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The Broken Bond

by Luis Casiano

There was a small breeze outside. The house was silent, not even a bug could be heard. Both brothers, Jake and Leo, sat on the couch in the living room. The blue couch was in the center of the room with a table in front and a sofa at opposite of it.

Their parents entered the room filled with paintings found somewhere at a yard sale. Jake's mom, Selena, came with a big smile on her face, while her husband, Henry, was trying to hide his own.

"I have good news," said Selena.

"What?" asked Jake.

"What is it?" asked Leo while he gripped on the side of the couch.

Selena took out her phone and then turned it to show them.

“Wait, is that for the summer camp I told you guys about?” asked Jake as he got up from the soft couch.

Leo’s eyes shot wide open. He had an intense stare at Selena and Jake while they celebrated.

“I can’t believe you guys were able to get me in,” said Jake. He grabbed Selena’s phone and looked closely. It was an email from Texas Tech, It said that he will be included in the summer camp they had for upcoming students. He jumped around the living room.

Leo stayed seated on the couch. He looked over at all, the family pictures next to the fireplace.

“Hey, what’s wrong?” asked Jake as he got closer to Leo. He reached out his hand.

Leo slapped his hand away from him and stood up. He hurried to his room.

Jake followed him. *What is wrong with him now*, thought Jake? He got to him before he entered his room. “Where are you going?”

Leo slammed the dark red door in Jake’s face.

“Hey, what the hell is wrong with you? Aren’t you happy for me?” asked Jake.

“I wanted to go to that summer camp,” said Leo from behind the door.

“Well, maybe they declined you and accepted me.”

“I told mom and dad that I wanted to go to that summer camp a few weeks ago, but you got accepted instead of me.” Leo banged on the door.

“I wanted to go to this summer camp too, remember?”

“Yeah, I remember you telling them after I told you about it!”

Jake gave up trying to reason with Leo and walked to his room.

“Jake just left didn’t he?” Leo asked himself. He got his phone and started to send messages to people. “I’m going to make sure people know that he isn’t as good of a person as people think.”

Whatever, he’ll get over it, he always does, Jake thought. He decided to call his friend Alexa.

“Hello?” asked Alexa.

“Hey, there’s something I want to talk to you about,” said Jake.

“Can it wait until tomorrow? I’m doing all my math homework right now.”

“Huh? You always do all your homework at night,” said Jake as he looked at the full moon through his window.

“Yeah, I’ll see you later.”

“Meet me at the back of the school after classes are over, okay?”

“Okay, bye.”

Jake saw all the posters in his room become foggy. His room slowly became darker as he drifted off. He then closed his eyes completely and went to sleep.

#

After a boring day of school, Jake left his last class and headed towards the back of the school. As he was on his way over there, he spotted Leo. He tried to walk up to him, but Leo walked away.

Jake noticed a bunch of eyes were on him. He heard a few whispers from the students.

The whispers were about Jake being selfish and stealing his brother's opportunity to go to a college summer camp. They kept getting louder and louder as he walked down the stairs to the

back entrance of the school. The entire time he felt as if the white hallway was trying to close on him. The air was thick and he could barely breathe.

“Hey,” said Alexa as she put her hand on Jake’s shoulder.

“Oh, hey, there you are.”

“Let’s go, this place feels a little tense,” said Alexa.

They made their way towards the open field at the back of the school where their favorite oak tree was. It was one of the only trees in the entire green field.

“Sometimes I wonder why we chose this tree,” said Alexa.

“Because it was the only tree in this entire school,” said Jake. He sat down next to the oak tree, and felt the soft green grass and the warmth of the sun on him, while he laid back on the tree. “This is life.” The air was fresh, he felt as he could actually take a huge breath in without gasping for air.

“Yeah, I could sleep here.”

“Could? You already have.”

“Oh, come on, it was one time.” Alexa also laid back on the same tree.

“Yeah, well, I had to carry you home that one time!”

“I thought you were going to carry me like a princess, but you put me over your shoulder like a dead body.”

“Wait, you were awake?”

“I never said I was fully asleep, right?”

Both of them laughed. They embraced the softness of the grass and the warmth of the sun, they were both silent for a few seconds.

Jake hesitated to say something at first. “You know that those rumors everyone is spreading around aren’t true, right.”

“I know.”

“How?”

“I know that you are kind and sweet, but you do have your bad days.”

Jake was silent for a few seconds thinking about those bad days Alexa was talking about. “Yeah, I feel like it’s more than just a few bad days.”

“Jake, tell me what’s going on with you,” said Alexa as she faced Jake.

“It’s true. I’m a selfish bastard.”

“How?” Alexa had a neutral expression on her face.

“Leo told me about the college summer camp at Texas Tech, He had just told our parents about it, and they said they could maybe help because they knew someone there at the university.” Jake put his hands behind his head. “After Leo told me all of this I went to them and told them I wanted to go to the summer camp as well.”

“And? You wanted to go too and Leo didn’t get accepted because his grades weren’t as good as yours. We don’t all make it big, it’s part of life.”

“I thought that too, but I looked over his report card and his grades were better than mine.” Jake took out his phone and showed Alexa a picture of Leo’s report card.

“Wow, they are better than yours.”

“I don’t understand why I was picked instead Leo.”

“Have you asked your parents?”

“Well, no.”

“Then let’s ask them.”

“Wait, you're coming with me?”

“Of course, till death do us part,” said Alexa as she laughed and stood up. She reached out her hand for Jake.

Jake complied and grabbed her hand. “You are one crazy woman, you know that?”

“Yeah, I know.”

#

Jake and Alexa walked to his house. They saw all the other small homes around the area, they were either brown or white. Most of the fences were just made of wood and weren't painted over, some of the fences were broken.

“This is the best the city of Austin can offer,” said Alexa as she ran her fingers over the fence. She looked over at the many cracks on the old street.

“You always say that when we walk home together. It's not our fault we both live in the outskirts of this city rather than in the center,” said Jake.

“Hopefully we move in together far away from here.”

“There you go with your crazy ideas again.”

“They aren't crazy.”

“Sure.”

Jake saw his home and grabbed Alexa's hand. He ran towards his home hoping that at least one of his parents was home. He knocked on the door.

His dad, Henry, answered the door. “Jake, what are you doing home so early?”

“Dad, I was hoping we could talk about the summer camp,” said Jake.

“Oh, yeah, we have to celebrate some more!” said Henry as he waved his arms around.

Jake signaled him to stop and walked inside with Alexa. He sat on the blue couch in the living room, he felt his body just being sunked into it.

Alexa tugged on Jake's shirt.

"What?" said Jake.

"Well, it just hit me that this is my first time at your house," said Alexa.

"Don't worry about it, let's get back to the matter at hand," said Jake.

Henry sat opposite of them on the sofa. He got comfortable first before he spoke.

"So, what's the problem?" asked Henry.

"Well, Jake was wondering why he got in—"

"Why didn't you help get Leo into the summer camp too?" asked Jake.

Henry stood up straight on the sofa. He cleared his throat. "We had to choose between you or him."

"Choose?" asked Jake.

"There was only one spot left when we contacted my friend at Texas Tech. We could only choose one of you," said Henry.

"Yes, but why me? Leo has better grades than me," said Jake as he leaned forward.

"Leo has his boxing career, he has other colleges to choose from," said Henry.

"And? He wanted to go to that summer camp too," said Jake as he attempted to stand up.

Alexa put her hand on Jake's shoulder to calm him down. She pushed him down back gently onto the couch.

Henry was shocked. Then he stood up and went to the bedroom.

"Where are you going?" asked Jake.

Alexa put both her hands on Jake. "Hey, try not to lose it, okay."

Jake nodded.

Henry came back with a folder. "These are all of your report cards since freshman year," said Henry.

"Okay, so what?" asked Jake.

"You have had good grades since freshman year. Leo on the other hand just started to pick up his grades," said Henry.

"Why does it matter what grades I had before? Right now, I'm not doing so good," said Jake.

"Yes, but--" said Henry.

"Leo came to you guys first, right?" asked Jake.

Henry was silent.

"Yes," Henry said softly. "We expect more out of you."

"Why?" asked Jake.

Henry was silent again.

Jake slammed his fist on the table. "It's your fault Leo hates me!"

"Are you sure it wasn't your fault too?" asked Leo as he opened the front door.

Jake immediately turned around and stood up. "Leo."

Leo turned back around and ran out of the house.

Jake jumped over the couch and followed Leo out of the house.

"Jake!" screamed Alexa.

Jake was many steps behind Leo. He ran as fast as he could. He felt shortness of breath, felt his feet stomp on the cement and they became heavy. The rest of his body followed. "Leo,

wait!” Jake kept screaming his name over and over, until Jake could no longer control his breathing.

Leo turned his head back and saw Jake slow down to a halt. He turned around to face him and he clenched his fists. “What do you want?”

“I just want to talk,” said Jake as he pushed himself up.

“We’re talking right now.”

“No, I mean actually talk.”

“Is that really all you want?”

“Yes.”

“Then you’ll have to earn it.”

Jake stood up and got on his footing. *Earn? How do I earn the right to speak to my own brother?* Jake thought.

“You can earn it in a boxing match, against me.”

Jake dwelled on the thought of fighting his own brother in a boxing match. “You’re not expecting me to win, are you?”

“That’s up to you, Jake.”

“Then I guess I have no choice, but to accept, Leo.”

“We’ll have our match in two weeks at the boxing gym near our house.”

“Yeah, I’ll be there.”

Leo turned around and walked away.

“Where are you going?” asked Jake with concern.

“I’m at a friend’s house. I’ll see you later.” Leo walked away with haste.

Jake instantly fell to the ground on his butt. He just sat there on the hard cement thinking about what he just got himself into. “Why? Why is this the only way I can get him to listen.”

Alexa came rushing over to Jake. “Are you okay? Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine,” said Jake as he stood up with Alexa’s help.

Alexa put her hand on his face. “What happened?”

“I’ll tell you later, okay?”

Alexa nodded.

#

Alexa waited at the entrance of a boxing gym. She looked at her phone multiple times, waiting for Jake to respond to her messages. Eventually Jake arrived with some workout clothes, a white shirt and some shorts. He also had a gym bag.

“Why are you also wearing workout clothes?” asked Jake.

“Well, I didn’t want to wear something too nice at a gym,” said Alexa as she put her hand on her waist. She showed off her tight shirt and black leggings by spinning twice.

“You could have just come in a nice shirt and some jeans. You didn’t have to dress the part, especially when you’re not the one training.”

“Hey, do you want me to help you or not?”

“I guess you said you knew some training exercises for boxing.”

“First let’s try to punch that.” She pointed out a hanging red punching bag in the corner of the gym.

Jake headed to it and put his bag down. He then took out a pair of boxing gloves.

Alexa got behind the punching bag. “You know, you don’t have to win.”

“Yeah, I’m not so sure about that.”

“You just have to win one round.”

“You think that’s enough for him to at least hear me out?” Jake continued to punch the bag as hard as he could.

“You’ll find a way even without winning, I believe in you.”

Jake stopped. “Thanks, Alexa.”

Jake continued to go to the boxing gym everyday until the day of the match.

Both Leo and Jake were in the old boxing ring. The ropes were red while the mat was pure white as if it was calling to be stained in blood. Leo and Jake were at opposite ends of the ring. There were a few people watching the fight from the sidelines. The room was small.

The referee explained the rules.

“This is a three round match and the one to inflict more damage to the other will win that round,” said the referee.

“The results of all the rounds will be announced after the match has concluded,” said the referee.

Leo was in the other corner ready to begin.

Jake was shaking a little.

They both approached the referee and faced each other.

“Fight!” ordered the referee.

Leo threw big and long punches to start off with. There was a timer set for three minutes each round. The entire time Jake kept blocking. He threw a few jabs, but it was ineffective.

Leo kept punching Jake into a corner and the referee had to step in to push him away a little.

Jake tried hard to punch back as much as he could, but before he could get the chance the bell rang.

The round ended.

Jake went back to his corner and Alexa gave him some water.

Leo on the other hand had no one on his corner.

The second round began. Jake threw more punches this time around. He hit Leo with some big punches, but that rush of punches were countered. Leo was still aggressive.

Leo was barely throwing any jabs at Jake, he started to breath heavily.

The second round ended.

“Damn, well I lost,” said Jake.

Alexa gave him more water and saw a bruise on the side of his face. “Remember what I said, you just have to win one round.”

Jake nodded.

The final round began.

Leo seemed to be breathing heavily and his punches became slow. Leo seemed to have used a lot of energy for the first two rounds.

Jake took the opportunity and threw many fast jabs. He also was able to hit him with some big punches. In the last ten seconds of the match, Leo collapsed.

Leo was breathing even heavier.

The final round ended.

The referee was about to announce who won, but Jake stopped him and asked for someone to help Leo.

They took Leo to the back of the gym so he could lie down.

Leo slept for an hour, he later started to open his eyes slowly.

“Leo, are you okay?” asked Jake.

Leo was silent, then a tear ran down his face. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry for what?”

“Everything. I was mad at you for no reason.”

“I took your opportunity to go to that summer camp,” said Jake as he put both his hands on his lap and looked down.

“I was upset by that, but I realized that in reality, I hated your parents.”

“Your parents?”

“I’m adopted. They told me that when I told them about the summer camp.”

Jake was in shock and grabbed Leo’s hand.

Leo turned his head towards Jake.

“Well, even if you’re adopted you are still my brother and we are both going to give those parents of ours a piece of our minds.”

Leo began to cry and said, “Thank you, Jake, thank you.”