

Viridescent

I am on my way to interview Alicia Morton, a Russian scientist who lives in New York. My name is David Watson and I am a journalist for *Innovative Science* magazine. I have been a journalist for over twenty years now and my greatest skill is my ability to squeeze out sensitive information from people.

Ms. Morton has been generating quite a lot of interest lately. The interest in Ms. Morton is not due to any of her scientific achievements but rather due to an argument regarding her age. She claims to be fifty years old but, allegedly, looks no older than twenty-five. There are speculations that she is lying about her age in order to appear more experienced and receive more reverence from the science community. She has denied having any plastic surgery done and even publicly released her birth certificate, translated into English, indicating her year of birth as “1970” but it

didn't help much. Ms. Morton is said to have "not a single wrinkle on her face" and "a body of a teenager." How about that for a middle-aged scientist! I have my work cut out for me, dear readers. Today, I am going to find out the real age of Alicia Morton.

I am finally here. Ms. Morton lives in a high-rise apartment building in Yorkville. As I am riding up the elevator to her apartment on the thirteenth floor, I am thinking that it all might just be a bunch of baloney. Once I'll get up there, Ms. Morton will open the door and she will look just like any other fifty-year-old broad—crow's feet around the eyes and all. The tabloids and the web bloggers have a knack for making up "great" stories these days and this might just be one of them. I ring her doorbell once and anxiously wait for her to open the door. Here she comes

"Good afternoon, David!"

I am stunned. Ms. Morton simply looks beautiful. Not only does she look not a day older than twenty-five, she hardly even looks twenty. Everything that's been said about her is true!

"Good afternoon, Ms. Morton."

"Oh, call me Alicia. Come in."

Ms. Morton's living room is large. A Persian carpet is hanging on the wall and a crystal chandelier on the ceiling. A chess set is laid out on the coffee table.

"Me and my Russian friends love to play chess. My grandfather taught me how to play it when I was a little girl, back in the seventies."

"Excellent." Yeah, right. She wasn't even alive back then.

"Would you like some coffee or tea?"

"Tea, please."

While Ms. Morton is out of the room, I am thinking what my next move should be. I now know that she is, indeed, much younger than fifty and is fooling people but how do I get her to admit it? Should I ask her upfront what her real date of birth is or trick her into revealing it to me somehow? What is that smell? It smells really weird in here. I'm wondering if it might be her perfume or something.

Ms. Morton is back with the tea. She also brought chocolate candies. They're called *Charodeika*. I ask her what it means and she says, "the sorceress."

"Let's get down to business, shall we? Ms. Morton—"

"Alicia," she corrects me.

"I'm sorry, Alicia, what is your secret to staying young?"

"First of all, thanks for the compliment. It's a compliment that I get a lot. You know, in Soviet Union, where I was born and spent the first twenty years of my life, we didn't have all those artificial beauty products that people in the West had. All we used for grooming was soap and water. Sometimes, we even used soap to wash our hair because there was no shampoo left in stores. So, all my life, I've only been using natural beauty products. And, also, my mother—she always looked young as well. She was from a village, a little place called Maloye Isakovo, and that's where she learned how to make her own beauty creams. She used to say they contained magical ingredients!"

"Well, Ms. Morton, I apologize, Alicia, there are some that think that you have, um, maintained so well not because of "natural beauty products" but because of plastic surgery and some other things. I know that you have released your birth certificate but someone from

Innovative Science had actually traveled to Russia and couldn't find any public records for the name "Alicia Morton" in Moscow, where you're from, or anywhere else. Honestly, judging by the way you look, I find it very hard to believe that you're fifty years old myself. How do you respond to that?"

"To clarify that, let me tell you first that "Alicia Morton" is not my real name. It's my so-called "American name." I was born Mortonova Alesya Valentinovna and there are plenty of records for that name in Moscow. Trust me, David; I am a very old woman. I still remember, better than I wish I could, how I had to eat grass in order to survive during famine and how my father was proclaimed "enemy of the people" and ordered to be killed by Stalin. They came for him at two in the morning and we never saw him again. Then, there was a fire at our house. Everything got burned ... and ... my beautiful mother ... became disfigured. I, I have to make a phone call. I'll be right back."

While she's on the phone in another room, I should examine her living room, just to see if I can find some clues which will point to her age. Let me take a look at her record collection. It contains classical music like Mozart and Bach and she also seems to have a liking for pop music as well because there's Madonna and Michael Jackson in here and, oops, I can't believe it, a Tekashi69 mixtape. Why would she be listening to that? That further proves that she's a teenager!

One obvious thing that I didn't notice before is the balcony. It is closed.

"I'm sorry, David, I had to call the laboratory. We're about to receive some new specimens," I hear her behind my back.

"That's okay. So, what attracted you to science?"

“That’s an easy question. A chance to discover something new, something that no one knows about. I had no idea that I would spend most of my life mixing chemicals inside of a lab instead.”

“What was your very first specialty right after you graduated from college?”

“Oh, wow, no one has ever asked me this question before. Everyone assumes that I’ve been mixing chemicals all my life. It was botany, my first love.”

“Can you tell more about it, please?”

“I would love to. I used to travel to Africa, Asia, all over the place, and searched for plants that haven’t been discovered yet. My travels took me to Egypt, China, Australia I’ve collected about a million seeds and planted all of them!”

Suddenly, she gets up from the couch and walks to the balcony. She opens it and reveals many different kinds of plants and flowers. There are plants there that you would never see in your life! For example, a flower that is almost ten feet tall or a tree the size of a quarter. That’s where the weird smell was coming from the whole time.

“These are some of the plants that I brought back with me. Some of them are over hundred years old—ageless and eternally beautiful.”

After a few seconds, she says, “I just remembered that I have to do something.”

She excuses herself and leaves once again. I am left on the balcony. Let me examine some of these plants, now. Okay, here’s one that looks really strange and over there I see some that look pretty normal. Wait a minute, what kind of a plant is this sucker? He’s the one that generates all that smell! This plant has big, fat, green leaves and green flowers in a shape of a star. Its scent is so

strong that I have to cover my nose. There might be a clue hidden in this. I pick up a small, dead flower that was on the floor and make a tiny cut in a leaf of the mysterious plant with a knife that was there. A green juice starts to flow from it slowly and I make a few drops of it fall on the dead flower. All of a sudden, the dead flower comes back to life! This is her real secret.

Ms. Morton is back. I am standing by the balcony and holding the flower in my hands.

“Alicia, I know the truth. I just cut a leaf from one of your plants here and this flower, which was dry, became fresh again! You ... you had discovered the fountain of youth! And you can't hide it anymore. I want you to tell me all about it in this interview so that everyone else could start using it and we'll forget all about grey hair and wrinkles.”

“Is this what you came here for? Do you really want to know?”

“Yes. Please.”

She starts to move towards me with a blank expression on her face. The miracle plant's potent smell is coming from her now. Her eyes became bright green, just like the miracle plant's flowers. As she gets closer and closer, the smell gets stronger and stronger. Oh my God, I can no longer take it! I feel like it's inside of me now and is filling up my throat and lungs. I can no longer keep my eyes open. What is happ *This interview was never finished.*

THE END