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Hiding the Truth

Jason Constantine Ford

Clarence took a quick gaze back at Bethany after she gave him a push as the swing lifted him up in the air. That look on his face. It was so bland. Previous expectations for a day of enjoyment had already disappeared. Although Bethany was spending more time with her son, their relationship was starting to strain. Previously, Clarence enjoyed the park so much that he would arrive there smiling and would leave with the same level of contentment. Bethany had no idea as to what she could do to improve her relationship with her son. As Clarence shook his head, Bethany realised that he already had enough. She simply allowed the swing to slow itself down before taking hold of Clarence's hand and leading him back to the car.

"When will daddy come back to us?" Clarence asked.

"He's still setting up his business. After things have been set up, he'll spend more time with you."

"You sure about that?"

"Yes, you're very important to him."

Opening the front passenger door of her car, Bethany let Clarence in before taking the driver's seat and leaving the park. Looking through the rear view mirror, Bethany noticed something. Clarence's puppy toy was in the back seat. When they arrived at a set of lights, Bethany used her left hand to reach for the toy and hand it to Clarence. He did not say anything.

"I thought that was your favourite toy?"

"Not today."

After they arrived back home, Bethany prepared dinner for the two of them. At meal time, Bethany and Clarence simply ate a roast dinner with very few words being spoken. It immediately became clear to Bethany that the prolonged period of time that Rick, her husband, was away from the family was having a negative psychological effect upon Clarence. It was already three days since Rick last set foot in the house. The former cheeriness that Bethany used to see in Clarence from day to day was completely gone. Immediately after the meal, Clarence left for his room without uttering a word. As Bethany comprehended Clarence's emotional state, she was determined to find a solution to this problem confronting her. Knowing that Clarence would not be following her around, Bethany walked out the front door and stood next to a stone statue of a young man holding a bow with its' arrow pulled back. The memory of Rick giving this statue to her on the day of their wedding, offered her hope that he would come back to her.

As Bethany was doing her best to cling to a positive attitude in relation to Rick, she noticed something strange in the distance. A man with a hat and dark glasses was wandering around the street a few houses away from the front gates of the house. He was pacing himself back and forth before walking away from view. Bethany simply reacted to this strange behaviour by shaking her head. Being aware of the important situation that she was in, Bethany returned her thoughts back to Rick. She wanted to ring Rick to inform him about the consequences of his absence but felt a reluctance to do so on account of his inability or unwillingness to answer her calls. For the past two days, each call she made to him achieved only one result. She would be left with a message from an answering service to call back. Each message she left was not returned. Despite a feeling of doubt that was plaguing her, Bethany used an option on her mobile phone to hide outgoing calls and rang Rick's number.

"Hello, Rick speaking."

"It's Bethany."

"What do you want?"

Bethany was shocked by this kind of response but managed to resume the conversation in a calm and relaxed manner. "Why are you talking to me like? I'm your wife."

"You're ringing me when I'm busy. I've already told you repeatedly that I'm busy setting up the business. I can't be disturbed."

"Can't you just give a few minutes to me? You haven't answered my calls in the last two days."

"O.K., I'll give you a few minutes."

"You've got to spend time with Clarence. He's not the same without you. He misses you."

"I'll be back tomorrow for lunch."

"What time?"

"One O'clock."

A smile of relief formed on Bethany's face. "I'm looking forward to seeing you. I'll let Clarence know that you'll be back tomorrow."

"Good bye."

"Bye, Bye honey."

When Bethany entered Clarence's room, she informed him that Rick would be returning home the next day for lunch. The look of cheeriness that had been absent for a few days came back to life. Clarence simply gave his mum a hug, looking forward to the following day.

The next day was a great disappointment. Bethany and Clarence ate a meal of marinara pizza alone. After the meal, they waited for more than half an hour without any sign of Rick. Bethany rang Rick's mobile phone with the usual response of an answering service. Bethany hung the phone up in frustration. She bowed her head with one hand on her face as she sat down at the table.

"Why isn't daddy here?"

"I don't know."

"Why doesn't he answer the phone?"

She shook her head without giving eye contact to Clarence. "Something has probably happened." Bethany collected the plates and made her way to the kitchen. "I'll find out what he's up to."

Not long afterwards, they left the house in Bethany's car. At the end of the street, Bethany noticed the presence of that strange hatted man she saw the day before. A few minutes later, she dropped Clarence at his uncle's house so she could search for Rick. The first place that Bethany went to was the location of Rick's business. To her astonishment, all the signs, furniture, mobile phones and accessories associated with this business had disappeared. All that was left was a sign stating that the property was available for lease. A phone number for Aaron Snider, a real estate agent was listed below. Bethany rang the number.

"Hello, Aaron speaking."

"Hello, my name is Bethany Walker. I'm Rick's wife. I'm wondering where his new business is being relocated."

"A Business? I don't think so."

"I thought he was setting up a store for selling mobile phones. I was here on the first day."

"No, he never set up a store. He was working with a few other people for a television commercial. They finished filming yesterday."

"Would you have any idea where Rick could be?"

"No, the contract is over. I don't have any more to do with him."

Bethany simply hung up the phone. For several seconds, she wondered why Rick would engage in such deception. Remembering how Rick frequently referred to Clarence as the most important person in the world, she could not understand how Rick could make a transition from giving so much time to his son to neglecting him. Bethany could only think of one possible explanation. *He must be with another woman.* She remembered those few nights in the past month when Rick would leave the house without informing her and then return the next day claiming to have been partying with friends. With a firm conviction that Rick was flirting with a mistress, Bethany tried to think of the possible locations he would go to with

her. The first place that came to mind was the Republic Bar in Hurstville. She arrived there a few minutes later to see the place filled with patrons. She looked around the whole bar but did not detect any trace of Rick. Seeing Luigi, the owner, behind the counter, she approached him. He smiled at her.

“Bethany, my dear, it’s so good to see you again.”

“Yes, it’s been a while.”

“Why haven’t you been coming over.”

“I’ve been so busy, I haven’t had the time.”

“It hasn’t been like that with Rick.”

Upon hearing her husband’s name, Bethany was temporarily frozen until Luigi continued talking.

“He’s been coming here every day with another guy.”

“Do you know who the other guy is?”

“No, I never asked his name. The only thing I know about him was that he seemed to be very close to Rick. It was almost as if they’d known each other all their lives.”

“What did he look like?”

“He had Arab features with black curly hair and a beard.”

Bethany looked back to all her memories of the friends and acquaintances she encountered with Rick. None of them matched the description of that man. *What could he be doing with that man?* For a while, she had no idea as to the answer to her question until she thought of the possibility that Rick and the strange man could be having an affair. This solitary thought was enough to make Bethany ill at ease. She temporarily looked away from Luigi before returning her attention to him.

“Is something wrong?” Luigi asked.

“No, I’m fine. I just need to go outside for some fresh air.”

Bethany left the pub and collected Clarence at his uncle’s house before returning home. Passing through the gates, Bethany noticed that something was missing. The stone statue of the archer was gone. It immediately became clear to Bethany that someone invaded the house without either breaking the gates or the front door. Entering the house, everything seemed to be normal until she entered her bedroom to see that all of Rick’s clothes were missing. Bethany fell down on her knees and started crying with her head bowed down. Through the corner of her eye, she saw Clarence enter the room.

“Why are daddy’s clothes missing?”

“He’s gone away.”

“Will he be coming back?”

“Yes.” She lied.

Bethany persuaded herself that it would be too hard for Clarence to know the truth about his father’s infidelity. As she struggled to confront the truth of her situation, she was convinced that Clarence should not know what his father was up to. Bethany did not think that a child of five years of age would be able to understand the actions of a man leaving his wife and son for another man.