

The Returned

1,492 Word Count

I knocked on the door. I could hear shuffling and talking as I waited. I turned to face the street. I could see the moon clear as crystal and the stars twinkling like nothing had changed. But it had. It had changed forever. Nothing would ever be the same.

'Can I help you?' As I had been dreaming an elderly man had opened the door. He spoke clearly even though you could see his aging face and eyes. He looked friendly and slightly familiar.

'Dad, is that you?' I stuttered. His eyebrows rose about a metre in the air. He inhaled sharply and almost froze to the spot. I could see his eyes going up and down my body trying to find an answer.

'Andrew? It can't be! It can't be!' He told me faster and faster. He was looking frantic now. I could tell he wasn't willing to believe it was me. I can't blame him either, not after everything that happened.

It was ten years ago on a winter's night. I remember the snow falling softly outside the window. I had never seen snow before and I had gotten a little too excited. I recall putting on a light jacket and running out to the front of the house and hearing the crunch of it beneath my feet. I remember falling and laughing and rolling around and looking at the stars as the snow fell around me. It was then that I heard my name. It might have been my mum but who knew. It was a figure in the distance. Laughing and running through the thickness of falling snow. I followed them as they shouted my name. Then they started to run down the street into the forest. I ran after them. It could have been minutes but it felt like hours of running through the thickening snow.

Suddenly I tripped and hit my head against one of the ancient trees. Everything went blurry. My vision was fading. All I could hear was the laughter of the stranger and my name being whispered in my ear before my world slid into darkness.

'Honey, who's at the door?' called a woman's voice coming from the rear of the house. Mum, I thought. I heard footsteps coming up the hall and then she was there, looking me in the face. My mouth slid into a grin. My parents, I was happy now knowing they were here safe and sound after all these years.

They both stood there standing, staring me in the face. I didn't know what to say. Why were they so shocked? It was me, Andrew, their son. How can they not see that?

'But the body, it was him. They have the DNA tests, and all the press and the police. The funeral, everyone knows what happened! So how are you here?' She asked me with sadness and confusion. I had no idea what she was talking about.

I sat in the lounge room of the old house I used to live in. My parents sat opposite me hand in hand looking at me with a dazed look about their faces. The three policemen stood around us; one with a notepad and pen scribbling down everything I said, the other two asking me questions about what I remembered.

'That's all I remember sir,' I told him. 'I'm sorry,' I added. I had told him everything. Why I went outside, why I left the property, how I ended up on the ground two days later, dead.

'That's alright son, we should have enough now anyway. Paul,' he said turning to the man with the notepad. 'Take the papers down to the station and ring the paramedics I want to know how Andrew's doing.'

The next four hours went past in a blur. After Paul left the paramedics turned up and I had a full body check-up. Nothing wrong at all, the doctor had said. I had grown in the years that I was gone, but no one knew how. Everyone was confused. It wasn't long before the news reporters got wind of what was happening. Cars and vans crowded the streets and they were all standing on the lawn talking to cameras.

In the confusion of it all a strange man in a black suit showed up and took my parents aside to the next room. In all the madness I couldn't hear what they were talking about, but they came back within minutes looking worse than ever. As they started talking with the police I noticed the stranger in the black suit was looking at me. He, like everyone in the room, had a confused look. And then he smiled at me.

'Yes, we will get right onto that now,' called the chief police officer. 'OK boy's lets go down to that cemetery.' Slowly the room emptied, leaving just my parents, two policemen, and the strange man in the black suit and me. Oh and all the reporters outside on the lawn.

'Where are they all going?' I asked the leftover policemen. They looked uneasy for a couple of seconds and looked at my parents for answer.

'Umm, look Andrew don't take this the wrong way but they are going to inspect and then lift up your grave. The one we supposedly buried you in ten years ago,' said my mum. She looked like she wanted to take back what she had just said but it was too late, it had already been said.

'Buried! What are you talking about? When was I buried?' I looked at her with confusion planted all over my face.

'You don't know? Oh, well two days after you went missing the police found you dead in the forest. You had no visible injuries, all the forensic scientists could say was that you had frozen to death. We were of course heart broken and didn't know why you had even left in the first place. Then there was the funeral and the burial. Ten years later you show up on our doorstep. We are as confused as anyone,' she said with a hint of sadness in her voice.

I look over to my parents. They are sad and confused but I can't help them, no matter how much I try.

A little while later there is a knock at the door. Before anyone can answer it, it opens and all the policemen come back into the house. They crowded round the room and stood awkwardly until the chief cleared his throat.

'At the cemetery we took photographic evidence of Andrews's grave and head stone before carefully lifting up his grave and discovering something. His grave was untouched and his coffin was still inside and inside the coffin was, well nothing,' he told us, not making eye contact. Mum gasped and her eyes rolled slightly and then looked straight at me.

I was buried ten years ago in a grave and someone went and dug it up and there wasn't a body inside it. Scary, I thought to myself. How could this have happened? I look up and noticed suddenly that everyone in the room is looking at me.

'Would you like to hold a press conference to explain everything that has happened so people don't start making things up and then it goes and reflects not just on poor Andrew but also yourselves,' asked the strange man in the black suit. He was talking to my parents but the room was silent so everyone heard.

My parents looked at each other with meaningful looks. I didn't know what they would say to it but I knew I would agree with them no matter what decision they made.

'Where will this conference be held?' Dad asked the man in the suit.

'Where ever you would like,' he replied.

'Ok then, it will be held here in my house, but we decide who comes in and who asks the questions and who is allowed to keep the tape,' Dad said loud but clearly. I knew he was nervous but he had to put those nerves away in order to do what was right, set the rumours straight.

It didn't take long. We set up in the kitchen with me sitting in the centre and my parents on either side. Two police stood at either door to stop intruders and the chief sat in front of us. Beside the chief was a camera ready to tape the whole conversation. The only other person in the room was the man in the black suit. He stood to the side observing the whole thing.

'Is the camera rolling?' asked my mum nervously.

'Yes, the camera is rolling. Now is everyone ready?' asked the chief. Once he had received a nod from everyone in the room he turned towards me and cleared his throat.

'Now Andrew, can you tell us where you have been for the last ten years?'