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# 1.

*Disappeared. Simply disappeared.* The sentence lodged itself into her heart as she stood facing the reception desk at the police station. *My daughter has disappeared and the world is silent. Or to be exact, it's simply going on as usual.* A tall, broad-shouldered man in a dark blue jacket stood ahead of her and spoke to the desk clerk. Anna was impatient and stepped closer. *So what if he notices? He should hurry up. He should know the woman standing behind him is a mother whose daughter's gone missing.* She couldn't help overhearing; he was there because of his daughter, too.

"She's going to harm herself," he said and she could hear the crashing sounds. "She tried to commit suicide once already."

"How old is she?" the officer asked plainly, writing down his answers.

"Twenty-six." He presented the condensed version of her traumatic backstory: she had a psychotic episode, was admitted to a mental institute, put on medication, and then released. The man whose daughter's life was now in danger spoke in a low voice with an occasional tremor. He said that he had rented her a room in a women's boarding house because he didn't want her to be on her own. Anna was almost brushing against him, hidden like a shadow behind the blue veil of his jacket, but the father, who was completely absorbed in his own story, didn't even notice she was eavesdropping.

"She called me earlier today," explained the father as the story came to present day, "and asked me to empty out all my savings. She wants to buy the 'Pioneer House'—that's the place where she's staying—and start a jewelry business with her roommate. They want to sell their handmade jewelry at the Nachlat Binyamin market. She sounds like she's out of her mind. Things can become very dangerous."

“Yes, I understand,” said the clerk plainly. “But at the moment, there’s nothing I can do. She’s not a minor. Try contacting the county psychiatrist—that’s the law. My hands are tied as long as she’s doesn’t pose a threat to herself or others.”

“I tried contacting the county psychiatrist, but he’s on vacation.” The father transferred his weight from one leg to the other. “Listen, I’m a former cop myself; I know the procedures. Try bending the rules a bit and help me out.”

The police clerk lifted his gaze for the first time. A cop? It seemed as if he was scanning the entire database trying to recognize him.

“What’s your name?”

“Eran Avital.”

“How much longer?” Anna interrupted. *What is this, a reunion?*

“What do you mean ‘How much longer’? Are you filing the complaint together?”

“How long does it take to determine if someone is a threat to themselves? I’ve seen girls threaten to kill themselves, then do it because no one took them seriously.”

The man turned around immediately like a spring had come loose and gave her a hard yet silent stare.

“I saw someone standing on the roof of the Pioneer House, and the people below looked terrified. Someone with a bullhorn was trying to convince her not to jump.”

“Are you the mother?” the officer asked. “Please, keep your voice down.” He stood up from behind the huge counter so he could be at Anna’s eye level.

“Did you hear what she said?” cried the father quietly. “Are you going to send someone over there?!”

“Sign here. And here.”

“Eran Avi-tal.” The clerk repeated what he had written with annoying enthusiasm.

“Come on,” growled the tense father, still keeping his voice low. His complaint was finally being addressed.

Anna impatiently read the name printed on the officer's name-tag after hearing that a police car had been dispatched over the radio. "Daniel, can you take down my complaint now?"

The clerk lifted his gaze and seemed confused. "So you're not the mother?"

"Yes, I am. I'm a mom, but not her mom. I have a daughter of my own. Her name is Ronny. She's disappeared and I need the police's help."

"Ma'am, when did you last hear from her?" The officer didn't like being manipulated, and he didn't like being called by his first name.

"Today." She swept aside a strand of hair that was bothering her. She didn't like being called "ma'am."

"That's not long enough, ma'am. You can file a complaint after forty-eight hours." The clerk settled back into his chair behind the desk, buried his gaze into his paperwork, and refused to make eye contact with her again.

"Forty-eight hours?! Are you kidding me! She could be killed a thousand times over till then." Anna stomped her foot helplessly and started pushing aside her hair from left to right, the way Ronny did when her hair got into her eyes. Then she did the same exact thing from right to left. The officer maintained his poker face and seemed to have only one tone of voice at his disposal. Dry and flat. Monotonous.

It was cold in the police station but she felt a heat wave coming on; her armpits were tingly and sweaty. More than anything, her own words scared her, which only infuriated her even more. "Look, Officer Daniel, her friends haven't heard from her since the day before yesterday, which means it's already been forty-eight hours."

"Ma'am, I strongly suggest you come back tomorrow, and please keep your voice down."

Eran, who had rushed out to catch the squad car returned—he had forgotten his cell phone on the counter. Before heading out

again, he placed his hand on Anna's shoulder and she immediately felt calmer, as if she had been touched with a magic wand. It was obvious her tantrum wasn't going to get her anywhere. Raising her voice would only make the clerk more stubborn.

"You know what?" She softened her tone considerably. "If I'm already here, would you be willing to take down my information and complete my form? Tomorrow's Tuesday; I have to be in court and I won't be able to make it back here unless I cancel my hearing ..."

She leaned over the counter, pressing her breasts against it so that her cleavage was right at his eye level. "I would be extremely grateful if you would be willing to save me the trip."

The officer was suddenly appeased. It was a foolproof method—the traces of that thought immediately scattered below Anna's brow.

"Fine. Step into the first room on the right," he said. "I'll send a detective in."

Anna stepped inside the room; she was dying for a cigarette. She obviously couldn't smoke inside the police station, but everyone there was extremely tense. Maybe they would be willing to make an exception? Maybe she could light one quickly before the detective walked in, and if he insisted, then she'd put it out. But the room was very small ... What if he was sensitive to smoke? And would that make him eager to leave the room? And what if he didn't have any patience for her? She had quit smoking after all ... so she restrained herself.

The detective walked in holding a missing persons form. It had the Israeli Police logo printed across at the top and Anna managed to read the date upside down: October 25, 2004. The detective filled out the known details and gave Anna a nod that he was ready to take down her information.

"Our computer system is down at the moment and I don't want to hold you up, so I'll be filling the form out by hand." He made an effort to give her a friendly smile.

She didn't respond.