

Untitled

The Ghost of Morgan
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Adolescence Education

AED 404, Teaching Writing

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I had just bought a chocolate vanilla twist ice cream cone with sprinkles. The sprinkles were dripping down the side of the cone, so I spun around on my heel to grab a pile of napkins. When my eyes fell upon her, I instinctively felt weak. My heart leaped into my throat, my hands began to sweat, and my breathing stopped. The child had the same features, only she was five years old. I counted on my fingers. Yes, she would be five now. I knew it was Morgan. I could never forget her face; it had been etched into my memory through the many sleepless nights.

She was just a baby when I met her, eleven months old, with a button nose, soft brown curls, and piercing blue eyes. But something about her dislike of people made me weary of her. When her icy blue eyes connected with mine, animosity filled them. Her mother had been abusive to her even before she was born, neglecting to see a doctor and drinking throughout her entire pregnancy. There weren't any physical signs of abuse; she was perfect in the way that all babies are. Though her mother seldom came around anymore, the abuse left an imprint on the child that seemed impossible to erase.

She locked her arms tightly around her father's neck, like a baby monkey clinging to a tree. Her eyes darted uneasily around, like a claustrophobic person searching for an exit in a crowded theatre. I smiled at her warmly, but she just turned her head coldly. Over the next few weeks I saw more and more of them, with no signs of her warming up to me. The night I cooked them dinner, I knelt down beside her to hand her a bowl of spaghetti. She hit me in my face with such a force that I fell back onto the linoleum floor. The throbbing pain ripped through my face and spaghetti dangled from the walls of my spotless kitchen. I asked him to go home; I had homework to do. Icing my ugly black and blue eye, thoughts pounded in my brain. "This will never work. I am only nineteen years old. How can I possibly take on the responsibility of a misguided child who doesn't even belong to me?" But I have never been a quitter. How could I lose to someone as tall as my arm? And so I stayed.

A few more physical confrontations taught me not to be at eye level with the one year old. She was at my house daily, never making an effort to be friendly with me. On my birthday, I held up my new kitten for her to pet. She locked her fingers around his fluffy neck and hurled him across the room. The cat was fine. Luckily Morgan was a better boxer than a pitcher. My face was as red as a lobster; my blood pressure flew off the charts. An awkward silence fell upon my usually lively house. I plopped Morgan into a wooden kitchen chair for ten minutes. She screamed, she cried, she kicked her tiny legs. But she didn't budge until I told her that she could get up. Her eyes were on fire, her cheeks were rosy, and her dampened curls stuck to her forehead. She knew I won.

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The first time Morgan showed me any kind of affection was about a month later. We were kneeling side by side, coloring. She had tried unsuccessfully to crawl to the other side of the table. I inched gradually closer to her. I was searching for the red crayon, which was lying next to her chubby hand. She saw my eyes grazing the table and handed me the crayon. Her eyes never met mine, nor did her hand. Morgan realized that I wasn't going anywhere. Whether she liked it or not, I was becoming a permanent fixture in her life.

Through our weekend trips to the mall and periodic trips to the zoo, I grew to love her as if she were my own child. One sunny afternoon while we were walking around the block, she looked up at me and reached her little arms towards me so I could kneel down to her height. She wrapped her chubby baby arms tenderly around my neck.

"I love you, Ta," she acclaimed. It was the first time she had spoken a complete sentence. It was also the last time I saw her. I never got to say good-bye.

A few weeks after we split up, I got a phone call late one night.

"Hello?" I squeaked, my voice lined with confusion.

"It's Morgan. She is in the hospital. She's in full cardiac arrest." His voice was lined with panic. I didn't need to hear the explanation of what had happened to my precious little Morgan. Her father, in desperate need of a babysitter, had dropped her off at her mother's house earlier that night. I could picture her screaming in fear at the sight of the puke-green porch. Her grip on her father must have been tight, as if she knew the danger that lay ahead of her. A short time after they pried her little arms off of her father's neck, she began to wander around. She stumbled upon some drugs, the doctor said it was cocaine, and ingested them.

The steady beep of the monitor strapped to her body was hypnotizing in a nightmarish way. As I looked upon her frail body, I couldn't believe it was the same baby I had carried on my shoulders with pigtails in her hair; the same baby who had been lying on her belly next to me, chin propped in her hands while I did my homework. It wasn't Morgan. Morgan would never lie so still. She would be screaming at the top of her lungs at these strangers with their impersonal looks and stark white clothing.

When he entered the room with both of his parents at his side, I wanted to scream: "She wouldn't be here if you hadn't taken her from me. We would have been reading a book right after her bath as we always did on Friday nights. She would be wearing her pink and purple fleece Pooh Bear pajamas and carrying her Fisher Price sippy cup. She would be safe in my arms." Instead I chose to say nothing. I lowered my head in defeat and walked out of the room. I got into my car, the nauseating smell of the hospital still clinging to my skin, and bawled all the way home.

Fate had thrown Morgan into my life, and then yanked her carelessly back out. The loss of Morgan has put a new meaning to the statement "Love Hurts."