

“Ma’am,” he says. “She’s your daughter.”

The sitting cop stands, and the standing cop writes something in his tiny notebook with a tiny pencil. She imagines his tiny letters spelling out *GUILTY*.



*How to clean: Lemon Pledge. Old English Lemon Oil. Johnson’s Paste Wax. Johnson’s Liquid Wax. Endust. Murphy’s Oil Soap. Rub in circles. Buff in stripes. Strip that waxy build up. White-glove this house, these gleaming surfaces.*



Somehow the cops always end up gone, though how? Through the front door, yes, but did she say goodbye? Thank them? See them drive off, watch them disappear? She’s startled to realize now, staring into the eyes of her husband, she’s not sure the men are real, asking their questions, demanding answers. But right there on the coffee table’s an untouched plate of windmill cookies. From yesterday?

Donna’s father says, “They’re going to find her. She’s going to be okay.”

Donna’s mother says, “You can’t know that. No one can know that.”

His eyes sputter, like a candle wick gasping for wax. “I’m late for work,” he says. “Again. You said you’d go to Hy-Vee yesterday, and the boys can’t eat pork and beans for supper three nights in a row, and neither can I.” He lifts one hand like he might touch her shoulder, but his arm drifts into a meaningless gesture.

He’s right. Casseroles the neighbors brought were like hers, but off, and even the boys picked. Potato chip topping, not Ritz crackers. Frozen mixed vegetables, not corn. The terrified moms wouldn’t linger, unwilling to soak in this bad luck. They handed over tin foil-covered CorningWare, mumbling, “sad” and “awful” before hurrying home to their waiting children.

Donna’s father says, “They’re growing boys. They need you too.”

She thinks it, then says it: “Donna’s who needed me.”

His breath catches and he turns, passing through the front door. Now she’s watching him leave. After scraping a small, careful hole through the