

My Husband's Picture: Perfect Betrayal

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Chapter 1

"It appears she accidentally fell from a great height..." ~~the~~ ~~palit;~~ but his words felt like distant echoes to me.

All I could see was my daughter, my precious, sweet girl. ~~She~~ ~~was~~ only adorable as an angel. Her once-bright eyes were now closed, never to open again.

I knelt beside her, cradling her tiny hands which were covered in bruises and cuts. Her smartwatch, the one I put on her, was nowhere to be found.

"Stella, can you open your eyes for Mommy? I got you your favorite doll. Remember, the one you wanted to hug every night?" I whispered, my voice trembling. "How could you fall asleep here all alone, sweetheart?"

But no matter how much I called out to her, she never answered. I opened her little palm and found a crumpled family portrait she had drawn of our family. That was when my tears broke free, unstoppable.

It was now 3 in the morning. An hour earlier, I found Stella's body at the foot of the mountain ~~where~~ ~~she~~ and her father ~~Cedric~~ ~~Fleetham~~ had gone camping. Just yesterday, she had left the house bouncing with energy. I had carried her to the backseat of Cedric's car.

"You're going to sleep in a tent with Daddy tonight, Stella. Are you excited?" I asked.

Stella nodded eagerly but made a small gesture showing a hint of fear. My sweet girl could not speak. She had been mute since the day she was born.

I remembered reassuring her, "Don't be scared. Daddy will protect you."

For all of Stella's ~~3~~ years of life, Cedric always found excuses not to celebrate her birthday. This time, I begged him endlessly until he agreed.

As Cedric got into the car, he looked at me impatiently. "Are you done yet? If it gets dark, we won't bother going."

Cedric had agreed ~~to~~ take Stella camping ~~to~~ watch the sunset, but under one condition: I was not allowed to come along.

Stella just wanted to spend her birthday with her dad. That was her wish last year.

"Okay, okay." Before I closed the door, I double-checked Stella's smartwatch. "If anything happens, call me, okay?"

Stella could not talk, but we had a deal. If she were ever in danger, she would press the button to call me. No words would be needed. I thought everything was set. I thought she would be safe. I never imagined that would be the last time I would see Stella, gazing at her little face through the car window, alive.

The next morning, Cedric did not bring Stella home, and she did not come back on her own. I rushed up the mountain ~~there~~, but all I saw was a broken tent and piles of trash. I called Cedric over and over as I searched the mountain. It was not until late at night that he ~~ally~~ answered, his voice dripping with irritation.

"Are you insane, Rachel Jover? I just checked into my hotel for a business trip, and you've been calling me non-stop all day. You might not need rest, but others do," he growled.

I sighed in relief despite everything. "Sorry for disturbing you, but why would you take Stella on a business trip?"

My humility was met with mocking laughter.

"I already sent her home. Are you trying to blame me for your incompetence as a mother? Did you lose her and now think you can pin it on me? How useless are you?" Cedric mocked. "Oh, I get it. You saw that post, didn't you? And now you're pretending to be worried. What, I can't take Laura and her daughter camping? They have no one else. What's wrong with me helping them? Your jealous whining is pathetic. It makes me sick."

I opened Cedric's social media, and there it was—his latest post. In the photo, he stood with Laura Welbey and her daughter, Tina, looking like a happy family of three. And it was Stella who took that picture for them.

Cedric was cruel, a monster. But even then, I naively believed he would never abandon his own daughter—until I found Stella's body at the foot of the mountain. Her tiny limbs had been gnawed by stray dogs, her skin pallid, and the air around her thick with the smell of decay. At that moment, it felt as though my heart was being ripped apart.

"Your husband is calling you. Do you want to answer it?"

The policeman's voice pulled me back to reality. I looked down and stared at my phone screen, at the word "Hubby."