

# Mystique

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## Part One

Abigail Turner had a secret. But doesn't everyone? The difference was that Miss Turner's secret affected the balance of power in the universe. Sex appeal. That was her secret, bottled and sold. From the second she entered the Laughing Lion it was obvious that she didn't belong there. She had a tendency towards more chic nightclubs. This would be her first time there and also her last. Of course she didn't know that yet. She had arrogant hair; black as night, comely, and wholly intact. Her eyes cast an air of childhood innocence, tattered and thrown away. She never smiled, not once, but a girl like that doesn't have to. She knew her place in the universe, and made sure others understood theirs as well. Her clothing was nothing exceptional. She wore a grey v-neck sweater that slightly exposed her peerless cleavage and a medium length black skirt that danced along her kneecaps when she crossed her legs to sit at the bar. No, it wasn't her clothes or even her matchless beauty that made men want her and women want to be her. It was the inexplicable way she carried herself that made people crumble in her presence. Perhaps it was the way she laughed without smiling, or the way she cried without seeming upset that lured the young Miss Turner to her untimely death.

Miss Turner kept to herself, never went on a second date, and lived in a private condo adjacent to Miami Beach. Her days were spent researching human pheromones as a doctoral student at the University of Miami, while her nights were spent drinking alone in seedy bars and having meaningless one night stands with strangers who always felt that she was way out of their league. In some deranged way, this was also part of her research.

He could have been anyone, but he wasn't just anyone. He had a name, and like most (in fact, all) men he was powerless to her charm. Detective Brad Hayes slumped in his barstool when

she approached him. He attempted to seem preoccupied with his single malt scotch while compulsively flicking his unlit Pall Mall cigarette.

Miss Turner sat on the barstool beside him, produced a lighter from between her breasts, lit his cigarette, and whispered “Frustrated much? They say it’s a sign of sexual frustration. The flicking I mean.” He sat there obliquely silent, unsure of what, if anything he should say. “Not much of a talker are you officer?” she remarked, noticing the badge on his belt loop.

“Detective...” he stammered. “It’s Detective... Hayes.” She didn’t give him her name, she never did. It was part of how she controlled the men she used.

“Well, detective it is then. What shall we drink to?” she said while raising her glass. Hayes being married, shy, and slightly awkward said nothing in reply and merely tipped his rocks glass towards her as he took another sip. She felt that she could have had him as did everyone else in the bar, but the gold ring on his finger and the gold on his badge tickled her conscience, warning her not to tempt fate. *It has to stop sometime*, she thought. The full ramifications of that thought would not be evident until the following morning.

He thought about offering to buy her a drink and wrestled with the notion for several minutes as she flirted with the few remaining sips of her Cosmopolitan. What Hayes didn’t know was that she never let men buy her drinks. It was part of her persona; to always keep the upper hand. In the end he never offered her a drink. He finished his scotch, she finished her Cosmopolitan, and they went their separate ways.

As she left the bar the sultry scent of her perfume lingered in the detective’s nose and nearly caused him to call after her. His mind was jumbled, but his conscious was clean. He loved his family, and thought better than to throw that away on a pretty face, but for the life of him he couldn’t sleep that night. He lay in bed next to his beautiful wife Sarah, unable to shake

the thought of the mysterious dark haired woman from the bar. As the events of the following day began to unfold he would question whether or not he could have changed anything by buying her that drink. Not that he questioned whether he should have given in to infidelity, but rather he mourned and wondered whether she had maybe just needed someone to talk to.

Detective Hayes' phone rang at five thirty in the morning, interrupting his wrestling match with the pillow as he tossed and turned. *Work*, he thought, *that can only mean one thing*. He answered the phone as Sarah was waking up.

“What is it honey?” she groaned, still half asleep.

“I have to go,” he half whispered as he kissed her forehead. He hurriedly got dressed, missing a loop on his pants as he put on his belt, and sloppily tying his tie. *Probably another god damn drug dealer dead. Good riddance*, he thought. In his experience, most of the early morning calls were actually bitter ends to very late nights for the city's criminals and drug pushers. This would not be such a morning, for the person who was deceased was neither a drug dealer, nor a drug user. He didn't know it yet, but the butterfly effect had already cast its ripple, and his life would be forever changed by what happened next.

When he arrived at the scene the fire trucks and squad cars were already there, yellow crime scene tape had been placed around the condo building, and forensics had just arrived. People from the neighborhood had gathered around the edge of the crime scene, trying to get a look at what had happened. Hayes parked his car across the street, waded through the crowd gathered at the edge of the yellow tape, and entered the crime scene. The sun had not yet risen on Miami Beach, and the blue and red lights from the squad cars cast an eerie glow on the naked, lifeless body of the woman on the sidewalk that would shortly be identified as Miss Abigail Turner.

Hayes slipped on a pair of clear rubber gloves to inspect the body. “Female, approximately five foot five, mid-twenties...” He paused as he shifted the corpses’ chin to look at her face. *It’s her*, he thought. Shocked, he wondered if he should mention that they had met the night before to the other officers. *What if it’s ruled a homicide and I’m the last person to see her? It could look bad*, he thought as he weighed his options. This being a delicate matter, and one that could have grave consequences, he decided not to disclose his brief encounter with the girl. Hayes had always been an honest cop, and although it pained him not to account for their meeting the previous night, he felt that these details could not in any way help their investigation.

As his mind was entrenched in this ethical dilemma, the forensics team was further examining the body. “What do you got?” said Hayes to Aaron Naismith, the lead forensics tech.

“Well, there appears to be no sign of struggle. No abrasions on her arms, neck, or face except the ones caused by the fall. It will be a few days before we can get the results back from the autopsy, but it seems evident that the fall was the cause of death. Once we get into her condo we can measure the trajectory of the impact, and that should help us determine whether she fell, jumped, or was pushed.”

“Good work” said Hayes. “Is there anything else you noticed? Anything out of the ordinary?” he probed, precariously hoping for anything that might explain this young woman’s death.

“Nothing yet. You’ll be the first to know,” replied Naismith.

“Thanks, I’ll meet you upstairs once you finish. Something seems odd about this.”

Although Hayes did have a small insight into the confident disposition of the victim, it was his finely honed detective instincts that made him feel that something was awry with her death.

“No sign of forced entry,” said Hayes to the other officers as they entered the condo, “but dust the door handle for prints just to be safe.” Her condo resembled his perception of her in an ominous way. Her living room was immaculate, charming, and not a thing was out of place. The remote controls to her television and stereo lay symmetrically arranged on her glass coffee table which appeared to have been dusted within the last day. The door to the balcony was open, the blinds whipped vigorously in the brisk morning air, and her red silk robe was hanging off of the patio chair. The balcony was as clean and organized as the living room, and he noticed several potted plants were still moist from being watered.

Hayes followed the forensics team to the balcony as they were attempting to determine the pattern of her fall. Before he made it outside he was interrupted by one of the uniformed officers urging him to come into the bedroom. As he rushed through the living room to see what had surprised the officers, he bumped into the coffee table and jarred the remote controls from their carefully placed positions. Although Miss Turner obviously wouldn't mind now, he straightened them back and then proceeded into the bedroom.

“What the hell happened here?” said Hayes to the other officers. Her bedroom was the polar opposite of the rest of the condo, a complete wreck. There were no sheets on the bed, only pillowcases on the pillows. Clothes were scattered from one end to the other. Her hair dryer and straightener were lying on the bed, bottles of perfume were scattered amongst the rubble, and an inordinate amount of lingerie lay out in the corner of the room near the window. The familiar scent of Miss Turner's perfume tickled his nostrils, and for a split second he could not help but picture her in the lingerie. Their investigation would not uncover the fact that the lingerie had been worn by Miss Turner to narcissistically perform peep shows for her male neighbors.

“Wow. I guess everyone hides their mess somewhere,” said Naismith as he entered the bedroom. “I hide mine in the closet. Anyways, it appears that she jumped from the balcony. There are smudged prints on the rail which indicate that she climbed up there, and the distance of her fall is consistent with jumping. We could do dummy-drops of her height and weight to measure it exactly, but I think the neighbors might be freaked out.”

“Yeah, you think?” said Hayes disdainfully. There was just something about forensics guys that gave him the creeps.

“So did you find a note?” asked Naismith.

“Not yet,” answered Hayes, “but it could be somewhere in this rubble.”

“Hmm,” said Naismith, “they almost always leave a note, and it’s generally somewhere easy to find.” He rambled on, but Hayes wasn’t listening. Nothing about this case made sense. He could not shake the thought of a beautiful, confident woman such as Miss Turner willfully ending her life. Furthermore, he could not get over the stark difference between the cleanliness of the living room and the disaster in the bedroom.

Hayes decided that he must be the one to notify the family, thinking maybe he could get some sort of insight into her life. Then, purely out of thoroughness he said, “Aaron, I want a tox-screen on Miss Turner. Maybe there’s some new street drug we don’t know about that can account for her strange behavior.” The tox-screen would eventually come back negative, for Miss Turner’s drug of choice was power. How she came to be addicted to it would be the question that Hayes would have to answer, and fast.

## Part Two

Winter had suddenly fallen on South Florida as Hayes climbed into his car. He had moved his family here to avoid exactly this kind of weather, but somehow as Christmas was approaching it had found him. The normally fresh, tropical breeze now blew frigid as Hayes tried to remember if his car even had a heater. He hated notifying families of a loved one's death. Their grief made him extremely uncomfortable. As he drove towards the Turner residence he tried to distract himself from what he had to do next by thinking of Christmas gifts he would purchase for his wife and daughter.

A few minutes later he parked his car on the curb outside of their house and stepped out into the cold. His hands trembled and his forehead beaded with sweat despite the icy breeze as he rang the doorbell.

"Can I help you?" asked the man who was presumably Miss Turner's Father.

"Mr. Turner? I'm Detective Brad Hayes, Miami Police Department. May I come in?"

"Yes, of course detective."

Mr. Turner motioned for Hayes to come inside. They sat down in the living room and were joined by Mrs. Turner.

"What is it detective? Is it Abby? Is she in trouble?" assumed Mrs. Turner frantically.

"I'm sorry to inform you, but your daughter fell from her balcony early this morning... She didn't survive the fall."

Mr. Turner appeared to be in shock, and was attempting to console his wife who was sobbing, and beating her fist on the arm of the couch.



“So it *was* an accident?” asked Mr. Turner.

“The investigation is still open. I’m sorry to ask in your time of grief, but is there anything you might be able to tell us about Abigail? Really anything could help.”

“Abby... she went by Abby,” said her mother attempting to gain her composure. “She was so smart. She would have been our Dr. Abby next year.”

Mrs. Turner burst into tears again, and excused herself from the room.

“Mr. Turner, if you’d like me to come back another time it’s not a problem.”

“No, it’s okay. I’ll help in any way I can. Abby went to U of M. Like my wife told you she was about to get her doctorate degree. I assumed she was just under a lot of stress from school. She hadn’t been herself the last few weeks.”

“How so?”

“Well, she’s always been very close with her mother. Normally this time of year, I can’t keep them apart. They would be doing their Christmas shopping together, putting up the Christmas tree, you know? Holiday stuff. But we haven’t seen her since Thanksgiving. She wouldn’t even return our calls.”

“I see. Do you know if she had a boyfriend or anyone else she might have been spending a lot of time with?”

“Not Abby, she was never was the dating type. I think she was still afraid of boys,” said Mr. Turner, despite his grief almost squeezing out a smile.

*Still afraid of boys?*, thought Hayes. It seemed that something had drastically changed recently in Abby’s life.

“Well, I won’t take anymore of your time. I’ll be sure to let you know if anything develops.”

“Thank you detective. I just don’t know what was going on with her. I wish I would have. She might still be here.”

“Don’t beat yourself up. It’s not your fault. I’ll be in touch Mr. Turner.”

Hayes left the Turner house feeling despondent, the weight of their grief resting on his shoulders. It was nearly three p.m., and he had to pick up his daughter, Elisa from school. She always had a way of cheering him up, or at least talking so much that he didn’t have time to think about anything else. She was at *that* age. He could hear her voice above all the other children as he pulled up to the curb next to her school.

“Hi daddy oh my gosh you won’t believe it we had our Christmas party today and they gave us ice cream and Bobby Jenkins got sugar packets and mixed like a million of them into his ice cream and then I did the same thing and so did Melissa and Amanda and this weird boy I don’t know his name but he doesn’t wear socks with his shoes and stinks really bad and then we had recess and Melissa broke up with Eric but then they got back together but Eric had already asked Jenny to be his girlfriend so now he has *two* girlfriends can you believe it!?!?”

“Wow,” said Hayes with a smile. What else could he say to *that*?

Christmas was only five days away and like all kids she could hardly contain her excitement. She continued on like that for the duration of their drive home. Although he wasn’t particularly listening to her stories, the sound of Elisa’s voice calmed his nerves and reminded him why he got up and went to work each day. He dropped her off at home, briefly kissed Sarah, and headed out again.

He decided to pay a visit to the University of Miami to see if he could get any answers from one of Abby’s professors. He was directed from the information desk to the office of Dr. Kimberly Larsen, head of the biology department.

“Good afternoon Dr. Larsen. I’m Detective Hayes with the Miami Police Department. I hope I didn’t catch you at a bad time.”

“Not at all detective. Is everything alright?”

“Well, no. I’m sorry to say that one of your students, Abby Turner was found dead this morning. I was hoping maybe you could give me some information about her.”

“Oh my God. That’s terrible. Abby was one of my favorite students. Bright, ambitious. She had a great life ahead of her. I was going to miss her after this semester. What happened?”

“Well, the investigation is still open, but it might have been a suicide. We’re not ruling anything out yet. Had she been acting different lately? Her parents seemed to have noticed a recent change in her behavior.”

“She hadn’t been attending class regularly, which was odd for her.”

“I see. So nothing else out of the ordinary?”

“Not that I can recall.”

“Dr. Larsen, you mentioned you were going to miss her after *this* semester?”

“Yes. I’m retiring from teaching.”

“Really? You’re not anywhere near retirement age.”

“You’re too kind. I’m retiring from teaching because I’ve created a line of high-end cosmetics and fragrances. They’re all the buzz this Christmas season.”

“I see. I’m sure my wife is familiar with them then. Well, congratulations on your success. Here’s my card. Just let me know if anything comes to mind regarding Abby.”

“I will. Thank you detective.”

Hayes went home to his family, feeling that he gotten nowhere in the investigation. He still wasn't convinced it was a suicide, yet all the signs were pointing to it. Something was still gnawing at him. His instincts were right of course, but it wouldn't matter.

The next day as he dropped Elisa off at school his phone rang.

"Hayes," he said into the phone as he drove away.

"Detective, it's Aaron from forensics. The results of the autopsy are in. It was definitely a suicide, but you were right. There is something very odd about this. The enterochromaffin cells in her intestines were ruptured, and she suffered massive internal bleeding *before* she died. There was absolutely no serotonin in her body. I've never seen anything like it."

"In English please?" said Hayes sharply.

"The enterochromaffin cells produce around eighty percent of the body's serotonin. It's the chemical that produces happiness and feelings of well being. It looks like she had a massive buildup of the chemical, then the cells ruptured and depleted every last drop of it."

"How could that happen?"

"In my professional opinion... I have no fucking idea. That's not all. I also found fresh semen. I checked it against the local donor database and got lucky. I found a match: Ruiz Marasorio. He lives in Hialeah. You want the address?"

"Sure. God, you should have to have a passport to get in there."

Hialeah is home to the largest percentage of Latino immigrants in Florida. Although a vibrant cultural center of Miami, it is most well known among gringos for its lack of English and high crime rate.

Hayes cautiously approached the apartment building where Ruiz Marasorio lived. A white cop in a predominantly Spanish speaking community stood out like a cheeseburger in a

Cuban restaurant. He found the apartment, nodded to the other officer who would serve as an interpreter if needed, and knocked on the door.

“Who the hell is it?” Hayes heard from the other side of the door.

“Detective Hayes, Miami P.D. I just want to ask you a few questions.”

“I’m busy, go away cerdo!” he heard through the door.

“Doesn’t cerdo mean pig?” Hayes said to the other officer, who was attempting to hold back a smirk.

“Ruiz, I only want to ask you about Abby Turner,” Hayes yelled at the door.

Hayes heard the door unlock, and then open just enough for him to get a glimpse of Ruiz’ face.

“What about Abby?”

“She was found dead outside of her condo this morning.”

“Aye dios mio. I just saw her yesterday. We met to study.”

Ruiz opened the door, letting Hayes and the accompanying officer inside.

“You’re blind,” said Hayes to Ruiz.

“You’re observant,” crassly replied Ruiz. “What’s your point?”

“Nothing. I apologize,” said Hayes, feeling slightly embarrassed.

“Would you like a drink?” said Ruiz, looking unsettled.

“No thanks, can’t drink on the job.”

“Mind if I have one?” said Ruiz, looking more grieved.

“Not at all. Were you close with Abby?”

“Not really. I mean, I don’t know. We were study partners, but she had been acting strange lately.”

“Strange? What do you mean?”

“Well, she was always kind of shy, but not lately. She *definitely* wasn’t shy anymore.”

“I see. Ruiz, I’ll be honest with you. We know that you two didn’t *just* study yesterday. We found your semen in her. We traced it to you through a donor database.”

“Ah, now I get it! So you think I’m responsible for this somehow? That was the only time we ever slept together, I swear. I don’t even know how to explain it. She kind of seduced me.”

“*She* seduced you? That doesn’t add up, no offense.”

“No, that’s okay. I’m sorry detective. It’s just that...”

“What?”

“The reason I donated at the sperm bank was because I want to have kids and with the laws the way they are I can’t adopt, so that was the closest I could come.”

“What do you mean? Cuban Americans have full rights to adoption.”

“First of all, I’m Chilean. Second of all, the reason this is all so weird for me is that I don’t know *how* she seduced me detective. It’s just that...well, I’m gay.”

### Part Three

A relative winter wonderland still loomed over Miami as Christmas approached. The startling blue ocean was dimmed gray as clouds overcast the city's trademark sunny skies. Christmas shoppers crowded the stores purchasing scarves, gloves, and other clothing foreign to their lifestyles. Hayes was among these shoppers purchasing last minute gifts for Sarah and Elisa with his annual Christmas bonus. Although at first he disliked it, Hayes began to take joy in the abnormally cold weather because he was finally able to wear his old charcoal gray trench coat like the ones he had seen detectives wearing in television shows as a kid.

The Turner case was officially closed and ruled a suicide, but unfortunately it would not close for Hayes. He had never been so personally affected by a case, and it troubled him. However, today was his day off and he was trying to focus on other things. He went through his Christmas list in his mind as he weaved through the crowded aisles of the department store. *Art crafts, Nintendo games, anything pink*, he thought as he pushed his shopping cart through the children's department. *Ooh, junior detective kit*, he marveled. Elisa was a girly girl, but she was also a daddy's girl. She would love it. He picked up a few presents for her, and hurriedly exited the children's department.

He had already purchased several gifts for Sarah, but needed to pick up something that would be from Elisa. He browsed the perfume and make-up counter, but felt as out of place as well, a man at the perfume and makeup counter.

"Can I help you find something?" said the sharply dressed woman at the counter.

"I'm looking for something for my wife. I think some perfume would be nice."

“Here try this. I think she’ll love it,” the salesperson said as she sprayed a sample on a card and waved it back and forth to dissipate the initial smell of alcohol. He took the sample from her, raised it to his nose, and then feeling shocked awkwardly dropped the card on the counter.

“Mystique,” he said slowly. It was the same perfume that Abby Turner wore. The smell awakened his senses and he felt compelled to buy it for his wife, although he wasn’t sure why. “Yeah... I’ll take it,” he said feeling slightly dazed and lost in thought.

As it had the habit of often doing, Hayes’ phone rang interrupting his day off. This time it was his lieutenant. He was exhausted from long hours and seldom days off. He wanted to ignore his phone, but the chain of command forced him to answer the call.

“Hayes,” he answered.

“Detective, I know it’s your day off, but I need you here right away. Another young girl was found dead. It’s startlingly similar to the Turner case you were on.”

It was exactly the same as the Turner case. The girl’s apartment was immaculate except for the bedroom, just like Abby Turner’s. Just as the plants in Abby’s condo were freshly watered, the dishwasher was running when the officers entered the girl’s apartment.

“What the hell does this mean?” asked Naismith when Hayes arrived at the scene.

“In my professional opinion—“

“Yeah, I gotcha,” replied Naismith.

As the next few days passed, four more girls were found dead in the same way. Each jumped to their death. Each girl’s living room was immaculate, while their bedrooms were a disaster. Each of them had performed daily house hold tasks right before their deaths, and each of them had the same type of internal bleeding.



The case remained a mystery to the entire department. On Christmas Eve when they would normally be having their Christmas party, the entire department was gathered in the conference room trying to formulate an idea of what had happened to these girls.

“There has to be something these girls have taken that caused this to happen,” said Naismith.

“The tox-screens all came up negative, and we’ve had our CI’s searching for any new street drug. They would have found something,” replied Hayes.

“What if it’s not a drug at all?” interrupted Naismith. “This might sound crazy, but it almost seems as if they were taking what you might call a love-potion, but one that affects the person who takes it. The girls all had the same astronomical increase in their serotonin levels. That would cause them to be more confident and sexually aroused. They had all been sexually active right before their deaths. When their serotonin levels increased exponentially it caused their cells to literally burst, and they committed suicide. Street drugs like MDMA cause serotonin levels to increase and then drop dramatically, often inflicting long term depression in the user. The drug doesn’t deplete the levels this quickly though. I don’t think we’re looking for a drug here, but something in common that the girls were all using.”

“Like what?” asked Hayes.

“I’m not sure, but we need to find out before it happens again.”

Hayes went home to his family who were already in bed, ate the milk and cookies left out for Santa, and quietly placed Christmas gifts under the tree. It would be another sleepless night, one of many for Hayes. He went over the facts of the case endlessly in his head, attempting to recall details from both his encounter with Abby Turner and the other girl’s homes. Nothing came to him, and eventually he slept.

“DADDY DADDY DADDY IT’S CHRISTMAS!” screamed Elisa as the sun was barely visible on the horizon. She pounced on their bed beaming with joy and ripped their covers off, beckoning for the day to begin. The cold front had lifted Christmas morning, and with the warm weather returned a sense of normalcy for Hayes.

“Okay, okay I’m up,” Hayes patiently replied. “Give us five minutes.”

He held on to his wife, soaking up the last bit of nighttime with tenderness. “Good morning baby girl,” he said. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas to you too. I missed you last night. I had my Mrs. Santa costume ready and everything.”

“Mmm, I do love that. Tonight maybe?”

“If you’re lucky,” she said with a smile. “If you’ll make the coffee, I’ll get some breakfast ready.”

“Done,” he said. “Sarah, I love you.”

“I love you too Bradley. Now make me some coffee.”

She was so sweet.

When Hayes walked into the kitchen to make the coffee Elisa had already arranged her presents from biggest to smallest (the order she wanted to open them in). He kissed her on the forehead and told her they would open presents as soon as they had some breakfast. For Elisa, it seemed like a millennium would pass before she could open them.

“Shit!” said Hayes as he apologetically looked at Sarah.

She knew what that look meant. Work. It was always work.

“I’m sorry sweetheart. Huge case. It’s an emergency. I’ll be back before you know it. I know Elisa’s going crazy in there, so let her open a few presents. I swear I’ll hurry. You open some too. I’ll be back. I love you.”

Hayes angrily raced to the station and burst through the front door demanding answers.

“This had better be good. It’s Christmas for God’s sake!”

“Well Merry Christmas!” said Naismith. “We cracked the case!”

“Wait, what is she doing here?” inquired Hayes, referring to Dr. Kimberly Larsen who was sitting handcuffed at his desk.

“All of the girls who died were her students,” replied Naismith.

“You’re kidding me.”

“Afraid not. That’s not all. We know exactly what killed those girls. I was right. We went through the photos of the crime scenes and noticed one particular thing in common—“

“There were a lot of things in common,” interrupted Hayes.

“I was right about the love potion. It’s not pretty. It works extremely fast when absorbed into the bloodstream, even in small amounts. Use it one time and it’s game over, two weeks max. Lucky for us we picked her up now. There’s still a huge mess to clean up though. All the retail stores are thankfully closed today, but Dr. Larsen’s products will have to be removed immediately. A massive media warning is going out as we speak.”

“You mean *her* products did this to those girls?”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t think something as simple as a perfume could be so deadly.”

“What?”

At the same time, both Hayes and Naismith uttered the fateful word, “Mystique.”

“Shit!” said Hayes. “I have to get home *now!*”

Hayes put his rarely used police light on the top of his car and furiously drove. He drove home, repeatedly calling his wife. No answer. Redial. No Answer. Everything moved in slow motion. The infinite time between intersections, the pedestrians on the sidewalks, and the tears now streaming down his face all seemed to stand still, waiting on fate.

He hit his own mailbox screeching into the driveway, and ran to the house. He was greeted by Elisa wearing her new detective outfit and excitedly hugging his waist. The familiar scent venomously lingered.

“Daddy! I’m so glad you’re home! Mommy loves the perfume I got her! I put some on too, smell!”

Hayes dropped to his knees, and wept. There was nothing he could do.