

I'd Like You to Meet My Mother

I first saw her from the corner of my eye. She was standing by a bus stop in front of the hospital. I looked over at her and she smiled at me. She looked familiar, but foreign at the same time. She was beautiful but I noticed that her wardrobe and hair style were out of date. I was walking next to my future husband, Marty, and holding his hand. She was to my left looking directly at me and smiling. I returned her smile and then looked away, feeling a pang of guilt for smiling. This was not the time for smiles.

Marty and I rushed by the woman and made our way up the stairs to the front door of the Mt. Shasta Memorial Hospital. We had gotten the call from the nurses at the ICU unit a half-hour earlier. They told us to get there as quickly as we could; there wasn't much time left. I glanced back at the bus stop just before Marty closed the door to the hospital behind me, but the woman who had smiled at me was no longer standing there.

Marty's mother had been in a medication-induced coma for days because she had been in so much pain. We had driven up to visit Margery the day before. I had never met the woman, but had spoken to her several times on the phone. She was happy that I was in Marty's life. He had been through a horrible divorce six years before I met him, so his entire family welcomed me with open arms when they realized how happy we were together.

Only six months earlier Margery had undergone hip replacement surgery. She had made a remarkable recovery for a woman of 87; but her good health had deteriorated rapidly in the past two months. It became more and more difficult for her to walk until she came to a point a week before we arrived when she was unable to get out of bed. Marty and I lived about five hours south of Margery. She had moved to the cabin in the Mt. Shasta area ten years ago, while Marty was still married to his first wife. Marty's cousin and Margery's life-long friend, Louise, had been keeping an eye on Marty's mom, as the cabin she lived in was adjacent to Louise's property. Louise and her husband, Dennis, were with us as we walked up to the nurse's station outside of Margery's room.

The four of us stood on either side of Margery's bed; Marty and I to the right and Louise and Dennis on the left. Marty took his mother's hand and leaned in to whisper something into her ear. There was no response from the frail woman in the bed. Dennis comforted his wife as she wept quietly.

The sounds of the machines that kept Margery alive were rhythmic and mesmerizing. As I gazed down at her still body I lamented that I had been just a few weeks late of being able to meet and get to know her. Marty and I had made several plans to come up for a visit, but something else had always occurred and we put it off. Now that it could be put off no longer, and it was too late. I thought she looked peaceful. She was in a place where she could no longer feel the intense pain of her deteriorating spine. Her curly white hair encircled her head like a halo. I looked around the room at the people Margery had loved throughout her life. They were devastated by her present state. Tears came to my eyes for them, but I felt like an outsider. I suddenly felt the need to step outside the room. No one noticed me leave.

I walked down the hall to a large waiting room that was situated at its end. The room was bright and cherry, as it had a large picture window that offered a magnificent view of Mount Shasta. I walked up to the window and stood there taking in the grandeur of the famous (infamous) mountain. There was still snow at the mountain's peak, although it was mid July. I stood there for quite a while watching the clouds pass over and around the great mountain's

summit. I had felt a strange draw to the mountain ever since I first saw it looming from the center of Route 5 as we drove into the town of Dunsmuir. Although we were in a hurry to arrive at Louise's home in Castella the night before, I persuaded Marty to stop so I could take a few photographs of the celebrated mountain. There was something about Mt. Shasta that made me want to get closer to it—almost as if the mountain had a magnetic pull for me.

I dropped my head, closed my eyes and took in a deep breath. When I opened them again I noticed a woman crossing the street in front of the hospital. I watched her intently and noticed that she was limping, as if walking was pure torture for her. When she got to the other side of the street she turned in the direction of the hospital, raised her head and looked directly at me standing in the window. I recognized her then as the woman who had been at the bus stop before we came into the building. Although she was a distance away, I could see that she was smiling at me. She lifted her right arm and waved at me. Instinctively, I smiled and waved back.

“Who are you waving to? You don't know anyone in this town, do you?”

I jumped when I heard Marty's voice behind me. “Oh, Honey; you startled me.”
How are you?” I turned and hugged my fiancé.

“I'm okay, I guess. It's just so difficult for me to see her like that. When I came up here six months ago to help her out after the surgery she looked so healthy. Even though she had that operation, she was feisty and just as quick witted as she has always been. I can't believe it's the same woman lying in that bed. Why'd you run off like that?”

“I'm sorry. I just needed to get out of there and give you and your family some time alone with your mom. I feel bad that I never got to meet her.”

“I know; I feel guilty about that myself. I wish I would have made the time to bring you up here sooner. I can't tell you how much it means to me that you're with me now through all of this.”

“Of course, where else would I be?”

“Well, I just wanted to let you know how much it means to me. Who were you waving to when I walked in?”

I released Marty from our embrace and we both turned back toward the window. “There was a woman down there. She was crossing the street and then she looked up at me and waved. I just waved back. I don't see her now, though. Strange.”

“Well, she probably went about her business. And I came to find you. The nurses are suggesting we go home. There isn't much more we can do here, and they are afraid we might try to revive Mom. Can you imagine them telling us not to try to revive her? But they said she has been in a great deal of pain and they didn't want her to wake up to that again.”

“Okay, I guess that makes sense. Where's Dennis and Louise?”

“Louise is talking to the nurses. I told them I'd find you and bring you back.”

We walked back down the hall and saw Marty's cousins waiting for us.

Louise took my arm when I came up to her. “You must be starving; I know I am. We didn't have much of an opportunity to eat before we came. Why don't we stop at a place in town and get an early lunch?”

“I am really hungry, now that you mention it.” I liked Louise. She was at least fifteen years older than me, but I felt a connection to her when I first entered her home the night before. She was one of those people who knew how to make everyone feel as though they have known her for years.

We left the hospital and drove about ten minutes to a restaurant that had outside seating. The weather was still in the 70s so we decided to eat outside. The conversation gravitated to

Marty and his cousins reminiscing about stories concerning Margery. I listened politely, and felt even more like an outsider, as some of the stories also involved Marty's ex-wife and daughters. I attempted to join in on the conversation, but eventually gave up. I could see the top of Mt. Shasta from where I was sitting and became fascinated by the unusual cloud formations that flew by the mountain.

"Hello."

The voice came from somewhere on the other side of the street. I looked around and saw the woman I had already seen twice that morning. She was walking on the other side of the street. My mind reeled. How was it possible that she could have walked all the way to the other side of town that quickly? As I watched her slowly pass by I saw her stop at the corner, turn and wave at me before she turned back and walked out of sight around the corner.

"I don't believe it." I said aloud.

Marty and his cousins stopped their conversation and looked at me.

"You don't believe what, Honey?" Marty asked, a bit puzzled.

"I saw that woman again."

"What woman?"

"The woman that I saw outside the window of the hospital earlier. She was just walking across the street."

"Oh, Honey, unless that lady caught a bus, there's no way she could have been the same woman."

"There are no busses that go from the hospital to this street," Dennis said.

"She was the same woman... she even waved to me again, like she did when I was standing by the window."

Louise had lived in the area for over thirty years and thought she knew just about everyone up there. "What did she look like?"

"Well, she has her light brown wavy hair that's shorter than shoulder length. She had on a nice dress, but it looked as though it was something someone would wear back in the thirties. I saw her this morning when we were walking into the hospital too."

"You did? Where did you see her? I don't remember seeing anyone in the parking lot outside of the hospital."

"She was standing at the bus stop to the left of me as we walked up to the door. She smiled at me then too, as if she knew me."

"I don't recall seeing anyone in that bus stop this morning, but I really wasn't paying much attention."

Our lunches came and the conversation changed again. An hour later we were back in Dennis' car, heading back to Castella. Right before we got onto Rt. 5 heading south we passed another bus stop. This one was situated about three miles from the restaurant. I glanced over to my left from the back seat and there she was again, sitting inside the protective covering of the bus stop. Dennis had stopped at a light so I had plenty of time to observe the woman. I was certain she was the same woman I had been seeing all morning. The others were in the middle of a conversation, so I said nothing. The light turned and we moved on just as I saw the woman with the light brown hair smile warmly and wave to me as we drove by.

The next morning at 6 am the phone rang at Louise and Dennis' home. Marty and I heard the phone and knew what it meant. We put on our robes and went into the kitchen where

we found Dennis talking to the hospital. Louise was sitting at the table and crying. After he hung up the receiver he told Marty, "I'm sorry, Marty; she's gone."

Marty sat down at the table next to Louise and they held each other for a while. I sat in a chair next to Marty. "I'm so sorry," was all I could say.

After a while, and several phone calls to family members, Marty and I went back to our room to get dressed. While Marty was in the shower I stood by the window that overlooked the Castle Crags, a famous jagged peak section of the Sierra Nevada Mountains that stood in the shadow of Mt. Shasta. The windows situated in the back of Louise and Dennis's home have the best view of the mountain formation than anywhere else in the area. It was an even better view than the State Park offered, which was a few miles away.

As I stood gazing at the Crags I suddenly felt the atmosphere of the bedroom change. The air became thick and chilled as though I was standing in water. I could feel someone moving through the room and then stop to the left of me. The hairs on the back of my neck and on my arms stood at attention as I felt someone lightly kiss my cheek. I turned quickly, and as I did the atmosphere of the room went back to normal.

"Marty?" I called with a shaky voice.

I could hear Marty answer me from behind the bathroom door. "Did you call me?"

"Yes. Were you just out here?"

"What?" Marty opened the door and I could see that he was still dripping wet. He had a towel in his hand and was drying his hair with it.

I realized that it could not have been Marty who had kissed me on the cheek.

"What's wrong with you, Honey? You look like you just saw a ghost."

I started to laugh nervously and then felt dizzy so I backed up and sat on the edge of the bed.

"Are you okay, Christie?" Marty walked over and dropped the towel he was holding onto the bed. "You look like you're about to faint." He sat down next to me on the bed and took my hand. "This whole thing has been hard on you too, hasn't it? Is it bringing back bad memories of your own mother's death?"

"Yes, I guess it is. I'm sorry. I want to be strong for you." A tear dropped from my eye and Marty took me into his arms.

"You are perfect for me. I don't need strong, I just need you." Marty kissed me gently on the mouth and spent the next twenty minutes showing me just how much he needed me.

That afternoon Louise brought out old photo albums of her and Margery's childhood. Although Margery was Louise's aunt, since they were only fifteen years apart in age, they had always been close friends. I sat close to Marty as we paged slowly through the albums. Marty explained who all the people were in the sepia toned photographs. In the second album there were antique photographs of Margery, but most of them were dark or she standing far from the camera, and therefore, she was unrecognizable. Until we came upon a beautiful close-up portrait of Margery sitting in an antique chair. It was taken when she was in her early 20s.

"That's her!" I explained loud enough for Marty to jump in his chair beside me.

"That's who? My mother; I know. This was taken right after she married my father."

"No, I mean that's the woman I kept seeing yesterday." I sat transfixed at the photograph. I was sure that I woman who I saw smiling and waving at me several times the day before was the same woman in the photograph.

“Well, that’s impossible, Honey. This photograph is of my mother and it was taken in the 1930s. You must be mistaken.”



“No, I’m not mistaken. I’m telling you Marty, that’s the woman. She even has the same smile in the photograph as she had on her face every time I saw her yesterday. My God, Marty, she’s even wearing the same dress!”

Louise came over to our side of the table and stood behind us. “She always loved that dress. I guess that explains why I didn’t notice anyone at the bus stop yesterday.”

Marty looked incredulously at his cousin. “What are you taking about, Louise? There is no way that Christie could have seen this woman yesterday. It’s just not possible.”

Louise put her hand on my shoulder. “Marty, anything is possible. About a week before your mom got really sick she and I were looking at this very album. I remarked on how beautiful this photograph is and she said to me, ‘Lousie, make sure you show this album to Marty and Christie when they come up to visit.’ At the time I thought it was a strange request. I told her that I would and she just smiled. Now I guess I understand why she wanted you both to see it.”