

RUN OR CONFRONT

Long, black hair gleamed in the sunlight as familiar visions began their torturing play inside my head. I always wondered why my brain did not possess a natural protecting aversion to beautiful, black hair. Rather than a protection, my demented brain seemed to gain pleasure from the torturing visions of hope that would soon fade into grave disappointment. The long sweeping locks danced in a different direction so that the owner's face would momentarily be revealed. "Turn away," a voice inside of me screamed, but I refused to listen for fear my daily quota of disappointment would not be met. Without warning the face for which I had relinquished everything and everyone else I had loved was only a few yards away from me. At first, I thought my hopeful visions had trumped my tortured brain, but the face remained the same verifying this time she was real. She smiled, the most radiant smile I had ever seen, and uncontrollably my breath was taken away. I registered how absolutely happy she looked. I couldn't divert my attention to what she was doing or if anyone was with her terrified the vision would disappear as so many visions of her had disappeared before. The fifteen years that had passed since the last time I experienced that enchanting smile had not changed her at all. If it was even possible, the years had only made her more beautiful and irresistible. I had fifteen years of training preparing me for this moment, and now with the moment not one of my fabricated visions, but reality, uncertainty flooded through me. I had two choices: I could run away, or I could confront her. Soon enough she would see me, and she would have the same two choices. Would she recognize me? It wasn't fair! This shouldn't be her choice! She had deprived me of enough; she would not deprive me of being the one to make this choice. A moment I had equally coveted and dreaded its arrival was here. My legs began to move before the rest of my body was aware of their amble in her direction.

A BECKONING BETRAYAL

As I walked toward her, I contemplated what Devin would have done in this situation. My contemplation was wasted energy because I was certain Devin would stride confidently toward our mother and unleash a tirade of hatred that one would assume could only be meant for Judas himself. Devin did not struggle as I did with the battle of hope and hatred. As much as I refused to relinquish my hope of finding the mother who abandoned us, Devin refused to relinquish her hatred for her casual departure from our lives when we were way too young to face the world without a mother. That departure had proven to have devastating effects on both of us, but for some unknown reason all the hatred I should be feeling right now was completely resolved.

As I finally reached her, my only feeling or desire was to have my betrayer embrace me. Without reservation, I said, “Mom.”

At the sound of my voice proclaiming her as my mother, Anna turned to look at me. As a child I could easily read and understand all my mother’s expressions. Now fifteen years of absence seemed to have diminished my powers of connection to my mother, and I struggled to interpret the expression on her face as she looked at me. This infuriating struggle produced a lingering bit of hatred for her inside of me that demanded I not allow the expression on my face to convey that her reaction to my arrival was in control of my emotions. Although we probably both knew she was as she had been since the day I was born. Some gravitational pull of needing her to smile at me, to love me, to hold me had controlled every emotion and action I had ever had. As I struggled to be expressionless, Anna smiled at me. I wasn’t expecting that. Then her smile widened and with certitude, almost as if fifteen years had not passed since she had seen me, she endearingly placed her hand to my face and said, “Drea.” Before I could object or concur that this is all I had craved for years, she enveloped me in her arms. I breathed in her sweet scent, felt the safety and security of her embrace, and began sobbing like a little girl. My mother didn’t try to stop my tears; instead, she held me tighter and let me cry out the past fifteen years of confusion, rejection, and unending mistakes that unguided children make.

As Anna held me, her gravitational pull on me enlarged and virtually catapulted me back to a day four years before when that gravitational pull had proven to be the sole motivator in every action that I made. *Devin and I were in the bedroom that belonged to my five-year-old daughter, Bree. I was packing Bree’s favorite belongings for the plane ride that would move us*

from sunny Los Angeles to cold New York because I could not resist that gravitational pull of Anna wanting me with her. "You won't find her!" Devin finally screamed at me as I folded a pair of jeans and placed those in the suitcase. I had felt her agitation rise with each new item I placed in the suitcase, but now all I felt was the sting of her words that was intentional to let me know that she saw through my façade of wanting to move to New York to advance my career. Moving to New York meant extreme hassle of constantly returning to Los Angeles for production meetings and filming. This, of course, would mean I would have to take Bree out of school often as she was about to begin kindergarten, and Devin knew that I had no family in New York to help me raise my daughter. All that hassle and the turbulent effects of such a major transition seemed trivial compared to not acting when I heard HER beckoning me to New York. Devin knew it, and now she was confronting me with her knowledge. We were each other's only support system so confrontation between us was rather unusual, but in that moment, I knew confrontation had become inevitable making now the time to sink or swim. I turned around so suddenly that Devin almost fell backwards at the sheer force of my surprise attack, but Devin's lapse of readiness for this battle was only momentary. She quickly raised her eyes level to mine showing she was equipped and ready for fierce competition. Identical blue eyes stared determinably into mine. We looked identical in every way, except that Devin had recently dyed her normally black hair to platinum blond as her declaration of independence on the hold our mother had on her. But in that moment the blonde hair, or any other defining difference between us, faded away as we looked deep into each other's eyes. Behind both sets of eyes was one motherless similarity that echoed an ocean's worth of pain and torment that had been accumulating for eleven years with no relief. An ocean of pain could easily be hidden from the world, but not from a twin sister. As much as both of us wanted so badly to ease some of that pain for the other, we accepted that we had tried and failed for years and that we were both incapable. The eye contact and the reminder of all the pain we had endured became too overpowering for both of us, and in a rare moment Devin accepted defeat by turning away from me to retrieve a stuffed animal she had picked out and given to Bree on her last birthday. 'You won't find her' was now one more stone in our carefully sculpted dam that held back a flood of unspeakable topics.

Devin placed the stuffed animal in the suitcase, but she hadn't abandoned the fight. "Please don't go, Drea. Think about Bree. She loves it here. She won't have any friends there." I won't have any friends here, went unsaid, but Devin's fighting attitude compelled her to try

every approach she could think of to get me to change my mind and stay in Los Angeles. Deep down I think she knew all of it was a futile effort, but she wouldn't be Devin without putting up a fight. After her fighting was expelled, I zipped the suitcase then turned lovingly to her. I was about to launch a reassuring fight of my own, but I recognized something hidden behind her dark blue eyes: betrayal. My move was as much of a betrayal as Anna's departure, maybe more of a betrayal. I was leaving Devin, taking away not only her twin sister but her beloved niece too, all in an effort to be close to Devin's source of eternal hatred. Feeling the full weight of my betrayal as she stared at me, the only fight I had in me was to embrace her, tightly, a long time, attempting to hug her long enough my love would be permanently inside of her. Then Bree and I slipped out of Los Angeles and made our new life in New York.

That independence proved to be incredibly beneficial for me and Bree, but a few months ago the dam broke and drowned Devin to the point of near fatality. As I thought of the horrifying moment of finding Devin in complete devastation because of the pain our mother had inflicted on her, I felt I was betraying Devin all over again four years later by being in our mother's arms. My allegiance to Devin, my identical twin sister, overpowered my gravitational pull to my mother, and I pushed Anna away from me. However, I couldn't run away; my feet stayed firmly planted a foot from her, and my hands moved up to wipe my tears that Devin would surely mock.

"Would you slap me in the face if I started with, how are you?" Anna started. I could tell she didn't want me to leave, but she had no clue what to say. What do you say to the twenty-five-year-old woman who was crying like the ten-year-old girl you abandoned?

"I guess not, but I reserve the right to slap you later," I finally said trying to act tough. I had acted in a million movies, even won Academy Awards for some of my portrayals, yet right now I could imagine my tough act was not convincing at all.

With a smile Anna said, "That's certainly your right." Her smile widened; it was surprisingly a mother's smile that flashed on her face. I recognized that smile; it was the same smile I always had as I basked in Bree's every move and accomplishment. "Drea, you look absolutely stunning, more beautiful than even in your movies. I've seen them all. I'm so proud of the career you have had." That really did matter to me that she had seen my movies because she was the only reason that I acted at all. I loathed acting, but I had to have a reason for Anna to notice me. For years I had endured agonizing torture that was part of the world of acting: kissing slimy conceited men who were terrible kissers, fake blood around me performing scenes that

gave me nightmares, overinflated egos of famous co-stars and directors, the press scrutinizing and ridiculing my every move, my daughter having kids only want to be her friend because of who her mom was or them not wanting to be her friend because of the latest tabloid scandal about me. I've endured that torture to have Anna notice me. I dreamed she would show up on a set one day and tell me how much she loved me and what a mistake it had been to leave me behind. I even made sure I was one of the best at what I loathed; I was constantly winning awards, so I knew there was absolutely no room for error in her knowing how famous I am. Devin, of course, had drastically different reasons for her famous acting career, still her reasons centered on our mother. In Devin's perception everything was a fight. Despite Anna being a completely silent competitor, Devin saw the two of them in the most prevalent war of Devin's life. Devin felt like every movie she made was spitting in Anna's face that she was more famous than her, and that each movie was a direct hit to our mom that Devin had been successful and fine without her. Devin had not been fine without her, and neither had I. Still Anna looked as if everything was fine because she had seen my movies without once bothering to show up on set or attempting to contact me. *She must like not having me in her life.* Every muscle in my body tensed at this thought, but this thought was so contrasting to the way she was looking at me, like she had missed me so much.

Reality of my battling emotions hit her, and she said, "I guess we have a lot more to discuss than your career."

I dropped my head for a moment feeling completely overwhelmed. Then I looked at her and with all honesty said, "I don't really know where to start or what to ask. As much as the big question of why you left us needs to be asked, I can recognize that I'm not ready for any explanations no matter what those are. I'm overwhelmed just by seeing you. I need time to process that before I know anything else. Can you be supportive of that?"

"I admire your ability to understand and express your limitations. You are far wiser than I have ever been. I can be supportive of whatever you need, Drea, even if that is walking away and never seeing me again. Although that is certainly not what I want; I want the chance to get to know you and be in your life. I want to make sure you know that is what I want, but what would you like right now?"

I had no idea what I wanted right now. As many times as I had played out this scenario in my head, I had never thought past the moment of us seeing each other, embracing each other,

and life magically transitioning back to how happy it had been before. Now I realized those were the dreams of ten-year-olds. Dreams of fairy tales like Bree's movies filled with princesses, fairies, magic kingdoms, and happily ever afters. That's why those were called Fairy Tales because they weren't ever true, and even if happiness could be possible, it certainly was not easily obtained. I realized having Anna in my life now was not going to make the past fifteen years of pain, rejection, and bad choices disappear. All those obstacles would still have to be dealt with, as well as new obstacles of forgiveness and rebuilding a broken relationship. Here she was - I could have my mother - but at what cost?

"I don't know," I finally blurted out. "I honestly can't tell you what I want because I don't know!" She had been so patient during my long silence, and this was all I could muster to answer. I lowered my head because I felt tears resurfacing, and I didn't want to start crying again. I took a deep breath and gave myself a moment to allow the shock to settle in. After the shock settled, I knew exactly what I wanted and declared it with confidence. "I would like to get to know you, the woman you are now, and you know me, the woman I am now. I would like to take it slowly to see what develops. I may not be strong enough, but I would like for us to try. I don't have any idea how that is going to develop, so I appreciate any suggestions you have."

Anna smiled. I had not rejected her when I had the chance as she had rejected me. She also realized I had not fully accepted her either; I knew she grasped that. I was willing to try, and I knew that was all she needed. I had her with me, I had her smile, and to me that meant I had her love. Why did I so desperately need the love of someone so determined to keep that love from me so I could feel like a whole person? As if she was reading my mind and trying to reassure me that she wasn't trying to keep her love from me now, Anna said, "Maybe we could go to dinner. A non-threatening but very busy place, so you might think twice if you decide to kill me."

I laughed at her humor, amazed at how easy it was to feel so natural in her presence right now. Of course, then I was immediately astonished at my amazement. A tornado could feel at ease in Anna's presence; it was her charm, and the ease that she looked at situations and people. I remember that ease and calm I always felt around her, and know that is what I have spent fifteen years searching for. Everything is different now; she took my peace with her and hurt me in ways I can't even describe. Yet here I was in front of the person who had hurt me more than anyone on earth, and I was agreeing to put myself right back into harm's way. *Harm's Way*, echoed in my

mind. Even that thought could not overrule the gravitational pull to her, and the words came so willingly, “Dinner sounds like a great idea. When and where?”

“I’m assuming from your earlier statement of being overwhelmed at seeing me, you could use a little time to soak this in and prepare yourself for dinner with your enemy.” A guilty look spread across my face, and she began her motherly assurance, “Oh, don’t try to pretend. I always knew if I ever got another shot with you girls, there would be hell to pay. I’m prepared for that, because the blessing of having you back in my life will far outweigh the hell I will go through to get there.”

At least she was realistic, this wouldn’t be easy for anyone involved, but I felt obligated to let her know just how much hell she was inviting into her life. “Don’t expect any kind of welcome from Devin. Devin hates you with the fire of a million burning suns. The last thing she needs right now, when she has recently gotten her life back together, is the presence of the one who left her which brought nothing but destruction and misery into her life. She has done some extremely outrageous and dangerous things to herself trying to escape the pain of her hatred for you, and finally she has found a way to be stable. I will not allow you to come back into her life and turn it upside down again. Don’t try to contact her. If we continue to build a relationship and I feel the time is right, I will let Devin know, and I will be the one to tell her. That’s my only condition. Take it or leave it. If you leave it, I walk away now, and you will never see me or Devin again.”

“I see your intense sense of protection for your sister has not diminished over the years. I’m glad it hasn’t. I accept your terms. I promise not to contact Devin or take any matters into my own hands. I will trust your judgment and decisions where Devin is concerned. Since I have accepted your terms, will you have dinner with me tomorrow night, if it’s not too soon for you?”