

You're Too Late

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Chapter 1

Keith Odell and Michelle Lavigne strapped themselves into the tandem parachute, bound together as tightly as conjoined twins.

The secure hold must have provided Michelle with a deep sense of safety as he guided her through the sky.

Meanwhile, I stood frozen, a wave of panic crashing over me as I stared at the remaining parachute.

A gaping hole marred its surface, the culprit had been brazen enough to leave behind the needle that had caused the damage, as if daring me to defy fate—

“You might as well just die!”

The hot air balloon drifted past the edge of the cli, and I glanced down into the abyss, the depths stretching endlessly below me.

I closed my eyes and leaped, my unborn child with me.

The intense sensation of freefall gripped me as if my soul was being wrenched from my body.

I couldsee myselffromabove,my bodyplunginghroughthe thickfog likea discarded rag doll, hurtling toward death at terrifying speed.

Memories of the past surged into my mind.

I had just learned how to skydive when I found out I was pregnant. I had planned to surprise Keith with the news on his birthday but now, it seemed, he wouldn’t have cared after all.

Only moments ago, I had begged him over and over again, “I’m pregnant, please, take mæst.”

His patiencead wornthin.“Chelleis terried of heightsand she has a heart condition. I can’t leave her alone. If you’re going to fake a pregnancy, at least pick a better time.”

“I swear, I’m not lying!”

He was furious. “Astrid! Could you just be reasonable and stop causing trouble for everyone?”

Keith ignored me completely as he fastened the parachute’s safety straps around Michelle.

Meanwhile, I was on the verge of disaster.

I watched the two of them as they drifted away, showing no signs of concern.

Keith even slowed their descent, as though they were taking time to admire the scenic view below.

It didn’t matter if I died, but I couldn’t bear the thought of my unborn child never getting the chance to see the world.

I quickly called for help.

“Miss Coppæld, please remain calm,” the operator said when the call connected.

“First, reduce the weight in the balloon by discarding any unnecessary items. That will slow your descent.”

I followed the instructions, throwing out everything I could.

“We’ll contact the pilot on standby immediately. Stay on the line.”

But the heliumwasleakingfasterthanI’d expectedWithtearsthreateningto overwhelm me, I pleaded, “Please hurry, I don’t have much time. I’m drifting towards the cli.”

Before long, the park sta called me back.

“Is this Astrid? Isn’t Keith with you?”

“He jumped with MichelleMy parachute is damaged, please hurry!” I cried.

The sta member sighed. “This is bizarre. All ten hot air balloons were fully booked today, and every pilot is already in the air. The area you’re in, Zone A, is an odd choice.”

Even as they tried to calm my nerves, they guided me through what I needed to do.

“Do you know where the gas valve is? Release the air to lower your altitude as quickly as possible.”

The hot air balloated ominously above the cli, and I couldn’t see the bottom no matter how hard I looked. I knew that releasing the air now would only speed up my demise.

“I can’t release the air. The balloon is hovering too high above the cli, the drop would be too severe.”

The sta member hesitated.

“Don’t panic. Keith has already jumped, right? Once he’s back, I’ll have him get to you immediately.”

Anxiety gnawed at me as I questioned whether Keith had landed safely. He was my only hope— the most skilled one who could come back to save me.

With a faint glimmer of hope, I called him three times before he picked up.

“Keith, please help me...” I cried, desperation creeping into my voice.

Before I could explain that my parachute was broken, he interrupted me.

“Are you pretending to be pregnant again, or is this another act?

“You’ve already done skydiving before at the park, and while the boys were so scared, you had a blast. Why are you being so dramatic?

“Just jump already! Stop being so stubborn!”

Then I heard Michelle’s delicate voice on the other end. “Keith, I feel so dizzy, and my heart hurts.”

“I need to take Chelle to the hospital for a check-up. Once you land, you’ll have to make your own way home,” Keith said before he hung up.