

Kimberly

3:40 p.m., on the money.

John reverses his vintage red Alfa Romeo out of his garage onto the drive and stops before reaching the pavement. He climbs out—chamois in hand—and begins polishing the bonnet with meticulous care, just as he did yesterday and the day before.

I peer through the gaps in the blinds and see a steady stream of uniformed teens making their way home from school, their hormonally charged voices resonating along Clarendon Road like poorly orchestrated stadium chants. My daughter's tangled mass of auburn curls is easy to spot. I see Sophie fifty metres away on the other side of the street, laughing and carrying on with a group of her peers. She appears happy and settled, despite only having started at her new school. I can't help but smile and feel proud of my girl for having adjusted well to our changed circumstances.

But then I remember why I'm here, in the upstairs box room, spying on our next-door neighbour through partially opened blinds.

'He stares at me, Mum,' Sophie said three nights ago as we sat for tea. 'Like, take-a-picture stares. It's super creepy.'

'Does he talk to you?'

Sophie shook her head. 'No. He just watches my every move. From when I cross the street until I reach our front door. I think he's a *paedo*.'

I chuckled. 'John's your grandad's age, Sophie! Besides, he seems perfectly normal.'

'You've spoken to him like *once*, Mum. Old people can be nonces, too, you know. Jimmy Savile was old.'

Evidently, Sophie had done the research. Good for her.

'Fair point,' I said.

'So, are you going to call the police?'

'Why would I do that?'

'To report a pervert.'

'But we don't know'

'So you're not going to do anything?' she huffed. '*Dad* would do something.'

Your dad is too busy dealing with his pregnant mistress, I wanted to remind her. But I held my tongue and said, 'Fine. Leave it with me. Just give me a few days.'

Sophie was right.

A chill shoots through me when I see for the third time John's fixed gaze on my baby girl. He doesn't pretend to be discreet about it, either. It's no wonder Sophie's feeling so ... violated.

Later that evening, I slip out and march next door. Confrontation has never been my strong suit, but when it comes to protecting my daughter, the Mama Bear in me surfaces. I pound on John's door and take a step back.

The door swings open wide, and John emerges in his dressing gown.

‘Oh! Hello ... Eileen, was it?’ he says, smiling. ‘To what do I owe this pleasure?’

I’m rendered speechless, not for dread, but because I glimpse a photo of my Sophie standing beside the red Alfa on the wall opposite the door.

John follows my eyes, then hangs his head.

‘That’s my Kimberly,’ he sighs. ‘She passed away just weeks before her seventeenth birthday. She never even got to drive her car.’