* the cop car.

"Oh, good, you can help me!" I said to the police officer in the front seat. I told him everything, and he laughed at the part about Garrett's image showing up. I got frustrated with him. I thought he was on my side.

"Listen, girl," he said. "I don't know what happened in your brain over the

past few days you've been asleep in the hospital, but you can't substitute a Terryn kid for something you did." My jaw hung as far as it could go.

"What do you mean? I didn't kill Garrett if that's what you think I'm saying!"

"Yes you did," said the officer. He held up a bag with a bloody rope. One I had never seen before. He must have put on those doctor gloves and carefully washed the knife, and hid it. "You also killed another boy, or do you not remember that, either?" I shook my head. "The one in the house with you. The Terryn guy you said killed your older brother. He didn't though. You did." I was angry, and confused. "He walked into a trap you set up, after he defended himself from you. I would press charges for throwing the knife, but he's dead, so..."

"No! No I didn't! I would not kill my brother or Terryn! Garrett was the only person I loved! I would *never* kill him! Terryn threatened me! He told me he would kill me! I ran to get away and halfway down the stairs, he threw it!" It all came out too quickly. The officer shook his head at me.

"That's what most of them say. 'He threatened me!' 'I loved him!' 'I would never kill him!' Lori Taker, you are just like every suspect or criminal I know." That last sentence offended me. I was *not* a criminal. If anything, I was brave. I talked to a true criminal. Threatening my life for the innocence of my best friend. So this is how life works. You do something to try to prove someone wrong and then *you're* the criminal. Good to know.

When we got to the juvenile delinquent center, I saw my mother sitting on a bench. She glared at me and shook her head. Then she walked away. I missed my mom being on my side. I can't blame her, though. The story that everyone believes is that I'm the massive killer of seventh grade. Terryn had committed suicide just to make the police believe I killed him. Terryn was always very dedicated to winning the fight. He had won, too. By killing himself, he made the police believe it was me.

They put me in this room. It apparently is supposed to jog your memory, and I obviously had to go in there because I was not going to tell a lie. I didn't kill

my brother. They believed I did. The room had nothing in there. I got three meals of grub a day. Who could stand this gross jail food?

I fell asleep one night, and my memory started telling me something I never thought before. I suddenly remembered everything. I was in the attic crying. Garrett was up there with me, continuing to taunt and tease me, made me cry and scream. I told him that if he didn't shut up, I would kill him. A flash of lightning, a knife in his back, he was dead. I did kill my brother. The truth itself taunted me more than Garrett ever could. I suddenly woke up and sat still for a moment. I hated it. I wanted to reverse everything, go back to that day, and take in the taunting and teasing. I deserved it. I didn't think that I would actually kill him. His image appeared in the far right corner of the room. Tears welled up in my eyes and I sat up, crying. He walked over to me and hugged me and I cried, he cried, and we sat for hours talking to each other. I apologized at least twelve times. I wish I could do more. "Sorry for killing you" didn't seem good enough. The tears ran down my face throughout the whole time. It was true. The aching truth was, I could never fight back. Never again, now that I know what happens when I do. I looked at him the whole time, and his image vanished, along with my happiness.