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The night is cold , wind sizziling my skin as its the only thing i can feel and the only sound i can hear as i run towards my house. The sidewalks are highlighted in blue in red and every window on the block is a tint of yellow with a pair of eyes looking through. But i dont have time to look at the concerned and shocked faces of my neighbors. I dont have time to ask what happened i just need to go. That was the only thought i had when i got off the bus and the only thought i had till i stop.... infront of my house where all the police were stationed. The impact of the sound the sirens made toned out my frantic voice from reaching my own ears. “What happened?!” “let me through! Let me through!let me through!” “where is my daughter?!” ‘LET ME THROUGH!’

When I opened the door a dozen unfamiliar faces were going up and down my house and all turned to me. It had to be the highest body count my house had ever hosted yet it felt so cold. “Where is my daughter?” I said as I strode in. one officer said “ in her room” and they all just carried on with their gloves and tubes. Usually, when I get home a walk up the stairs it meant seeing the kind face of my daughter fast asleep, it meant curling into a warm bed with my boyfriend. It was a consistent reward from working on the street for what most people would call pocket change . but now these stairs seem too long and the ventilation coming down is crisp. By the time I reached Krystals room my sweat had already become to feel like glacial droplets.

The door was wide open and as I looked inside there she was curled up into the arms of a stranger. She was okay...she was okay. I run towards the bed and reach for her 'Krystal mihja! you're okay? I'm so sorry I'm so sorry I knew me and Brutus shouldn't have left you alone with a babysitter.....where's your babysitter?' I look up to the stranger comforting my daughter " where is the babysitter?" from what I've seen in the past her eyes showed that she had some bad news, very bad news. She let go of Krystal and placed her into my arms, t felt as though she did that to comfort me more than her. "Ma'am my name is officer Ikram, we had received a call today from a neighbor who heard loud screams coming from your house. When we got to the house the suspect, Mason Garcia, was holding your daughter down with his pants unbuckled."she sighed "we've tried talking to your daughter but she had only just stopped screaming moments ago, please come along with us to the station to see if we can get anything out of your daughter and mister Garcia" I couldn't tell if the tear that dropped to my collarbone was mine or Krystals at this point as I shook my head.

At the station, I sat outside the room they took Krystal in. they said they needed to talk to her in private. The only thing keeping me calm is... well nothing, nothing keeping me calm: not Krystal's blanket, not the backpack we always have ready for her, not her stupid smiling curious George doll with a banana Krystal drew on his stomach. Everything in my hands is met to comfort my little girl. Not me.

" WHERE IS HE?!" I turned and I see Brutus storming though " Where is that fucking bastard?!" his greased fist are squeezed so tight that you see the white seeping through. His nose widening as he took fuming breathes until he turned his face towards me, and exhaled. His hard eyes become soft as mine become wet. Brutus and I met when Krystal was about two years

old at the supermarket close to home. I honestly don't know how but he caught me by surprise and slipped into the cracks very few people are in. I think its the way he treats Krystal, like his own, and the example he gives her as of how a man should treat everybody. We've been together for five years now, two living in the same rental home and I've never been more thankful for meeting him than right now.

“Its okay baby, it's over,” he takes my face and wipes away my tears “ ya want me to get you to some hot chocolate and a pack of popcorn. Or see if they have that oolong tea thing you like?” I just shake my head and pull him down to the seat next to mine “tired, just tired” I rummage through the Dora backpack for a packet of lays and hand it to him as I lay my head “just eat and wait with me.”

It is now 12:13 am, five different people have gone into the room where Krystal is. One female, three males. Two had tried to approach me but the not much conversation was passed, I was never good with people I didn't know. So they just assured me that she was a top priority and is being treated with the utmost care in that room. All I could do was a nod and offer a small smile, but I didn't mean it. A room with a closed door is anything but safe to me right now, it's just a sign that I have to wait longer to comfort her. ‘Mrs. flores I'm going to have to ask you to follow me.’ my head shot up to the woman at my side who I saw go in before, shes no longer wearing her coat. As Brutus and I stood up she placer her hand on my arm ‘Just Mrs.flores.’ “but im-” “sorry sir but the only way we can get answers more quickly is if everyone follows orders.” her eyes lingered on him in a way I couldn't put it. Her voice was calm but her eyes seemed to want to say more. “It's okay, just home and rest you have work in three hours ” he hesitated and hummed and stood there as we walked away. “ where is he going?” “ just home.”.

The room was warm and earth-toned, like the color of natural clay found in the ground. Around us were photos and drawings of kids and by kids, each with a lady holding their hands. Detective Delilah Ikmar on the table plack. I've waited for 30 more minutes in a whole entirely different room with my own door and lock to keep me here. The officer came in through the entrance and made her way to the desk.

“ Ma’am how did you meet the gentleman who was outside with you.?”

“um... We met when I was in high school and we've been together since.”

“Is he the father?”

“No... the father isnt with us anymore.”

“ does he know she isnt the father?”

“Yes.”

“ does he live with you”

“Yes”

“ how does he treat Krystal?”

“ like his own, they play all the time has really protective of her that's why...that's why he was so serious in suggesting that I shouldn't go sell today and stayed home instead of hiring ese Maldito-”

“ has he ever acted strange, in a way where you wouldn't categorize as fatherly ?”

“No he's always the first anything relating to her.”

“Mrs. Flores through questioning and DNA results, anything found in Krystal's bedroom shows that the most Mr. Garcia did was try to wake your daughter up from a nightmare, but” she pulls out the folder as I hold my breath. “ there are multiple pieces of clothing in Krystal's room with

sperm residue. We've checked if she herself had any of the same DNA in her but there seemed no sign of anything. I'm going to have to ask you do you know who's in your house?"

"Ma'am, can you answer the question?"

"Ma'am " she touched my shoulder and I shook "I know this is all coming at you in one go and that you need to take it in but we speculate that its either one of your neighbors or the boyfriend who has been living with you i know this could come as a surprise but this is actually a very common case.' I know it is. 'What was that Ma'am?"

"Nothing just.. In shock"

' Both Garcia and Krystal kept mentioning something called el cuco, apparently, she was yelling it in her sleep, what is that?"

" its a folktale people from my culture would tell kids to make sure they don't stay out too late and go to sleep faster. But it's not like a real thing. She didn't describe him or anything?"

"Ma'am... I don't know how to tell you but from we got there's one main culprit and its the young man who was with you outside. With the multiple incidents and no sign of intrusion through any windows or door, the culprit had to have access to the house, so unless your landlord comes in for nightly visits.... Im sorry."

At that moment all of the memories of Krystal and Brutus came flooding in and I didn't believe it.

"Your wrong!"

" we won't know until we get a sample of his sperm but as of right now you have to understand why were suspecting him.... I-" a knock at the door stopped her in midsentence " detective I need to talk to you about some new evidence on the Rodriguez case."

“Not at the moment off-” I stand up

“it's okay I need to go to the bathroom I'm feeling a little... sick as you could guess. I need time to organize everything up here.” I open the door and allow the officer to come through and close the door as calm as I could be. But as I make my way down the hall everything was enhanced, the clicking of my shoes, the ticks of the clocks, all up until I sprint towards the street to hail a cab.

‘Dont touch me!’ he knew

“Tio please!” he knew

“Mommy! Ayuda!” she knew

Flashbacks of growing up in my homeland. Flashbacks of me at night. Of always crying once I heard the click of the door shut. Always making sure that no one would come near us.

Flashbacks of him and her playing with her and calling him el cuco. El fucking cuco

“Why does el cuco come to play only when you're asleep?” i cant believe i let him in.

By the time I had reached the house the police had already arrived. Brutus had killed himself with a letter saying he's sorry in our bedroom, he said he had closed the door in case Krystal had came with me. Yet when they took his body back to the forensic department they said the DNA wasnt a match.”

The end