

Forever Strong

## ❖ Part 1

I felt sick. My stomach was in a countless amount of knots. I abruptly pause my actions to ponder on the thought that, "Today... my grandfather's heart stopped". For a moment, I shed a tear and then reluctantly resumed my chores. Suddenly, my phone glowed alive. I staggered towards it bracing for the worst. "Hello?" I said in a shaky voice. My uncle answered. "He's at the hospital and the doctors say that while reviving him..." an eerie silence fell over me. "He went into a coma." At that moment it seemed as if the world froze. My eyes shot a barrage of tears. Flashes of thoughts passed by me. My parents are dead. All I have is my grandfather. Will he be able to make it out alive? If not, where will I go? Will I have to go to a foster home? These overwhelming thoughts surged in my head. As if my uncle could hear my thoughts, he said in a calming voice, "You can stay with me if you want to". I hesitated for a moment and said, "I guess so." Without a moment to waste, he quickly uttered, "OK. I'll pick you up tonight." I hung up and let out a sigh. Then I ran upstairs to my bed, shut the door closed and cried myself to sleep.

Later on that night, I heard a loud honk outside. My uncle was waiting for me. I ran outside with my personal belongings, a picture of my parents, a pillow and my stuffed bear. The car ride was silent. Not a sound could be heard, except the soft humming of the engine. "Listen Johnny, I know this is hard for you. It's hard for me too, but you have to stay strong, no matter what." he finally said breaking the silence. "All we can do is hope. Hope that he can make it

out of this.” he continued. I listened to him as he spoke, nodding my head. As he is speaking I suddenly realize that I have never been able to hope for something and whatever I have hoped for doesn’t happen. For the rest of the long ride I ignored his unconvincing words and continued staring blankly at the rain outside.

❖ Part 2

We were driving in the Downtown area, until we came across his apartment. I wasn’t impressed; it was a simple and small apartment building from the outside. Each apartment looked the same as the one before it, keeping this pattern until a mile or so down the road. We walk in and I put down my stuff. “You’ll sleep on the couch tonight” he said while walking to another room. Tired from the long car ride, I went to sleep. When I woke up, about to get ready for school, I noticed a note taped on the fridge door. It said, “Had to go in to work early. You’re gonna have to walk to school today.” I was worried, not about the walking, because now I am actually closer to the school so I didn’t have to rely on someone giving me a ride to school or having to take the long bus ride to school. What I was mostly worried about was the school itself. I hated everything about it, and now my mind was elsewhere. I needed to act normal. As I entered through the school entrance, almost instantaneously I noticed people walking past me and saying “Freak” or “Weirdo”. It was a regular school day for me, something that I was always used to, people not wanting to talk, see, or even think of me. As I walked past people in the hallway, they looked at me like I was some sort of alien from a far away galaxy. I found my way to my first period class, Math. Ms. Jackson was a very bitter teacher who wasn’t afraid of embarrassing students like me. “You are late again, Johnny!” she said harshly. I sat in the back of the classroom where it is easy to ignore her. I dozed off for a few minutes and before I knew it, she’s right over me telling me that I now have detention. I shrug my shoulders, as if I don’t

care. However not wanting to get yelled at again and draw everyone's attention to me, I decide to sit up and act like I am paying attention to the words on the board. Then, as music to my ears, I hear the sound of the bell and I quickly prepare to leave the Algebraic torture I was enduring. That feeling of relief quickly changes, when I remember that I have seven more periods to go. I slowly walk down the hall once again toward my next class, only to be greeted by another wave of insults.

❖ Part 3

The rest of the day was a blur. I hid in the shadows during classes ignoring everyone around me. When I was dismissed, I casually walked back to the apartment. Across the street a little girl with a smile so bright- like the sun. She was playing hop-scotch, with her parents happily cheering her on. I wish I had a moment like that. I quietly muttered to myself as I threw on my hoodie and walked at a faster pace trying to run away from my problems. When I entered the apartment I immediately noticed my uncle poised in a slouching position over a chair with arms crossed and a frown directly facing me. Bewildered, I asked him, "Why are you home early?" He said, "Your teachers wanted to speak to me immediately about your behavior. They say that if you keep on acting like how you did today you will flunk and have to go to summer school, and fail the grade. What do you have to say about this, Johnny?" I stood there motionless thinking. "What do I think?" Then my uncle carried on saying, "Your parents would not be proud." The words hung in the air like a disgusting stench repelling anything living. Not being able to take anymore of it, Johnny said "Shut up." under his breath, with tears filling up his eyes and hoping his uncle didn't hear him. "What!?" his uncle said sternly. I couldn't help it and almost with no control of what comes out of my mouth, I roared "Shut up!" again, only this time with an antagonized facial expression that only read the words fury. The whole

apartment was shaking. "Don't ever talk about my parents and what they think!" My uncle was speechless. He left and I was alone in the living room with nothing but my overwhelming anger and depression.

❖ Part 4

As I sat on the couch staring at the darkness of the wall, my uncle sat on the cushion next to me. "I'm sorry I talked about your parents Johnny, I didn't realize how much you miss them." I teared up a little remembering my parents or at least as much as I remembered about them. It's been a long time since. Then I remembered the sweetest memories of my grandfather, when he went to my award ceremony and the proudness on his face. This made me feel a little at ease. "I just didn't know what terrible things you were going through", he said. I simply nodded in agreement. "Tell me if there's anything I could do to make this easier, please tell me what exactly is making this hard. I responded by saying, "My parents- not being here, the thought of losing the only person I really care about- my grandfather, and how my entire school is bullying me." My uncle started crying and unexpectedly said "I am such a bad uncle. I didn't know... I just want to let you know Johnny, that despite not being around in the past for you, I do love you." He was sobbing like a three year old. He grabbed his keys and said, "Let's go see grand-dad." Five minutes into the car ride, I asked "Why are we going to see grand-dad?" It took him a few seconds to register the question. "Johnny, you probably don't know this but I am going through something similar to you. I really need to see him, thinking about him had been effecting everything I do. To think he may be gone forever is a nightmare for me. I just want to see him one more time. I'm sure you understand." "I do.", I said. I never thought of how my uncle might feel about grand-dad. This is maybe the first time I have felt a connection with my uncle. I was left with this thought in my mind for the rest of the ride.

## ❖ Part 5

"Beep!" the automatic doors alerted everyone around as we entered. A lady patiently waiting at the front desk knew who we were coming to see. I was trying to be strong, bracing myself for the misery on my poor grandfathers' face. Dazed by the thought, the lady suddenly pointed to the door across the hall and said in a soft mellow voice, "He's in there." The nurse was opening the door that led to my grandfather. When I was walking towards him, I felt a warm feeling, like the sun suddenly beaming on me after a long and treacherous walk along the beach on a cold winter day. As I walked closer I noticed his eyes were closed, he looked peaceful, and as I focused my attention to his face he had an unusual happy smile. The room felt like a calming sanctuary, nothing I had expected. Then I hear my uncle beside me crying and sobbing wildly. "It's okay", I tell him while softly rubbing his back. Then I said "He's probably thinking about us". This appeared to calm him down. He looked up at me, smiled and said, "You are probably right". Ten minutes later we decided to leave. Before leaving, I lean forward and kiss him on the forehead, then without giving it a second thought I took a hold of one of his buttons from his soft sweater, yanked it off and slipped it into my pocket without anyone even noticing. I felt like my soul was stitched back together bit by bit coming closer to form a better, more happier self. "Oh, no!", the nurse yelled as she ran towards us. "He's gone!" she said. I was in shock. Feeling vulnerable and feeling as if I couldn't deal with it alone, I quickly grabbed my uncle and hugged him. That hug seemed to last forever. I felt that it not only made me feel better, but my uncle needed it just as much as me. "Let's leave, we said our good-byes to grand-dad, while he was alive." I said. The thought of seeing him dead was just too much for us to deal with. We returned home, the apartment was silent. We knew we needed time for ourselves to mourn, but knew we had each other. So we respected our space and parted ways, he

went into his room and I laid down on the couch. I then went to bed with a hopeful smile on my face- for the first time I felt hopeful that things would work out. The resemblance of the smile on my face was obvious. "You're at a better place." I said.

❖ Part 6

The next day I entered the school cautiously like I was entering a blazing and wild fire, preparing for the sting and burn of insults. The first to come was from a girl who passed by me, "Get out of my way, stupid!" she yelled at me. The words echoed, but something amazing happened... It was as if I had a fireproof suit on. I was immune to the fire, the insults didn't hurt me. The reassuring voice of my uncle was going through my head, "You have to be strong!" I continued walking casually down the hall to Math class. I took a seat in the front of the class. "Pop quiz" she immediately says with an evil grin. As she hands everyone a paper, I could hear the whispers of "Oh,no! I'm going to fail." and the groaning from the students around me. As the teacher hands me the quiz, she asked me, "Do you think you're ready?" "Yes, Miss Jackson." I confidently reply. I take one look at the quiz and almost immediately I start answering those questions. I realize that I know the answers, and that I knew them all along.

By the end of the class, Miss Jackson was able to grade them , and give them back to us. On the top of the quiz I saw, 100%. "I did it!" I said so happily. I walked back home with a big grin on my face. When I arrived home I set down my book bag and took a glance at my possessions, a picture of my parents, my stuffed bear which my parents had given me, and my new prized possessions- my grandfather's button and the pop quiz, which I am going to frame.