

Short Story

Timothy “Tim” Hines, was a man known well by his neighbors. He was a loving husband and father to two daughters. He and his wife Lydia both worked for the same company Bristlecone Corporate. A software company in their hometown of Banyan. His oldest daughter Janet was in college for her second year, home for a long winter break after having a tedious and stressful first semester at a new college in Amherst. His youngest daughter Natalie was in middle school who is in the school’s drama club.

Mr. Hines was seen in his black Honda on his way to Natalie’s school to pick her up. The roads were clear and hardly any cars or pedestrians were in sight. Mr. Hines appeared calm yet slightly weary due a long day at work, helping his wife with tickets and attending meetings with his co-workers. The route Mr. Hines normally took about fifteen minutes. The road itself was patchy and had sustained damage as a result of snow plows clearing the roads constantly last winter. Mr. Hines was very careful to avoid every pothole, having damaged one of his tires last spring.

Mr. Hines arrives five to three at the front of Natalie’s school, lined up alongside the other parents who are all waiting in their cars for their kids. Five minutes pass, then ten minutes pass. It was 3:15, but Mr. Hines wasn’t worried, thinking that the drama club is still rehearsing. The school doors suddenly swing open, and the children inside emerge. Mr. Hines watches the children walking to their parent’s cars and observes, looking for Natalie.

After all the parents leave, Mr. Hines was the only car left. His daughter didn’t leave with the crowd. Mr. Hines grew worried and was about to step out of the car. Then the door opened, and there she appeared, his daughter Natalie with her pink backpack and pigtails outfront. She walked to the car humming a soft tune.

“Hey Dad! I’m here!” Natalie

“Hello dear, late rehearsal?” Mr. Hines asked as he sighed with relief,

“Yeah, Mrs. Pulaski is so serious about this play. She made us stay overtime”

Mr. Hines drives away with his daughter in tow. As they leave, the school door swings open and someone is seen running out to the sidewalk to reach Mr. Hine’s car. Only their black shoes can be seen. As Mr. Hines is driving away, he notices his daughter still humming, and smiling. He smiles seeing his daughter happy.

Suddenly his phone rings, the ringtone was his wife’s. Mr. Hines picks up the phone and answers.

“Hello?” Mr. Hines answered,

“Hi Honey, did you pick up Natalie from school?” His wife asked,

“I did and we are on the way home, why?” He answered confidently,

“I just got a call from her, she said she saw you driving away” Lydia said with nervousness in her tone,

“What do you mean?” Mr. Hines asked confusingly,

“Natalie is still at the school, she said you didn’t pick her up”

Mr. Hines’ heart dropped. He notices Natalie humming louder and more ominously. A chill goes down his spine and he slowly looks to his right at the passenger's seat where Natalie was. She disappeared. He then looks at the road and sees a deer jump out in front of him. Startled, he swerves his car off road and crashes into a tree in the forest.

The Honda is seen smashed and Mr. Hines was seen in his seat, unresponsive. The deer on the road had disappeared. Police sirens and lights were seen coming to the scene of the crash from a distance as a girl’s laugh was heard echoing from the woods.