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An extract from

Getting Over Garrett Delaney

Written by

Abby McDonald

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"You what?" I gasp. Talk about a birthday miracle: I offered my wish up to the universe, and it delivered! OK, so Garrett hasn't swept me into a passionate embrace and sworn he can't live without me, but still, this is a start.

"When?" I ask, struggling to hide my joy. "Why didn't you say anything?"

He looks awkward. "It was just last night. I mean, we've been fighting for a while, but … I don't know. I didn't want to spoil your birthday with all my breakup drama." He keeps playing with his coffee cup, looking embarrassed.

"Garrett! What happened? Did she cheat on you? Did you finally get sick of her reading *Cosmo* all the time? Did she throw one tantrum too many?" Garrett has a thing for redheads, and drama club girls at that. I've thought about dyeing my hair and nearly auditioned for the spring

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play, but somehow, I don't think even that would make the difference. "Wait. I'm sorry," I say, reminding myself that I'm supposed to be the supportive friend here – rather than, you know, filled with wild hope and rapturous expectation. "The most important thing is, are you OK?"

He nods, reluctant, but something about the way he presses his fingertip into the sugar grains on the table brings me back to earth with a jolt. He's genuinely hurt here, and even I wouldn't wish that on him, however thrilled I am about the circumstances behind said pain. "I guess it was inevitable?" he asks. "I mean, she's graduated now. And things haven't exactly gone smooth these last few months."

"You mean, because she's crazy," I point out.

"No! Beth is just … complicated. High maintenance…"

"Crazy," I finish, shaking my head. "The girl would throw a fit over anything."

You may think I'm a teeny, tiny bit biased when it comes to the character of Garrett's girlfriends, but trust me, this isn't even me being blinded by jealousy and unrequited longing. After tagging along on countless third-wheel movie nights and after-school hangouts, I can safely say that Beth Chambers is a high-strung, temperamental bitch. And I can – say it, I mean. Finally!

"You're so much better off without her," I reassure him fervently. "I don't know why you dated her in the first place."

Let alone for five months. Five whole months of agony, watching him moon all over her, every kiss like a tiny dagger to my heart.

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Garrett gives me this wistful smile. "Because she's beautiful." He sighs. "And unpredictable. And being around her inspired me to write the most amazing poetry…"

I bite my lip. OK, so we're not quite done with the tiny daggers just yet. "But it didn't work out, right?" I remind him. "There was a reason you broke up with her."

He nods, resigned. "She wanted commitment. You know, that we'd stay together in college. She made it into an ultimatum, like if I couldn't promise her that, then there was no point in even trying." Garrett's voice is heavy, and even though this is the news I've been waiting – hoping, praying! – for ever since they first hooked up at Lexie Monroe's party, I can't help but feel a pang for him.

"You did the right thing," I insist. "Really, you won't regret it."

Garrett, alas, isn't as convinced. "I don't know. I cared about her," he says quietly. "I still do. I know she could be … difficult, but when we were together, just the two of us, it was amazing."

"But she gave you the ultimatum," I remind him gently. "And who could give that guarantee, anyway?"

He manages a smile. "I know. I'll feel better soon. I hope. See?" He rolls his eyes. "This is why I didn't mention it – I didn't want to drag you into my relationship angst. Not today."

"What are best friends for?" I bounce up. "Come on, no more moping around here. There's a *Before Sunrise* box set with our name on it."

He pauses. "Are you sure?"

"Hmm, let me think about that." I pretend to ponder.

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"An evening with Ethan Hawke and pizza. Oh, the tragedy!"

Not to mention snuggling up with Garrett on the conveniently small couch.

Garrett finally cracks a smile, genuine this time. "We're gonna party like it's your birthday," he raps, badly, slinging an arm over my shoulder as we head toward the exit.

"Eww, no, stop!" I hit him.

"Gonna talk about Descartes like it's your birthday."

"I'm officially disowning you," I tell him, putting distance between us. Garrett just sings louder.

"Gonna sip root beers like it's your birthday."

I catch LuAnn's eye as we pass. She grins, and I blush. "I can't take him anywhere," I tell her as Garrett makes lame white-boy gang signs.

"You know we'll stay out past eleven o'clock 'cause it's your birthday!"

"And you call yourself a poet."

By the time Garrett drops me off back home after our movie marathon – and a whole tub of peanut brittle – I've managed to convince him that breaking up with Beth is the best thing that's ever happened to him. I definitely know it's the best thing that's ever happened to me. Finally, the Gods of Unrequited Crushes are on my side: Garrett is single, just in time for us to head off to lit camp together. I can see us now: days spent pushing each other to dizzying literary heights, nights spent sneaking away for romantic rendezvous under the stars.

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After two years of agony, destiny is on my side once more!

"Remember, no more moping around, reading her old love letters," I order Garrett as I hop off the Vespa and tuck the helmet under the backseat.

"Yes, ma'am." He laughs.

"See you tomorrow?" I ask. "We could spend the day reading out by the river."

"Sounds good." Garrett revs the engine. "Give me a call in the morning, OK?"

I watch happily as he rides away, Vera spluttering all the way back down the street, a flash of red against the green of the shady oak trees and overgrown front lawns. Me and mom live on the older side of town, where the streets are full of rambling colonial houses and leafy backyards, but Garrett's family is across town in one of the newer developments by the lake: the crisp mock-Tudor houses full of plush cream carpets and sofas that get smudge marks just from looking at them.

"Hey, Sadie."

The voice comes from across the street, and I turn to find Kayla sitting on her front porch steps in a pretty print blouse and cutoffs. She waves. "Happy birthday," she adds. "It *is* your birthday, right?"

"Yup, thanks!" I call back, but neither of us crosses the road. After a childhood of sleepovers and play-dates, our friendship kind of faded out after we started high school. We still get along fine, but it's clear we're different kinds of people. After I met Garrett, I got involved with the lit magazine, while Kayla turned out

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to be one of those perky, cheer-filled girls, wearing bright bands in her blond ponytail and gossiping over celebrity breakups. She's been dating a varsity basketball player named Blake for a year now, and sometimes, when Garrett drops me off at home late at night, we pass his blue pickup truck, parked two blocks over, the windows steamed up inside.

I'm just deciding whether to go over and say hi when that very truck pulls around the corner, some rock song playing loudly through the open windows. Kayla bounces up. "Have fun!" she calls, smiling, and then hurries toward the truck. Blake leans over to open the passenger door; Kayla hops in, kissing him for a long moment before he slings one arm around her shoulder and they drive away.

I watch them go, feeling a curious pang of envy. Not because I harbor a secret love for monosyllabic jocks – I would die of boredom spending even an hour with Blake. I've met him in passing a couple of times, and sure he's cute (in a hair-product-and-tan kind of way), but the guy has nothing to say. Not even a little; not even a teeny, tiny bit. *Nothing*. Garrett and I talk for hours, about everything under the sun: politics, philosophy, religion. He challenges me to think about the world in a whole new way. That's real love: when you're intellectual equals. The Ted Hughes to my Sylvia Plath.

Except, of course, without that whole sticking-my-head-in-the-oven thing.

I've barely closed the front door behind me when my

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mom bounces out of the kitchen, resplendent in matching aqua velour yoga separates. I swear she's the only woman in the known universe who irons her loungewear.

"Honey!" She beams. "I've been waiting! Are you ready for your surprise?"

"Sure," I say. "Let me just go change and—"

"No need! Your gift is upstairs."

I follow her up. Everyone says that we look alike, with our Jewish coloring and dark, wants-to-be-curly hair, but she's the petite, polished version, while I got my dad's awkward height and bony figure – forever doomed to the Extra Tall section at department stores, and the continual assumption of gym teachers that I should be good at organized sports.

"Close your eyes," I'm ordered for the second time today. I wait patiently while Mom opens my bedroom door. "Ta-da!"

I open my eyes – and promptly let out a wail of distress.

"What did you *do*?"

Gone are my haphazard photo collages; all my pictures are now neatly pinned on a bulletin board in the corner. My messy but totally personalized desk system has been reduced to color-coded storage boxes and a gleaming in-box. My collection of battered old books is nowhere to be seen, and the clothes I had carefully – well, lovingly – strewn across the night table, floor, and dresser…

"What do you think?" Mom spins around, proud as a catalog model. "I reorganized the closet. See? Everything

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is color coded, with sections and boxes. And your desk is set up for maximum functionality, with a proper filing system and—"

"Mom!" I interrupt, staring in horror at the organization she's wrought on my perfect mess. "I thought we agreed: you keep your life coaching out of my life!"

She's unswayed. "But honey, you'll love it. You can be so much more productive now. You know what I always say: an ordered environment means an ordered internal life!"

"And you know what Nietzsche says?" I counter. "'You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star'!"

Mom blanches. "Birth?"

"It's a *metaphor*!" I catch my breath. "And where did all my books go?"

"They're here." Mom shows me the shelf full of neatly ordered volumes. Shiny, brand-new volumes. "They were all so battered and old. I replaced them with brand-new editions."

"But…" I gasp, lost for words. Are we even related? "That's the point! That they're old; they've been passed along from somebody else. They had notes in them! History, and meaning, and—"

"OK, all right!" Clearly, Mom realizes that tampering with my library collection is an intrusion too far. She puts a soothing hand on my shoulder and backtracks. "They're still boxed in the garage. We can go get them back."

"Thank you." I sigh with relief. "And, um, thanks,"

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I add, not wanting to seem like a completely ungrateful brat, "for all of this. It's a … nice thought."

She smiles. "I promise, just a few days of the new system, and you'll be convinced. It's the first thing I do with my clients. And look, I even made you a wall chart with space for your personal goals and achievement schedule!"

I sigh. "Thanks, Mom."

It was inevitable, I guess. For years now, she's been just itching to get her hands on me: to turn me into one of her little clones, following their checklists and seven-step plans that she hands out like a grade-school teacher passing around paint-by-numbers sheets. She used to be cool, once upon a time – scatterbrained and artistic. She was into pottery, these weird abstract sculptures, and would sometimes be so deep in a project that she'd lose all track of time. We'd wind up eating PB&J sandwiches for dinner and wearing pajamas around the house on laundry days.

It was awesome.

But then Dad left us to go play saxophone on tour with his jam band, and overnight it seemed she turned into this stranger – guzzling self-help books and going on motivational weekends designed to strip her of all spontaneity and turn her into a goddess of achievement and positive thinking. It worked out for her, I guess. She qualified as a life coach, and now she has a ton of clients, paying her ridiculous amounts of money to brainwash, I mean, *teach,* them, too.

But not me.

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As far as Garrett and I are concerned, organization and structure are the mortal enemies of creativity. I mean, did Emily Dickinson plan her goals in a color-coded workbook? Did Shakespeare use an inspirational daily quote calendar?

I think not.

Mom turns to go, and I flop down on my – crisply made – bed. "Wait," I say, stopping her. "Did the mail come? Is there anything from camp?"

"Why don't you check your in-box?" Mom winks. I leap up.

There it is: a single white envelope. "Why didn't you say something?" I cry, tearing it open in such a rush that I rip part of the letter itself.

"Slow down!" Mom laughs, but I'm already eagerly scanning the printed letter, my eyes racing over the small type.

> *Dear Ms Allen,*
>
> *Thank you for your application to our summer program. However, we regret to inform you that due to the high number of eligible candidates this year, we have decided to limit intake to those who have completed at least their junior year of high school…*

I stop. That can't be right. But no, there it is, spelled out in hateful Times New Roman.

> *We regret to inform you…*

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I lower the letter, numb. "I didn't get in."

"What?" Mom snatches it and reads it through. "Oh, honey, I'm sorry. But see here: 'Your application was strong, so we welcome you to resubmit for next summer's session.' See? It was just the age criterion."

"Not age," I tell her through gritted teeth. "Grade."

She doesn't even have the decency to look guilty. "Maybe it's for the best. You wouldn't want to go and be the youngest there, behind everyone."

I don't even bother trying to explain that I wouldn't be behind everyone, that I'm *ahead* pretty much most of the time. Instead, I stand there, rereading the letter, feeling my last sliver of hope fall to the floor and shatter into a million tiny pieces.

No lit camp. No summer quoting poetry under the stars with Garrett. Nothing.

I'm on my own.

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