



Four Questions and a Funeral

Monday, September 22

Forcing consumers to go paperless wasn't a victimless crime. Dylan Turner knew this because of the email splayed across her phone. There they were—her DNA test results—set against a backdrop of blue light, committing manslaughter.

The victim? Everything she'd thought was true about herself for the past thirty years.

And her family.

She'd waited weeks for these results, but now that she had them, they'd arrived a century too early and with the gentleness of a meat grinder. She dreamed of a historical era when someone might sit her down face-to-face with a cup of tea before ruining her life with information. Or, at the very least, handwrite her a letter and mail it through the postal service, giving her a three-second buffer of ignorance while she opened the envelope. A buffer that might make living with the threat of cholera worth it.

Her screen went dark, and cold sweat prickled the back of her neck. She was at her parents' house, standing at the bottom of the stairs that emptied into a gracious foyer. She squinted—would that make the room stop spinning?—but the rust-colored velvet armchairs, ivory rug, and seafoam walls swirled like a kaleidoscope.

If the Bluetooth speaker were playing Tina Guo and fragrant

notes of merlot were hanging from the breath of the middle-aged adults piled into the room, she'd feel right back at one of the housewarming parties her dad had thrown each time they moved to a new city. Buzzing, humid, and full of faces so unfamiliar they might as well have been pixelated.

Her knees buckled, and she grabbed on to the banister with both hands, dropping her phone in the process. She wasn't even supposed to be looking at her phone, not on the day of her dad's funeral anyway. Her mom would throw a fit if she saw her staring at it now. Then again, Candis Turner was caffeinated by criticism—giving it, that is. But Dylan hadn't checked her phone as part of some scheme to exasperate her mom. She'd checked it out of habit, like one of Pavlov's dogs conditioned to respond to every ding inside her coat pocket.

Her coat.

That was what her mom had ordered her to do when she got caught staring out of the living room's large bay windows—not at the raspberry mums on the porch steps or the black-throated green warbler perched at the birdfeeder, but at nothing in particular. She was supposed to put on her coat and shoes and move toward the exit so they could leave for the funeral.

She picked up her phone and somehow managed to wrestle each of her arms into a sleeve. Putting her feet into boots proved harder, but that was because her gut decided to float outside her body and hover above, laughing at her because deep down it had always known something was off.

These test results, delivered digitally to the device that was her constant companion, meant her life would never be the same. Not in a way that was like "You just won the lottery! Congrats!" It was more like a fog rising inside her body, wrapping itself around her brain until she no longer knew how to move or think.



“Please buckle.” The clipped words dragged Dylan back to reality, where she was now sitting in the back seat of her mom’s car. When had she climbed into the car? Let alone walked from the front door, down the porch steps, and to the narrow driveway next to the house where the car was parked?

Maybe she’d been teleported by the sheer force of her confusion.

A sigh as strong as last night’s September storm gusted from the front passenger seat. It came from her mom, who checked herself in the mirror, then flipped the sun visor back into place. “Look, I know this isn’t easy, but let’s just try to get through the rest of today without being at each other’s throats.”

Dylan wanted to scream her first question at her mom: *Why didn’t you tell me?*

“It’s okay to be nervous about giving the eulogy,” said another voice—far gentler—from the driver’s seat. “You’re going to do great.”

It was “Aunt” Lou, her mom’s best friend since college. Aunt Lou had booked a flight from Jacksonville to Milwaukee the moment she learned Dad had passed. She’d also booked a couple other flights during the past month to give her mom breaks from caretaking. Now she leaned over and squeezed Candis’s hand and glanced back at Dylan with a soft smile. She’d long been their glue.

Did Aunt Lou know already? The thought lit a firework in her chest.

Does everyone know the truth but me?

“Yes, thank you again for giving the eulogy.” Her mom massaged her temples. “I didn’t think I could do it.”

It was her mom’s only earnest request of her regarding the funeral. She didn’t know how she’d get through it now.

Aunt Lou drove the city blocks between the house and Saint

Mark's Presbyterian Church, pulling the car up next to the curb and parking just as a cold rain began to pour.

Dylan heard the drumming on the roof of the car and then felt the drops on her cheeks, where more tears should be by now. Maybe they'd fall once the shock finally wore off, once she told her mom about the email and her mom said it was simply a colossal misunderstanding.

The heavy drops of rain on her skin made her realize her body was moving again—mostly without her help—from the curb to the church's front doors, down the tiled aisle to the front wooden pew.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to honor the life and memory of Darren Turner . . ."

The rest of Reverend Schwartz's words trailed off into a void, including whatever prayer or reading followed his formal introduction.

"Dylan," Aunt Lou whispered. It was Dylan's turn to walk up to the ornately carved pulpit.

Onstage, she scanned the sanctuary with its vaulted ceiling and long chandeliers. It was small and yet still too spacious for the audience of four that included the minister and a pretty ceramic urn. Her dad would have made friends with everyone in his new city like he always did *and* thrown that party, if only he'd had more time between their move to Milwaukee and his diagnosis.

She put her sweaty hand into her coat pocket. The words she'd composed to try to honor the life of Darren Turner were written in the Notes app on her phone. When she pulled it out and unlocked it, she would be faced with the same bombshell of an email she'd been struck by earlier. Her last ounce of willpower lifted the phone and set it on the podium.

She cleared her throat and looked up at her mom and Aunt Lou, both dressed in black. Candis was wearing a professional bun and pearls, glazed over like a ghost, while Aunt Lou, with her frizzy mane and armful of bangles, kept her warm focus on Dylan.

Aunt Lou nodded, prodding her to begin.

The fog entangling her mind and limbs started to burn off, and she wondered what it would be like to chuck a brick through one of the church's lovely stained-glass windows. She fixed her eyes on the urn sitting on its pedestal a few feet in front of her, full of ashes and memories now tainted.

"He's not my father." The words came out barely a whisper.

Her mom gasped; Aunt Lou's mouth gaped.

Who is my dad?

And who am I?

INBOX (1)—DYLANTURNER918@GMAIL.COM—GMAIL

From: KindreDNA <testresults@KindreDNA.com>

Date: September 22

To: Turner, Dylan <dylanturner918@gmail.com>

Subject: Your KindreDNA Results Are In!

GREAT NEWS!

The moment you've been waiting for is here.
The KindreDNA results are ready for: **Dylan Turner.**

Here is your basic DNA profile:

Ethnicity Estimate: 38% German, 23% Dutch, 39% Other regions

Genetic Matches:

Extended Family: 1 linked KindreDNA user, 12.2% match

Close Family: 0 linked users

Sibling or Parent: 0 linked users

Family Tree Name: Jacksonville

Family Tree Kindreds*: 1 user (Darren Turner)

*Family Tree Kindreds are people who follow your profile,
not necessarily DNA matches

**<To view your entire DNA profile, sign up
for our \$660 annual membership!>**



Like Mother, Like Fodder

Her mom stood up from the pew. “Dylan, what are you—”

“There should be one other user in the KindreDNA database that shows a fifty percent DNA match to me, and his name should be Darren Turner,” she explained, though it sounded more like an accusation. “Because I’ve been told for thirty years that Darren Turner is my dad.”

Red splotches covered her mom’s neck. “That’s what this is about—the genealogy test the two of you did? It’s possible your dad’s sample hasn’t been processed yet. Why are you checking your email the day of his funeral anyway?”

Dylan wasn’t tuned in to her body at the moment, but she thought she heard herself groan. “We did the DNA test *together* and sent in our vials on the exact same day. We edited our settings so our KindreDNA profiles would be public and automatically linked to our tree when the results came in. When we received our emails, we should have already shown up as matches.”

“I’m sure this is all a big mistake.” Her mom looked from Dylan and Aunt Lou to the near-empty sanctuary. “Companies like KindreDNA have a margin of error they have to apologize for—switched vials and whatnot. Can we get through the funeral and then try to sort this out?”

She reached for Dylan, who pulled back.

“Is this why you refused to do the test with us, or why you didn’t

want Dad and me to do it in the first place? Because you knew I'd find out?"

The sanctuary was so quiet it buzzed.

Her mom exhaled. "It's too much to explain."

Dylan's throat filled with bile. "Too much to explain why Dad isn't my biological father?"

"Dylan." Aunt Lou's brow creased with concern.

"Did *you* know, Aunt Lou?"

The woman folded her hands and shrank back into her seat.

"Um . . . ladies?" a trembling masculine voice interrupted. Reverend Schwartz's upper lip was sweating. "It sounds like there might be some family issues to resolve. Can you take it outside the sanctuary?"

Dylan walked out from behind the podium and down the steps, but she stopped at the pedestal holding her dad's ashes. Three people, four orange brick walls, and many more wooden pews watched to see what she'd do next.

She could swipe the urn onto the floor and watch as the plume of gray dust covered her mom and Aunt Lou, but Darren Turner didn't deserve that kind of disrespect. Instead, she picked up the urn and held it tight against her chest. She'd take her "family issue" outside, where, apparently, God couldn't hear them.

Behind her, Mom and Aunt Lou whispered rushed, polite apologies to Reverend Schwartz.

She made it out of the sanctuary, through the narthex, and outside the church before she slowed down. Dark thunderclouds and sheets of pouring rain stopped her from going any farther. Her own car was at her parents' house, and her mom's car was probably locked. She paced under the maroon awning protecting the church's doors. Feeling lost wasn't new to her, but still, where was she supposed to go, what was she supposed to do right now?

"Dylan. Please." Her mom caught up, then finished putting on her coat. "Do you want me to take the urn?"

She squeezed it tighter, like it was her hostage. “No. I want you to answer my questions.”

Her mom nodded. “I know you have questions; I do.”

“Who is my dad?”

The question, though straightforward, was heavy as a tombstone.

Aunt Lou stepped between the two of them and held out her hands. “How about I take Darren to the car with me?”

Dylan surrendered the urn, then zipped up the coat she’d never taken off. The rain shower was too strong for the church’s small awning to keep them dry.

Her mom cleared her throat. “I thought I’d have more time before you got the test results.”

“I’m not asking why you didn’t tell me before I got the results. I’m asking why you didn’t tell me *decades* ago.”

Tears spilled onto her mom’s cheeks, and Dylan’s own eyes welled.

“It’s really complicated.”

“Then explain it to me, Mom.” A realization hit her so hard she blinked. “Unless . . . you’re not my mom?”

“Oh, Dylan.”

She threw up her hands. “It’s not a dumb question.”

“None of these questions are dumb, but—you’ve seen pictures of me pregnant with you.”

“AI can do some incredible stuff these days.”

Her mom raised an eyebrow.

“If you tell me to calm down, I swear—”

“I’m not trying to tell you to calm down. I just wasn’t expecting to have this conversation today. Right now. At your dad’s funeral.”

Dylan stared at the person whose apple body shape and upturned brown eyes were a mirror image of her own. “That doesn’t answer the question.”

She gripped Dylan’s shoulders. “Yes. I’m your mom.”

Why was she so relieved? Her mom’s argument about pregnancy

pictures made enough sense. The woman would exist happily in any technology-free time period as long as there were knives and fire. Her mom could barely sign into her email account, let alone make an entire album of doctored photos.

But until today, Dylan had been 100 percent certain she was genetically related to her father too.

“But . . . Dad?”

“Dad is your dad, but not biologically.”

Dylan turned away just in time for the sobs to grip her body. It wasn't new information, but hearing it from her mom's mouth somehow made it more official. This wasn't some mistake by the lab at KindreDNA.

She thought of her dad—of Darren Turner—and in her effort to make it make sense, she tried to catalog every way they were different from each other. She'd never had his outgoing personality or his tenacity. She wasn't confident like he was, nor a dreamer. Well, she dreamed, tormentedly, but only while she slept. Those were closer to restless nightmares.

She thought of her dad's dark hair and pointed nose, the features he claimed were just like her own. If they didn't come from him, where did they come from?

“Was it an affair?” The words came out before she thought them through.

Her parents' relationship had always seemed subdued. Her dad was happy, gregarious at times. And her mom, well, sometimes down, sometimes an emotional plateau.

Her mom's jaw clenched. “It's not what you think it is.”

“That's not an answer. I want the truth.”

“No, you don't,” her mom yelled, then scanned the parking lot and surrounding sidewalk. “Sometimes the truth is too painful,” she whispered, choking back tears.

It was like talking to a wall, a concrete wall barricading her from answers. “This is not some tiny white lie you've told, Mom. It's the

story of my entire life. How am I supposed to even know who I am if I don't know who my biological father is?"

"Who you are?" Her mom's tears dried into one of her classic lectures. "You're Dylan Turner, and that's not going to change no matter who your biological father is. Your generation is obsessed with 'knowing who you are.' Do you seriously think knowing will be the magic ingredient to you no longer living your life on autopilot?"

The blow made her gasp. She combed a piece of windblown hair off her shoulder but ran into a snarl near the collar of her coat. This conversation was getting nowhere. If her mom wasn't going to tell her what she wanted to hear, she'd give herself the space she needed.

She walked out from the protection of the awning.

"Dylan," her mom called after her. "Where are you going?"

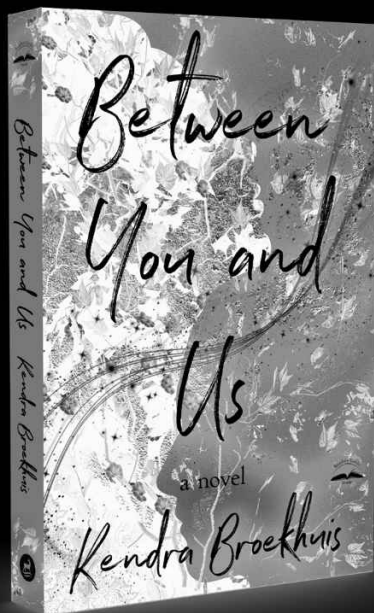
The question woke a beast. She turned on her heel. "To look for answers somewhere else. Don't call unless you're ready to tell me the truth."

She looked at her mom's car, where Aunt Lou was in the driver's seat, scrolling on her phone, next to Darren Turner's ashes. This day was supposed to offer some closure after months of losing her dad to cancer. It wasn't supposed to be the day she lost him a second time.

She scanned the area for a different ride back to her car and found one on the corner—a public e-scooter. Her parents' house was only eight blocks from the church, and the rain was relenting.

It would have to work.

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