

## Ten Years of the Unknown

“Good afternoon, is this Mrs. Bates speaking?” the receiver on the phone asked as I fumbled with my house keys.

“This is her,” I answered, “Who is this?”

“This is Miranda Grayson from Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. Your relative, Mr. Joshua Bates was involved in a car crash yesterday at April 8 at 2:35 p.m and is now under intensive care. He--”

I dropped my bag and stood there in shock. It had been ten years since I had heard of or seen my father. “--My dad?”

“Yes sweetie.” the voice softened, “Your dad. You can come and see him. He won’t be leaving the hospital for a while. He was in a three car collision crash and is in coma. He’ll be glad to see you when he wakes up.”

“Yes, thank you,” I mumbled still dumbfounded with shock. I ended the call and gazed past into the hallway thinking about him. I didn’t remember much since the last time I met him, I was only seven years old. But one thing I knew for sure, he wouldn’t be glad to see me, he would be surprised. Surprised and shocked.

Later when my mother came home, I found her drinking on the couch by herself in deep thought. I snatched the bottle from her, “Mom I need to tell you something.”

Her head swerved towards me and her glazed eyes focused in on me, “Give me my drink back,” she slurred.

“No,” I said firmly. “Not until you listen to me.”

“What do you want?”

“Mom, you said Dad is in California right?” I took a deep breath and said, “ I want to go see him.”

It took her a moment for what I said to register. And when it did, she went off like a bomb. In the dimly lit lights, the gaunt lines of her aging skin and the shadows masking her face, made her look exactly like a monster. Her knuckles white from clenching her fists too hard, and teeth gritted from effort to remain impassive. Her face was red with suppressed rage as the anger radiated out of her.

“Have you lost your mind?” She screamed at me from across the room. My hand was shaking so badly from her outburst, I dropped the bottle and it shattered. “Have you actually lost your mind?” She repeated.

“I-I...Mom..” I stammered, looking down at the spilled drink.

“You want to go see the man you call your father!?” She pointed her shaking finger at me, “Well let me tell you, you good for nothing piece of trash,” Her purple face came level with mine and she grabbed my neck pulling me closer. Blindly, I started to thrash around, trying to get out of her iron grip, but it proved impossible. Wide eyed, I stared back at her, afraid of who this person my mom had become. I could see it in her eyes; the anger, hatred and pain all from my father.

“Your father was an awful man,” she began, her voice no more than a throaty growl, “As soon as I had you, he said to me that he wouldn’t be responsible for raising a daughter who would become like me. We got into a fight, and in the next minute he packed his bags and was out the front door. ”

She loosened her grip and shoved me back. Breathing deeply, she closed her eyes, reminiscing of that event. “I cried for him to come back for weeks. I told him we could fix things. But he didn’t listen. He left me in my own misery on the front doorstep while he got in the car and left. He didn’t even turn around to look at me Morgan! He didn’t even say goodbye! He just left. And you want to go see a man who would be so cruel to leave his own wife devastated and financially unstable?”

She collapsed to the floor, her hair covering her tear-streaked face. I took a deep breath, “Mom...I’m so sorry he did this to you. But you need to move on, just like he did. And...and he got in a car accident two days ago and-and now he’s in coma. A-and”

Her red eyes trained in on me, “You--you think I care?” she rasped. “I don’t give a damn to what happened to your father. He hurt me with what happened and I have no remorse for him.”

I stumble back, eyes wide in shock of what she said. *Was my father really that bad? Was he as cruel as my mother claimed he was? As doubts filled my head, another voice, louder than the rest spoke in my head, ‘Would you believe the claims of a drunken, grief driven woman who would do anything to blacken her ex-husband’s name?’*

As she sobbed on the floor, I looked down at her, tears filling my own eyes. “Mom...”

“Morgan, don’t leave me.”

I closed my eyes, “Mom, I don’t think I can let my father die without knowing who his daughter is.”

She closed her eyes defeated, “You go visit your father. But just know that you will regret not staying here. Not to mention, the moment you leave this house to see him, you will not be allowed back in. Go lie beside your father and ask him to protect you the way he was never able to protect me.” She tore a piece of paper off the counter and wrote down something and chucked it at me, “Here. Take this address, and ask God to help you out of the mess your going to find yourself in.”

“Mom, please don’t kick me out.” I cried, “I just want to know both my parents. Your acting like he’s dead, but he’s living a life just like you. I love you, but I also want to meet my father, and--” I wiped my eyes furiously, “And don’t take this opportunity from me. I can’t be with you forever, but I love you and I hope you’ll let me in again once I come back.”

Without another word, I ran up to my room before I changed my mind. I had already bought the tickets yesterday, and by tomorrow morning I would be on a plane to California.

The next morning when I walked out of my room with a suitcase in my hand, I found my mom still lying on the cold floor, sound asleep. I stopped to admire her peaceful expression and realized that if all went right, I would finally understand what went so wrong in my parents

relationship and why my father never bothered to contact us all these years. Why my mother didn't even bother keep a picture and why she talked about him like a cursed man.

It was all only three thousand miles away.

Quietly I moved towards my mother and bent down, giving her a small kiss on her wet, tear stained cheek. "I love you," I whispered quietly, tears filling my own eyes.

She didn't move. I got up and made my way to the door, but not before hearing my mother mutter, "This is the second person I love who walked out on me."

As soon as I closed the door behind me, I sobbed. My heart ached for all the pain my mother went through. In my heart I whispered back, "But I will be the first to come back."

I had been in California for a day and a half, and I finally found the courage to go visit my father. It wasn't a matter of where he was as much as as much as was I ready to see somebody I hadn't seen for ten years. But I wasn't planning on chickening out.

Standing in front of the tall, lit up hospital, I started having second doubts. The door opened and closed as visitors, doctors, staff and sometimes patients came streaming in and out. I took a deep breath and entered the drafty front lobby. I walked to the receptionist, "Hi, I'm Morgan Bates. Here for patient Joshua Bates. He's my father." She nodded and looked down at her computer.

"I'm sorry, but he doesn't have a daughter."

"He divorced, I'm his first wife's daughter. Please, I really need to visit him."

She nodded and signed my name down, "Room 231 second floor. Elevators on your left."

I bid her goodbye and headed to his room. When I got there, I stood outside the room for five minutes, rethinking my plan of walking in and saying 'Hi, I'm your ex-wife's kid.'

Suddenly a nurse bumped me from behind. I turned around, "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to be in the way." I apologized.

"No its fine." She looked at the paper in my hand, "Room 231 is right in front of you. The room should be unlocked. Just go right in."

With her watching, I had no choice but to walk in. There was a nurse in the room when I entered, "Hi, you visitng?" She saw me hesitating and gestured to him, "Come closer. He's sleeping."

I slowly moved towards the foot of the bed, took a deep breath and looked straight in the man's peaceful face. I gasped.

The man wasn't my father!

I stumbled back in shock and the nurse grabbed me, "Hun, are you okay?"

"The man," I stuttered, "he isn't my father. I thought he was. I got a call telling my father was here."

"Sweetheart, he doesn't have a daughter. I'm sorry but you have the wrong person. I can escort you out though."

I nodded in a daze as she led me out of the building. I couldn't believe it. I got a call from this hospital telling me that my dad was in the hospital only to come and find out the man lying

in the bed wasn't him! I felt lost and confused. I didn't know what to do next, I couldn't just go back. Then I remembered the address my mom had given me. That was going to be my next destination. I wasn't going to stop until I found answers.

"Hi sweetie! What's your name? I don't think I've seen such a pretty girl around here before," greeted the kind old lady as she opened the door.

"Hello, I'm Morgan. Morgan Bates, and I was wondering if you knew about my father, Joshua Bates. He lives right next door."

Instantly the lady's smile faded as she ushered me in, "Well, sweetie you better come in. Sit down here, I'll be back in just a second."

I sat on the couch in their living room, while I waited for their return and thought about her reaction to my dad. She had seemed so happy and then all of sudden there was grief, and overwhelming sadness. Was it because of his hospitalization or me being his 'forgotten' daughter or something more?

Five minutes later, and still no sign I decided to get up and see if I could find her. As I walked down the hallway, I heard two voices.

"I can't believe his daughter came. Who knew--" the old lady began.

"Well she's about ten years late. What made her come know of all times anyway?" another younger voice said.

"You can't blame it on her. Its her mother."

"I don't think she knows. Oh the poor child, what lies her mother must have told her."

"Oh dear, we have to tell her the truth, she'll be heartbroken."

I heard enough and stormed in. *What was my mother hiding from me? And what 'truth' were they talking about?*

Even though I had millions of questions swirling in my mind, I only asked one, "Where's my dad?"

The two woman looked each other guilty, "Darling Morgan, I have something to show you. Its of your father and you." the old lady said as she sped of quickly, leaving me alone with the younger woman.

"Hi, I'm Sasha, and thats my mother Eliza.." She smiled nervously.

"What situation? What's going on?. Why are you guys acting like he's dead? I went to the hospital and he wasn't there. And nobody's home next door. I thought he would get married, since he was the one who left my mom."

Sasha straightened up frowning, "He's in the hospital? Morgan, that's your uncle whose in the hospital not him. And your father never left, it was your mother. Your mother put lies in her own mind to make it seem like it was his fault. She needed someone to blame--I'm sorry I know this is a lot, but you need to know what happened between them."

I frowned, still trying to process this new information. It was hard to imagine the woman, I called my mother told me lies about my own father to save her own daughter from leaving her. "So what made her leave?," I asked.

Before she could reply, Eliza came running back in with a photo in her hand. “Morgan,” she panted, “Come here, this is you and your dad. You visited him when you were younger and you wanted to live with him. I remember he was crying with happiness when he heard you wanted to stay with him instead of your mom.”

In her hands, there was a photo of me and my dad. It was my seven year old self sitting on my dad’s lap on a swing. My dad had his arms wrapped around me with his chin resting on my head with a content expression on his face. He looked old, very very tired and old. But the exhaustion was blanketed with the joy at being with his beautiful daughter. Me.

My sadness, my shock, my love... they were simply words flying around my own head. But nothing could express the love and bliss that I radiated after seeing my father so happy. A feeling of joy and hopefulness overwhelmed me when I realized I could meet the man my mother took away from me.

Tears swam in my eyes as I looked up at Eliza and Sasha. “Where is he now?” I croaked out with a hopeful smile on my face. Eliza and Sasha had tears in their eyes too, “He’s...he...”

Sasha led me to a chair and sat across from me, holding my hands. “Morgan you need to understand--”

I jumped up, tears leaking uncontrollably out of my eyes, I clenched my fists. “Just please tell me!” I said in my own anguish, raising my voice with every syllable, “Where is he!”

Sasha laid her hands limply in her lap, and hung her head. Eliza cleared her throat and murmured the ten words that would scar me the rest of my life.

“Morgan, your father died of brain cancer ten years ago.”