
*In a matter of seconds parents can
change the course of your life.*

How does a relatively smart sixteen-year-old girl get stuck in a sucky situation she can't get out of? Well, as I sit at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport on a Monday afternoon during the one hour and forty-five minute delay, I think about the past twenty-four hours of my now messed-up life.

I was sitting in my room yesterday when my biological father, Ron, called. No, you don't get it . . . Ron *never* calls. Well, unless it's my birthday, and that was eight months ago.

You see, after their affair in college, my mom found out she was pregnant. She comes from money, and Ron . . . well, he doesn't. Mom, with her parents pushing her

along, told Ron it would be best if he didn't have a big part in our lives. Boy, were they wrong. But the worst part is he gave up without even trying.

I know he puts money into an account for me. He also comes by to take me out to dinner for my birthdays. But so what? I want a father who'll always be there for me.

He used to come around more, but I finally told him to leave me alone so my mom could find me a real dad. I didn't really mean it; I guess I was just trying to test him. He failed miserably.

Well, the guy phones this time and tells my mom he wants to take me to Israel. *Israel!* You know, that little country in the Middle East that causes so much controversy. You don't have to TiVo the news to know Israel is a hotbed of international hostility.

I know I'm off on a tangent, so let's get back to what happened. My mom hands me the phone without so much as an "it's your dad" or "it's the guy who I had a one-night stand with, but never married" to warn me it was *him*.

I still remember what he said. "Hi, Amy. It's Ron."

"Who?" I answer.

I'm not trying to be a smartass, it just doesn't register that the guy who gave me fifty percent of my genes is actually calling me.

"Ron . . . Ron Barak," he says a bit louder and slower as if I'm a complete imbecile.

I freeze and end up saying nothing. Believe it or not, sometimes saying nothing actually works in my favor. I've learned this from years of practice. It makes people ner-

vous and, well, better them than me. I huff loudly to let him know I'm still on the line.

"Amy?"

"Yeah?"

"Um, I just wanted you to know *dat* your *grandmudder* is sick," he says in his Israeli accent.

A faceless image of a small white-haired old lady who smells like baby powder and mildew, and whose life's goal is baking chocolate chip cookies, briefly races across my mind.

"I didn't know I had a grandmother," I say, emphasizing the 'th' because Ron, like every other Israeli I've ever met, can't say the 'th'—that sound is not in their language.

My mom's mom died shortly after I was born so I was one of those kids without a grandma. A pang of sorrow and self-pity from never knowing I had a grandma and now knowing she's 'sick' makes me feel yucky. But I shove those feelings into the back of my head where they're safe.

Ron clears his throat. "She lives in Israel and, uh, I'm going for the summer. I'd like to take you with me."

Israel?

"I'm not Jewish," I blurt out.

A little sound, like one of pain, escapes from his mouth before he says, "You don't have to be Jewish to go to Israel, Amy."

And you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know Israel is smack dab in the middle of a war zone. *A war zone!*

"Thanks for the offer, but I'm going to tennis camp this summer. Tell *Grandma* I hope she gets over her illness. Bye," I say and hang up.

Wouldn't you know it, not more than four seconds go by before the phone rings again. I know it's Ron. A little ironic he's hardly called twice in a year and here he is calling twice in a matter of seconds.

My mom picks up the phone in the living room. I try to listen through my bedroom door. I can't hear much. Just mumble, mumble, mumble. After about forty long minutes she comes knocking at my door and tells me to pack for Israel.

"You're kidding, right?"

"Amy, you can't avoid him forever. It's not fair."

Not fair? I cross my arms in front of my chest. "Excuse me, what's not fair is that you two didn't even *try* and live like parents. Don't talk to me about fairness."

I know I'm sixteen and should be over it by now, but I'm not. I never said I was perfect.

"Life isn't simple, you'll realize that when you're older," she says. "We've all made mistakes in the past, but it's time to mend them. You're going. It's already settled."

Panic starts to set in and I decide to take the guilt trip route.

"I'll be killed. Unless that's what you ultimately want—"

"Amy, stop the dramatics. He's promised me he'll keep you safe. It'll be a great experience."

I try for another two hours to get out of it, I really do. I should have known trying to argue with my mom would get me nothing except a sore throat.

I decide to call my best friend, Jessica. Supportive, understanding Jessica. “Hey, Amy, what’s up?” a cheery voice answers on the other end of the line. Gotta love caller ID.

“My parents decided to ruin my life,” I tell her.

“What do you mean ‘parents’? Ron called?”

“Oh, yeah, he called. And somehow he convinced my mom to cancel my summer plans so he could take me to Israel. Could you just die?”

“Um, you don’t really want to hear my opinion, Amy. Trust me.”

My eyebrows furrow as I slowly realize Jessica, my very dearest friend in the world, isn’t going to back me up one hundred and ten percent.

“It’s a *war zone!*” I say it slowly so she gets the full impact.

Is that a laugh I hear on the other end of the line?

“Are you kidding?” Jessica says. “Heck, my mom goes to Tel Aviv every year to go shopping. She says they have the clearest diamonds ever cut. You know the little black dress I *love*? She got it for me there. They have the *best* European styles and—”

“I need support here, Jess, not some crap about diamonds and clothes,” I say, cutting off her ‘Israel is all that’ speech. Jeez!

“Sorry. You’re right,” she says.

“Don’t you ever watch the news?”

“Sure, Israel has its share of problems. But my parents say a lot of what we see on TV is propaganda. Just don’t

hang out at bus stops or go to coffee shops. Ron will keep you safe.”

“Ha,” I say.

“Are you mad at me?” Jess asks. “I could lie and tell you your life is ruined beyond repair. Would that make you feel better?”

Jessica is the only person who can make fun of me and get away with it. “You’re just a laugh a minute, Jess. You know I’d never get mad at you, you’re my BFF.”

Although what does it say about our friendship when my BFF has no problems sending me into a war zone?

Less than twenty-four hours later I’m sitting in the airport waiting for our El Al Israel Airlines flight to start boarding.

Looking around, I watch a guy in a dark suit as he crouches on the floor and examines the underside of each row of benches. If he finds a bomb, will he know how to disarm it?

I glance at my biological father, the almost non-existent man in my life, who’s reading the newspaper. He tried talking to me on the way to the airport. I cut him off by putting on my headphones and listening to my iPod.

As if he knows I’m staring at him, he puts his paper down and turns my way. His hair is short. It’s thick and dark, just like mine. I know if he’d grow it out it would be curly, too. As hard as it is, I straighten my curly hair every morning. I hate my hair.

My mom's eyes are green, mine are blue. People say my eyes are such a bright blue they glow. I consider my eyes my best feature.

Unfortunately, the main thing I inherited from Mom is a big chest. Besides changing my hair, I'd like to have smaller boobs. When I play tennis, they get in the way. Have you ever tried a two-handed backhand with mongo boobs? They seriously should have handicaps in tennis for people with big chests.

When I get older maybe I'll get a reduction. But Jessica said during a boob reduction the doctor removes your whole areola . . . you know, that pinky part in the middle of your boob, and then after they take out the excess boob they reattach the areola.

I don't think I'd like my pinky parts detached at all.

As I think about detached areolas, I realize Ron is still looking at me. Although from the expression on his face he probably thinks I'm disgusted with *him*. I can't possibly explain I'm thinking of what I'd actually look like with detached pinky parts.

Anyway, I'm still mad at him for bringing me on this stupid trip in the first place. Because of him, I had to drop out of tennis camp this summer. Which means I probably won't make it on the high school team when tryouts start in the fall. I totally want to make the varsity team.

To make matters worse, Mitch, my boyfriend, won't even know I'm gone. He went camping with his dad for a couple weeks on a 'cell phone free' vacation. It's still a new

relationship. If we're not together the rest of the summer, he just might find someone else who will be there for him.

I don't even know why Ron wants me to go with him. He doesn't even like me. Mom probably wanted me out of the house so she could have privacy with her latest guy.

Her current boyfriend, Marc with a 'c', thinks he's *the one*. *As if*. Doesn't he realize once Mom meets someone bigger or better he's out of the picture?

"I'm going to the bathroom," I say to Ron.

I really don't have to go, but I take my purse and walk down the hallway. When I get out of Ron's line of vision, I take out my trusty cell phone and keep walking. Mom got me the cell "for emergencies only."

I'm definitely feeling an emergency coming on.