

# Dearest Cora

By Brandi Long

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Dearest Cora,

I really wish you were here right now. You would know what to do, how to fix this, just as big sisters always do. I don't know what happened to Mom and Dad, but they aren't around anymore. I mean, there were people who *looked like* Mom and Dad, but it was not them, no matter what anybody says. Dominic still doesn't see it though. And he won't listen to me. I think he hates me now.

About five months ago Dom knocked on my bedroom door and I told him he could come in. The second he walked in I could feel that he was on edge, an odd electrified tension filled the room, and he stood awkwardly in the doorway. He stared at me for a few seconds before saying, "Why are you acting this way? How could you accuse Mom and Dad of not being Mom and Dad? What's wrong with you?" He walked across my room and sat at the edge of my bed, but he completely avoided eye contact. I said something along the lines of, "I don't know how you're so blind to it." He was rubbing his palms back and forth along the denim on his thighs. He shifted his body towards me; I was sitting in the middle of my bed with my comforter around my shoulders--remember, the one Nanna made me a couple years back? Anyways, he stared at me for a long time before getting up and walking out of the room, and shutting the door softly behind him, leaving me once again to the suffocating loneliness that I felt that day... that I still feel today.

Allow me to back up a little bit. I noticed it about an hour before Dom came. Clay dropped me off at home around six on that Friday; we saw an afternoon movie, but I can't quite recall which one. I walked in the door, dropped my purse in Dad's recliner, and went to my room to watch some Netflix on my laptop before dinner, as per usual. I only got about fifteen minutes into the newest episode of *American Horror Story* (did you watch last season, by the way?) before Mom called Dom and I out for dinner. I went into the kitchen and sat down in my chair, to the left of Dominic's spot and to the right of Mom's spot, and I looked over to Mom who was standing at the stove cooking, but Cora, it wasn't Mom. Dad walked in from the living room, the noise of the television leaking into the room as the door separating the kitchen and living room swung back and forth, and it

wasn't Dad either. They looked like them and sounded like them, but I could just tell, ya know? When you get that gut feeling? I hope you know what I'm talking about. It felt like there was a cinder block (or three) in the bottom of my stomach. Then Dom strolled in from the hallway, I was relieved to see that it really was Dom. But I didn't say anything about Mom and Dad, not then, because I couldn't let them know that I knew. I ate dinner at that table, keeping an eye on them, but I know they didn't realize that I was onto the both of them.

Later, when "Mom" and "Dad" went to the living room to watch their show-- the *X factor* (Can you believe they still watch that? They watched that when you still lived here!), and Dom and I were left to do the dishes, I tried to figure out if he noticed it too. I asked him, "Dom, do you know what's up with Mom and Dad?"

He side-eyed me at me and stated plainly, "What are you talking about?" and I could tell he wasn't just messing around like usual Dom.

I put down the towel I was holding (Dominic was washing and I was drying, as we've always done) and put my hand on his arm, but he pulled away. I asked, "Do you really not see it? That's not Mom and Dad that's in the living room... They're... they're duplicates... You can't tell it's not them?"

Dom scowled at me and said, "What's your deal, Ivy? Are you crazy?" I didn't say anything else, we just finished washing the dishes in silence.

Dom told Mom and Dad that I thought (knew) it wasn't them, and they called a family meeting and tried to talk to me about it, but Cora, I just sat on the couch and I kept my mouth shut. Dominic was sitting next to me, and Mom and Dad were standing in front of us, in the middle of the living room.

Dad said, "What are you on about now, Ivy? Dominic told us you think we've been replaced by look-a-likes? That doesn't make a lick of sense." I shifted in my seat and glared at Dom out of the side of my eye for a moment. I couldn't believe he had told them-- it felt like betrayal, like a stab in the back. We had always been close, you know that; after you moved out we became even closer because it was just him and me. Now that they knew that I knew, there was more of a chance of them hurting us before we could get the upperhand.

Mom said, "Honey, we think you should see a psychiatrist... I don't know how else to deal with this, I don't understand it, maybe you just need to talk it out with somebody?" I felt that a psychiatrist wouldn't be able to see it either, especially since they wouldn't know my parents like I do, and besides, the real Mom would never suggest I see a psychiatrist. We always deal with things in

the family. We don't need extra outside help. I got up and went back to my room, and left them to their plotting in the living room.

Cora, you have to understand, I feared for Dom and I. They obviously wanted something, and they did something bad to Mom and Dad. After that meeting, I had those cinder blocks again, or rather it felt like somebody poured straight concrete into my gut. I knew I wasn't going to see our real parents again, and I laid face-down in my bed for a long time. It felt like three hours though time was probably warped, crying and crying, feeling exceedingly empty and isolated, because not even our little brother was on my side. My bed covers were soaked by the time I was able to fall asleep from exhaustion.

Long story short, Cora, I couldn't wait around anymore! I spent a week trying to figure out what to do, but I constantly feared they were going to harm me or Dom-- I simply took matters into my own hands. And now because I wanted to protect our little brother I'm stuck here. After a stupid psych evaluation they stuck me away. In the damn mental institution. At the court case (I'm sure you saw it all over the news) they told me I was criminally insane, but I can tell you I am the only one here that sees anything clearly. Dominic doesn't even visit me, even though I've been in here for over a month and I'm allowed one visitor every two weeks. I've written to him, but my letters have gone unanswered. Cora, I don't want Dom to hate me, though I guess it's not his fault that he can't see it. But he won't listen to my explanations! For that matter, nobody will listen to them! I guess it's sort of okay as long as you don't hate me.

The people in the white coats tried to tell me that this was caused by my car accident with Clay six months ago when we hit the tree and my head hit the dash real hard. But that's absolutely ridiculous. Yeah, I was in the hospital for a week after, but they said I only had a concussion. They're saying that the blow to my head caused a pretty rare syndrome-- I don't remember the name of it but it sounded French. But how could hitting my head have any correlation with my parents being replaced?

I'm stuck here indefinitely, that's what they've told me. I have group therapy every morning, art therapy every other afternoon (group therapy is excruciatingly drab, art therapy is bearable), and one-on-one with a psychologist every Thursday. Luckily they decided that I don't need any pills, because I would for sure refuse them. You know how much I hate pills; other people here that do have to take pills and refuse them get sedated and forced to take them.

I have a lot of down time, I mostly just read books from the library. I wish I had the chance to bring books from home, there were a bunch of books you bought me over the years that I never

had the time to read, but now it seems that I have nothing but time. Overall my days here are very monotonous. I also sometimes draw outside of art therapy, but lately I'm out of ideas. There's only so many times you can draw and paint the trees outside your window, especially when there are only scant colorless leaves left clinging to the nearly naked branches. I liked the sunlight throughout the whole summer, and the vibrant green of the trees, but now I'd rather keep my curtains drawn.

First I tried talking to the people here, but I can't stand anybody. There are a bunch of girls and guys my age, but none of them talk to me. I've tried to reach out, but once I tell them my story, they ignore me. I've heard them whispering about me; they think I'm crazy, or crazier than them I guess, because they've been deemed crazy enough to be stuck in the same exact place as I am.

But I can tell you I don't regret it. I only regret Dominic not being able to see that I just wanted to protect him. Those people took Mom and Dad, then pretended to be them and acted like I wouldn't know the difference, and I'm glad I killed them before they had the chance to hurt me or Dominic. When Dom saw what I did the morning after (waited until the duplicates went to bed and took a knife from the kitchen, but you know that from the news) he started screaming. He wouldn't stop screaming, I couldn't make him stop. That scream still manifests in my dreams. I'll be walking down the street, in my dream, minding my own business, and a passerby will stop in front of me, and all of the sudden their mouth is gaping open, emitting Dom's scream from that morning. He wouldn't stop and listen-- he still believed that they were the real Mom and Dad, and the only thing I am sorry about is that I put him through the anguish of believing I killed our real parents.

I'm sorry I didn't write you sooner, Cora. I'm sure you've heard about it all by now, but you haven't gotten the chance to hear my side of the story. I hope you get what I've told you, I think you should, as I think I've explained things pretty clearly-- I'm sorry this letter was so long. Please write back swiftly, or visit sometime soon. Maybe you can include your number so I can give you a call? I have unlimited access to the phones but of course Dom doesn't pick up and I don't really have anyone else I want to talk to. I miss you.

With love,  
Ivy