

My Day
As
Regan
Forrester

MISTY URBAN

1 • The Wish

Beth Barony spent her forty-second birthday exactly as she wanted to.

And when she woke up the next day, she was someone else.

As she lived it, the day didn't seem extraordinary. The kids were at their respective camps and the summer honors class Beth taught didn't meet on Fridays. Her husband refused to take the day off, but that was no surprise. Only hospitalization or cataclysm could lure Daniel Barony away from the law office when he was wrapping a big case.

Beth told herself she was used to it. She spent the day at the spa with her best friends, Joan and Sherice. After manicures, pedicures, and facials, they smuggled bottles of mimosas into the movie theater with the reclining seats and watched a matinee showing of the latest blockbuster, blow-'em-up, world-ending alien invasion movie.

Halfway through another endless action sequence Joan leaned over and whispered, "Let's go get a cocktail" and they went to their favorite restaurant, found a table near the wood-burning oven, and ordered a pitcher of Bellinis.

"Forty-two will be the best year yet," Joan declared, filling Beth's glass. "You know how you wake up at thirty with that feeling of, oh my God,

thank goodness the crap about finding myself is finally over? Every year of your forties is less crap. It's great. You'll see."

Beth opened her mouth to agree and was surprised by what came out.

"Do you feel like you're living the life you're supposed to be living?" she blurted, then hid behind her glass as her friends stared. "I mean," she said in a small voice, "do you?"

Sherice leaned forward, chin on her fist. She'd thrown her hair into a colorful wrap and wore all the jewelry she couldn't wear on the pediatric floor, big gold hoops and a chunky necklace that caught the light. "What's wrong, honey?"

"Nothing." Beth twirled the stem of her glass. "Everything's fine. Just as it should be." She forced a smile. "I'm the luckiest girl alive. I know that."

Joan, wearing a tailored blouse and slacks even on her casual day, tapped her manicured fingers on the polished table. "Have you made your birthday wish?"

Beth stared into her glass. The birthday wish was her custom, one she'd let Joan and Sherice in on ages ago. Every birthday she set her sights on a new goal she wanted to accomplish, a dream she wanted to come true. But this year . . .

"I have no idea what to wish for," Beth admitted. "Is that sad?"

"I wish I could be thin like Joan," Sherice

volunteered.

“We all wish we could be as thin as Joan,” Beth said, comparing her comfortable, average-sized body to their slender friend.

“And I wish I had you two’s gorgeous curves.” Joan lifted her glass in a toast.

“I wish I were as smart as Beth,” Sherice said after a long sip.

“Sweetheart, nobody’s as smart as Beth,” Joan answered.

“Tell me this,” Sherice said. “If you had a do-over, what would you change?”

“Say what?” Joan’s perfectly arched, darkened brows flew up her forehead. “Of all of us, Beth is the one who has it together. She’s got the man, healthy kids—” She turned to Beth. “You love your job. Your house. Your kids. And Barony. Right?”

The prosecco was making Beth queasy. She rarely drank this much.

“I do.” Beth nodded. She met Barony in their first year of college and they were friends before they dated and married right out of grad school. She still called him Barony, since only his mom called him Daniel, and he’d been a solid and faithful husband for eighteen years.

“I love our house,” Beth went on. “The kids have never given us a minute of trouble. I love my job at the school. And it feels like . . .” She trailed off. “There’s nothing left to wish for. The rest of my life

is going to look exactly like this, going to school and then coming home, paying the bills and trying to hide the grey hair.”

Joan slurped her Bellini. “And that’s bad?”

“No! That’s why I feel guilty for even saying anything. I have nothing to complain about.” She should just shut up. Sherice was a pediatric nurse single parenting two children, a boy who was on the autism spectrum and a girl who was gender questioning. Sherice loved her kids fiercely—so did Joan and Beth—but there were plenty of struggles.

Joan was single after a painful marriage marked by infertility, abuse, and a messy divorce. She ran the domestic violence shelter and poured her energy into helping women and children get out of danger into safety and self-sufficiency. Beth’s friends did work that made a difference in people’s lives every day.

Beth, meanwhile, taught literature to talented high achievers at the International School, fixed lunches for her kids and ran them to practices, made dinner every night and cleaned up after, and then fell into bed with a book. She spent her weekends at sports meets and music recitals, made a big dinner every holiday, once a year booked a family vacation to somewhere fun. And that was the scope of her life.

“It’s just that when I look at you two—what you do every day, how much it matters—I ask myself if I’m doing what I should be doing. I’m not unhappy. But I feel like I’m not really *in* my life. Something’s

missing. It's like—" Beth paused. "Maybe I'm supposed to be doing something else. *Be* somewhere else."

"Is this a mid-life crisis?" Joan swirled the liquid in her glass. "Are you going to ditch Barony and the kids and run away to travel the world? Because if you do, I want to come with you."

Beth responded with a shaky laugh.

"I'd love to do that, right now," she said honestly, "and there's absolutely no chance that I will."

"It's perimenopause," Sherice said. When Beth cried out in protest, her friend nodded in emphasis. "Mmm-hmm. The hormones are starting, girl. First you feel itchy, then you can't sleep, then the hot flashes. I'm sorry, but that's how it goes."

"I think it's that movie," Joan announced, reaching for the pitcher. "We should have picked the chick flick about the book club. Instead we go to the superhero movie with that hard-bodied little Hollywood princess—what's her name again? She's on the cover of every magazine I look at these days."

"Regan Forrester," Beth replied. When Joan's brows rose again, she explained. "My students love her. But I don't think this is about her. I mean, I never looked like that even when I was twenty-four."

"But she's a huge celebrity," Sherice said. "And you're feeling invisible right now. You wonder what it would be like to have people notice you. Pay attention to you."

“Invisible?” Beth said, startled. “I didn’t think of it that way. Maybe I am a little jealous. I don’t have that kind of talent.”

“Everybody has a talent,” Joan insisted. “And I wouldn’t say her life is so wonderful. Didn’t you read that interview in *People*?”

“Um, no,” Sherice said. “Because I do not subscribe to *People*, and I don’t have time to read it if I did, and I certainly don’t want to hear some teeny Hollywood princess complaining how hard it is to be rich and gorgeous.”

“She seemed kind of sad.”

Joan twirled the ends of her silk scarf. “She talked about how her mom got her into acting when she was six, and she’s never done anything else. And how she doesn’t have any real friends, at least not girlfriends, because Hollywood is so bitchy and competitive. She basically said her whole life is her boyfriend, though the way she talks about him creeps me out, about how they’re soulmates and such, when he’s a has-been who’s at least fifteen years older than she is and only using her to get attention.”

Beth sipped her Bellini. Her nose tingled. “No girlfriends? That is sad. I don’t know what I would do without you two. I would cease to exist.”

“Amen, sister.” Sherice raised her glass and the three of them toasted with a musical clink. The light from the overhead chandelier flashed through Beth’s glass, winking at her.

“See, Beth?” Joan said. “Nobody’s life is perfect. Even the people who seem to have it figured out don’t, not really. You never really know what’s going on inside.”

“You just need some excitement, girl,” Sherice said with a wink. “See if Barony can do something about that, huh?”

“Maybe when he wins the case he’s working on, he’ll remember he has a wife.” They clinked glasses in another toast, and Beth let the conversation move on. But the nagging, hollow feeling persisted, as it had for months now, perhaps years.

She thought about it as she drove home to the empty house. With the kids gone she got to have everything as she liked it, tidy, clear, every item in place. Quiet and a bit—boring. No clutter. Nothing dramatic. No surprises.

She thought about it as she dressed for dinner. *Excitement*. When was the last time something had stretched her? Exhilarated her? Made her feel recklessly, gloriously alive? She’d spent twenty years of her life working to build a stable home, financial security, solid relationships with people she loved, and now she wanted more? What more was there?

She pulled on the new dress she’d bought shopping with Joan last weekend and tried a new style on her hair. Barony came home from work and greeted her with a kiss, then drove them to the

steakhouse where they'd had their anniversary dinner for the last eighteen years. They talked about her classes, his cases, and what the kids were doing as she nibbled at her salmon and Barony wolfed his steak. And she was startled to look across the table and realize that her husband had become nearly a stranger.

How was that even possible? This was the life she and Barony had dreamed of, wanted, built together. But she'd been going on so long in the same routine that she couldn't say quite how she'd gotten here.

Why did it feel like she wasn't really *in* her life? The tracks had been laid so well, so firmly, that she could step out of her life, run away like Joan had said, and everything would simply keep on churning without her.

She set down her wine glass. Barony liked a nice merlot with his steak, but her head was still floating from all the champagne that afternoon.

"What do you think of my hair?" she asked, cupping the curls it had taken hours to create.

He gave her a cautious, you-must-be-testing-me look. "Did you change it?"

She sighed and pulled the wine glass toward her. "Nope."

"Well, I'm glad you're one of those women who doesn't mind going grey. I think hair dye always looks fake. The assistant from the law firm on this Cates case . . ."

Beth pushed away the tiny flare of resentment. She would have been surprised, frankly, if Barony picked up on her mood. He wasn't the most perceptive of men, at least not where his wife was concerned. They finished the bottle of red wine while soft music played overhead and the crowd turned from families to older couples. At home they swirled in the Jacuzzi on their new back porch and then had sex the same way they'd been having sex since their daughter Abby was born.

Barony fell asleep at once and Beth lay looking out the window at a hazy full moon. She still hadn't made her birthday wish.

Because she couldn't bring herself to say what she wished for. It felt like a betrayal of everyone she loved to form the words, even in her head.

On the edge of sleep, images from the movie tumbled into her head: the beautiful actress in a skin-tight bodysuit, fighting off alien invaders, saving the world, and then telling interested reporters that she simply didn't know what else to do with her life, since she'd never known anything else.

She felt sorry for the girl, so sad, so lost. Still, Beth thought as she slipped beneath the surface of sleep, it must be easier to try new things when you're young and gorgeous and famous and rich. Slip away . . . shed your skin . . . reinvent yourself into something new entirely . . .

Then she woke up to find that, somehow, she'd

done just that.

2 • The Awakening

Beth stared at the canopy above her bed. Since when did she have a purple princess canopy above her bed?

It was a pretty, gauzy lavender color, like looking at the underside of clouds. It was something she might have loved when she was fourteen, although her daughter, twelve, would laugh herself silly if Beth suggested something like that for her décor.

She must have had an awful lot of wine, except her body felt wonderful. She felt strong and healthy with not a sore spot anywhere, like she was twenty years old again.

She sat up, but she had to be dreaming.

That wasn't the nightstand from the bedroom set she'd made Barony buy for their fifteenth wedding anniversary. The lamp had a pink scarf draped around it with dangling strings of beads. There was a bottle of lotion, but it wasn't the lotion she put on her feet right before bed.

Her annotated copy of *Wuthering Heights* was missing, and that wasn't her cell phone. She'd had the same old beat-up phone for going on three years. This contraption on her nightstand, quietly vibrating as it registered an incoming text, was thin, unscratched, a much more sophisticated piece of equipment, and it was a bright plum purple.

Beth pushed back the covers of the bed. She was still in her negligee—her birthday present to her

husband—but it was a lot tinier than she remembered, with more see-through lace. Beth glanced down at herself and did a double take. Wow, the light was especially forgiving this morning. Her legs looked lean and long and tanned, not a trace of cellulite. She couldn't even see the scar from the bicycling accident five years ago.

Her belly looked firm and flat, too, and her boobs—no wonder Barony had given her extra attention last night. Maybe she should suggest a morning reenactment, Beth thought with a smile. Her body felt amazing, lithe and strong and full of energy. She couldn't remember the last time she'd woke up feeling this good. Barony was definitely in trouble, she thought as she turned to wake him up.

She screamed.

“What? What? What?” The man in her bed who was most definitely *not* Barony startled awake, arms flailing. “Someone breaking in?”

Beth clapped her hands to her mouth. “How did you get here?” she cried.

He shook his head. “Jesus. Give me a heart attack.” He ran a hand over his shaved head and stubbled chin. “I got in late. You were already in bed.”

He looked like an actor on a show Beth used to watch in high school. The weirdness of this kept her still for a moment. “What did you do with Barony?”

“With who?” His eyebrows snapped together in a

frown.

“With Barony!” Beth shrieked. “My husband!”

“Your *what?*” He sat up and swung around in the bed, grabbing her wrist.

“Where is my house?” Beth looked around the room. “Where is my bedroom? Where is my life?”

He grabbed her by both arms and looked her over. “Damn it, Regan! What did you take?”

“I didn't take anything! I went to sleep in my own bed and I woke up here! Who's Regan?”

He shook her, and her head bobbed back and forth, which cut off the scream rising in her throat. “Benny gave you some shit again, didn't he! And you took it. When you know it makes you all paranoid and freaky.”

“What on earth did he give me?” Beth gasped.

“Hell if I know!” He held both her wrists in one hand and looked around the room, muttering. “I'm going to kill Benny this time—”

“Don't kill him before he can make it stop!” Beth took a deep breath. *Don't panic, Beth.* She was a rational person. There had to be a rational explanation for this.

“Relax, babe. You're just going to have to chill until it's over.”

“Let's make it over now!” Beth said. “I have to get home to my husband, and my job, and I'm supposed to teach *Wuthering Heights* to the summer honors class next week.” She shook her wrists. “Let

go of me!”

He drew back a hand, and Beth's jaw dropped. When she said nothing, his hand dropped as well.

She yanked her arms out of his grasp. “Were you about to *hit me*?”

“Listen to yourself! You sound like a crazy bitch.”

“Well, I *feel* like a crazy bitch,” Beth shouted. “This is not my room, I have no idea how I got here, and—” She glanced down at the cleavage exposed by the negligee. “This is not my body. What the hell happened last night?”

“Look at me.” He leaned forward, so close that she had no choice. “Now listen. You freak out every time Benny gives you something. I don’t know why you keep pulling this, Regan! Seriously, I ought to—”

“Who is *Regan*?” Beth choked.

“You.” He spoke over her, taking her wrists once more. “Are Regan Forrester. We live in West Hollywood. You're twenty-four years old and a movie star who is—” his eyes ran over her— “hot as all hell, though you are crazy as a chigger.”

I—” he shook her wrists again—“am your boyfriend. This is our apartment. Well, your apartment. Benny gave you something, and that's why you're having this weird freak out. You need to go back to bed and sleep it off. And stop looking at me like that. You're giving me the creeps.”

“You have the creeps?” Beth repeated. “You are?”

I'm having a psychotic break. I need to call Sherice. Or Joan. And find Barony.” Her volume escalated.

He shook his head and tossed her wrists away. “You better take an aspirin and lie down. I’ll—” He looked at her, frowning.

“Don’t you dare hit me!” Beth snapped. “No one has ever hit me in my life.”

He laughed. “Wouldn’t your mama love to hear that? Give me your phone,” he demanded as the device trilled a musical tone. “That’s probably Benny texting to see if he killed you.”

Beth held the phone to her chest out of some wild, reflexive sense of self-preservation. “I’m calm. I need to think. Go away, please.”

He gave her a suspicious look, his eyes lingering on the negligee. “I’m gonna shower. And when I come out, you’re going to be over this little freak out. Okay?”

“Yes. Okay. You do that.” Beth watched as he walked into the bathroom, and then she stared at the back of the door and her reflection in the full-length mirror.

He wasn’t kidding. By whatever trick of the light or consequence of the mind-melding drugs she had supposedly taken, she looked exactly like Regan Forrester.

Beth looked at the stylish smartphone. A picture of Regan Forrester and the man who had just started the shower stared back at her, both grinning. She

looked at her hands. Her fingertips were long and painted scarlet, a color Beth would never wear because it washed out her skin.

There was a tattoo of a butterfly on the inside of one wrist. She was wearing a ring on her right hand that Beth had never seen before. Her wedding ring was missing.

She pinched her arm, hard, above the butterfly. Nothing happened except pain.

Nope, not dreaming.

What had *happened* to her last night? Had Joan and Sherice put something in the Bellinis?

No, they'd never do anything to hurt her. What about the wine she'd shared with Barony? Had she gotten out of bed and gone somewhere after he fell asleep? Had she gone to some club and taken some drug that made her hallucinate? If she'd had a one-night stand, Barony would never forgive her. She would never forgive herself.

Slowly, because her red-tipped fingers were shaking, Beth punched a number into the phone and hit the green button.

* * *

When she was in grade school, Beth had a recurring dream that she was with her parents on the observation deck at the top of a very tall building, like the Space Needle in Seattle. She stood near the glass, looking down hundreds of feet, clinging to the

legs of a woman she assumed was her mother.

But suddenly, in the dream, Beth saw her mother on the street below, her features very clear and magnified, her expression intent on something in front of her. Beth called out as loudly as she could, but her mother didn't turn or hear her, instead kept walking steadily away.

In panic, Beth turned to look at the face of the woman whose legs she was holding and saw a total stranger. In the dream she screamed and let go of the stranger's legs and then the glass disappeared and she was falling, falling through the air, still screaming, waiting for her mother to see her and grab her and bring her safely to the ground. She felt much the same way now, waiting for the call to connect.

The phone rang, then clicked, and then a sleepy voice said, "Who is this?"

The voice sounded familiar, but she couldn't place it. "Who is *this*?"

"Regan," the voice slurred. "Regan Forrester." The voice became a hint sharper, something about it vaguely recognizable. "Wait a minute—*who* is this?"

Beth almost laughed. If she was talking to Regan Forrester on the phone, then she couldn't somehow be in Regan Forrester's body. It was all some weird sort of delusion, just as the TV actor said. Maybe she had been taking drugs.

But she didn't laugh because something new occurred to her. "This is Beth Barony. What are you

doing answering my phone?”

Some indistinguishable muttering followed. Beth worked hard to place the voice. She was sure she knew it, yet it sounded strange. She heard silence, some rustling, a bang that sounded like a bathroom door closing, and then, in an awed tone, “Holy shit. I didn't think it would actually *work*.”

Recognition slapped her in the face. It was her voice. She was talking to a woman who was speaking to her in Beth's own voice.

“You didn't think *what* would actually work?”

A laugh followed, one that left no doubt in her mind. She had heard that laugh thousands of times, coming from her own mouth. “If you're Regan Forrester, what are you doing with my phone?”

“I think I'm in your house! What did you say your name was?”

Beth clutched the phone as if she could channel herself through the connection and wind up in the place she was supposed to be. “Beth Barony.”

“Are you, um, do you have brown hair? You're short, and a little—hmmm? Forty-five, fifty?”

“Give me a break!” Beth yelled. “I just had a facial! I'm only forty-two. At my physical my doctor said I have the bloodwork of a woman half my age.” She was proud of that.

“Whoops, sorry.” Another chuckle. “Hey, I like this picture you have in your bathroom. I've thought about buying that picture. This is so weird.”

“Weird doesn’t begin to describe it.” Beth closed her eyes. “I’m guessing you’re in my body, Regan Forrester, because I seem to have woken up in yours.”

“I’m really hot, aren’t I?” Regan Forrester said.