
MS. CARVER SAYS, “Everyone experiences grief differently.”

some embrace it

some avoid it

some talk about it

some don’t want to mention it at all

some cry a lot some sleep a lot

some eat a lot some shout a lot

some remember everything

some forget it all

some push the pain down

some let it all out

“There is no wrong way,” Ms. Carver says.

“What’s important is to let yourself truly feel

whatever you are feeling, even when it’s a joyous feeling.

What’s important is to ask for what you need.”

AFTER GROUP, Ebony asks me, “You hungry, Sage?”
And this means she wants to go to the Jamaican bakery
around the corner.

We stand and look at the menu even though we order the
same thing we got last time.

Two of each: beef patty and cocoa bread, sorrel—no ice.

My best friend never came here.
The bakery just opened last month.
She died and this store opened on the same day.

My birthday.

My best friend died on my birthday.
And a good day, turned into a bad day, turned into
the worst day.

And it’s all my fault.

Makes me wonder if all over Harlem there is devastation
and delight happening all at once.

A birthday, a funeral, a hug, a fight, a song, a sorrow.
The neighborhood is full of it all.
Even now, while walking with Ebony, I see it.
Tiny flowers blooming out of the planter outside a brownstone,
showing off their beauty.
And across the street, a pile of garbage bags
holding rotting things.

Ebony brings me back, asking, "You want to spend
the night at my place this weekend?"

I say, "Maybe another time. I already have plans."

Even though I don't.

ALL WEEKEND I think about what I would be doing
if things had never changed.

WE WOULD have spent our Saturday with Aunt Ini,
who is more like my grandmother than my aunt.
She raised my dad after his mother—her sister—died.
In one day, her whole world changed.
She lost a sister, gained a son.

And she also has me now, her niece,
who is more like her granddaughter.
Aunt Ini loves whoever I love,
so my best friend was like her granddaughter too.

If my best friend was here, the three of us
would walk over to Central Park, search the Harlem Meer
for tulips, Aunt Ini's favorite flower.
Every spring she waits and waits
for them to appear.

If my best friend was here, the three of us would be going
thrift shopping or museum hopping or learning to make a new
Jamaican dish: run down, pepper pot soup, red peas soup.

"I gotta pass down the family recipes," Aunt Ini would
probably say.

And me and my best friend, we would be listening
and learning and cooking and eating and getting so full,
from the delicious food and also from all the love.

WE WOULD BE walking through Morningside Park, with my best friend's big sister, Brielle. Brielle would be talking on the phone to one person while texting another, keeping her eye on us but giving us space because we are not babies anymore, but still, our parents won't let us venture out alone.

We would probably stop at the pond to stare at the turtles. Making up nonsense stories about this turtle community—the four on the rock to the left are a clique, friends since birth. The three wading in the water, newbies to the neighborhood, a little annoying with all their questions but okay for the most part. And the one way out is the show-off. But in a way that showing off is leading, guiding, setting a good example, teaching the rest how to be the smartest, the fastest, the most stylish, the best.

Kind of like my best friend.

IF SHE were here,
we would be buying icees
from the stand at the corner
because spring is arriving
and at every other block
there's a man or woman
with a Coco Helado cart
serving scoops of delicious
coconut, lime, cherry, or mango.

The best dollar ever spent.

We would be walking through Harlem,
staying close to home but far enough
to be out of our parents' watchful eyes.
Barely teenagers, but thinking we're grown.

WE WOULD BE fantasizing about first kisses, first loves.
Dreaming about going to high school one day
and then college and then what would we do?
Who would we become?

Me, I want to be a pilot.
Want to soar and dwell in the clouds.

My best friend? She wanted to be a coder.
Spent her summers in camps learning
how to build websites and create apps
and work for social justice through technology.

Friends always told us we chose hard careers,
said, “too many numbers and formulas”
and “don’t you think it’ll be hard to fly a plane?”
and “don’t you think it’ll be hard
to keep changing time zones?”

Maybe. But

nothing can be as hard as talking about someone you love
in past tense.

Nothing can be as hard as knowing we both
had a vision for our lives

but only one of us is here
to make her dream come true.

I TURNED thirteen.

My best friend never did.