

ABANDONED  
By  
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**EXT. BUSH CLEARING - DAY**

A MAN and WOMAN wearing party hats sit on a picnic blanket littered with cake, soda bottles and lollies. The couple smile and cheer as they watch...

ELLA (6), their cute daughter with long curly hair performs cartwheels across the grass. She stops, beckons her parents.

Her mother instantly gets to her feet and hurries over. Ella performs a handstand. Her mother catches her feet to balance her.

While Ella can't see, her father breaks a capsule, tips the contents into a cup and tops it up with soda.

**EXT. BUSH CLEARING - LATER**

With cake around her mouth, Ella's eyes droop as she slumps against her mother.

Her parents eye each other. Her father nods. With tears in her eyes, her mother lays Ella on the grass as her father quickly packs up the picnic.

Without a backward glance, the couple hurry into the thick bush, leaving Ella behind.

**EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY**

Sobbing, Ella stumbles from the bush onto the road, her hair a tangled mess, exposed skin scratched and dirty. A forlorn little girl in the middle of nowhere.

A car hurtles around a bend. Brakes screech. The car skids, barely misses Ella.

Shaken, ROSE MACKENZIE (30), attractive, gets out, runs to Ella, kneels before her.

ROSE  
Are you okay, sweetie?

Ella shakes her head, unable to talk through her sobs.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Where's your Mommy and Daddy?

Ella throws her arms around Rose, continues to cry. Surprised, Rose picks her up, turns in a circle.

ROSE (CONT'D)  
Hello?! Anybody here?!

Only the constant hum of cicadas answer.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - DAY**

Ella sits on the breakfast table while Rose finds a first aid kit in a cupboard.

ROSE

You sure you don't remember your last name, Ella?

Ella snuffles, shakes her head as she watches Rose's every move. Rose pours disinfectant on a cotton balls and inches toward Ella's scratched legs. Ella jerks away.

ROSE (CONT'D)

It's okay, sweetie. We just need to clean these up. Then we can find your Mommy and Daddy.

ELLA

No!

Startled by the outburst, Rose jerks back.

ROSE

You don't want to go home?

ELLA

They hate me.

ROSE

No they don't. They'll be so worried.

ELLA

(sobbing)

They left me on purpose. They said I make them sick!

ROSE

I'm sure that's not true.

ELLA

Yes it is!

Rose frowns, uncertain now.

ROSE

Ella. We need to go to the police, tell them what happened.

Ella cries harder, shakes her head.

Rose chews her bottom lip, her heart breaking at the sight of the distressed little girl.

ELLA

Please, don't. Please...

Rose wraps Ella in her arms, holds her tight.

ROSE  
I won't. I promise.

**INT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Finding Nemo plays on the TV.

Rose sits on the couch with Ella nestled beside her, now clean and cosy.

The front door opens and closes in the hallway. Footsteps approach the living room.

ANDREW MACKENZIE (35), wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase, stops in the doorway.

ANDREW  
(annoyed)  
Rose?

Rose begins to stand, but Ella grips her arm, hangs on for dear life.

ROSE  
It's okay, I'll be back in a second.

Ella reluctantly lets go, gives Andrew a shy look.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Andrew follows Rose into the kitchen, picks up the cordless phone, holds it out to her.

ANDREW  
Rose, you know you have to do it.

Rose takes the phone and stares at the keypad. Slowly, she looks up at her husband.

ROSE  
I can't. I promised her.

ANDREW  
It's not up to you. It's up to the police. You want us to wind up in jail?

ROSE  
You don't know what she's been through.

ANDREW  
You told me on the phone.

ROSE

But she's so cute, Andrew. If you'd just give her a chance to--

ANDREW

Rose. Call the police.

Rose's grip tightens on the phone as her eyes blaze with determination. She flings the phone at the floor, shattering the plastic casing.

Andrew stares at her in shock.

ANDREW

Rose...

She advances on him, jabs her finger into his chest.

ROSE

No. You listen to me. I've wanted her for ten years. You said we had to wait, we needed more money. So I waited. Then when you said it was okay, it didn't work.

ANDREW

You can't just keep her because--

ROSE

I always do everything you say! Well, it's time you do what I want. She stays.

Andrew realizes she's serious.

ANDREW

Where the hell're we supposed to say she came from? Out of the sky?

ROSE

We say she's my sick cousin's kid and we have to look after her. And then, after a while, my cousin dies and... well, we can't abandon her. So we keep her.

Uncomfortable, Andrew loosens his tie.

ANDREW

I don't think--

ROSE

I don't care what you think, Andrew. I'm keeping her. It's up to you whether or not you want to keep me.

**INT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Andrew cautiously enters, his jacket and tie now gone, the top button on his shirt undone.

The Finding Nemo credits roll on the TV.

Andrew kneels front of Ella, a sheepish grin on his face. He holds out his right hand.

ANDREW

Hi, I'm Andrew.

Ella stares at her lap, then shyly peeks at him. Slowly, she takes his hand and shakes it.

ANDREW

Nice to meet you, Ella.

ELLA

Are you going to make me go away?

ANDREW

Apparently not.

Ella launches herself at him, hugs him tight. Caught off guard, Andrew tentatively hugs her back.

Rose appears in the doorway, smiles.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - DAY**

Rose stands at the kitchen bench stirring coffee. Ella eats cereal at the breakfast table.

Andrew enters, dressed for work. As he passes Ella, he plants a kiss on top of her head.

ANDREW

Morning ladies.

Ella grins at him, stands up on her chair and kisses his cheek. Touched by the gesture, he looks at Rose.

Pleased, she grins as he walks over and hugs her, putting his mouth close to her ear.

ANDREW

(whispering)

Nothing on the news today?

ROSE

Nothing.

He pulls back to look at her face.

ANDREW

Good.

Rose's smile widens and she kisses him.

**INT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Andrew joins Rose and Ella on the couch. A game show plays on TV.

ROSE

I'd better check on dinner.

Rose hurries out just as the game show finishes.

Ella scoops up the remote control and flicks the TV over to The Simpsons.

ANDREW

Hey, it's news time, Ella.

ELLA

But I want The Simpsons.

ANDREW

Not tonight.

Ella turns on the charm, her eyes pleading.

Andrew grins, shakes his head.

ANDREW

That's not working tonight, cute stuff.

He grabs the remote from her hand and changes the channel.

Ella crosses her arms over her chest, glares at the TV.

Trying not to smile, Andrew watches her from the corner of his eye. Gradually, his amusement vanishes. He suddenly grips his stomach, groans.

Dropping the remote, Andrew gets up and, half crouched over in pain, hurries from the room.

Ella picks up the remote, flicks the channel back to The Simpsons, and smiles.

**INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT**

Rose knocks on the bathroom door. Andrew groans from the other side.

ROSE

Are you okay, honey?

ANDREW (O.S.)  
Oh God... diarrhea... it's bad...

Rose screws up her face.

ROSE  
Ahh... okay. Dinner'll be ready  
soon. I'll keep it warm for you.

Andrew lets out another long groan.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - LATER**

Rose serves dinner onto three plates.

ROSE  
(loud)  
Dinner!

From the living room, the final beat of The Simpsons music plays. A moment later, Ella bounds into the kitchen and sits at the table.

Turning from the bench, Rose places a plate in front of Ella, then raises her eyes to the doorway, surprised.

Andrew walks in, a sheepish grin on his face.

ROSE  
That was a fast recovery.

He shrugs and takes a seat, gives Ella a quick wink.

ANDREW  
It just... stopped. Feels like  
I've lost ten pounds, though.

Rose turns back to the bench to collect the plates, a slight frown forming on her face.

**INT. HALLWAY - DAY**

Standing at the front door with her handbag over her shoulder, Rose takes out her car keys. She looks down the hallway, puts her hands on her hips.

ROSE  
Come on, Ella. Let's go.

Ella sits at the other end of the hallway, arms crossed over her chest, lips pouting.

Not impressed, Rose stares at her.



ROSE

Ella. You need to go to the doctors for a check up, and that's final.

Turning, she opens the door.

ROSE

Now move it.

Ella remains motionless.

Rose's anger suddenly turns to surprise. Her hand comes up to her mouth and she bolts down the hallway, disappearing into the bathroom and retching loudly.

Ella rises, slowly walks toward the bathroom door. She looks inside, a slight smile on her face.

ELLA

It's okay, Rosie. I'll make you better.

**INT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Rose lies on the couch, a thermometer in her mouth, a bucket on the floor at her side.

Playing nurse, Ella folds a wash cloth and places it gently over Rose's forehead. With great concentration, she removes the thermometer from Rose's mouth and inspects the reading.

ROSE

Has it gone down?

Ella smiles.

ELLA

Do we still have to go to the doctor?

ROSE

No. It's too late now.

The front door opens and closes. A moment later, Andrew walks in, his face instantly creasing with concern.

ANDREW

What's wrong?

Rose sits up, feeling better.

ROSE

I felt sick all day, but... I guess whatever it was has gone.

Ella launches herself into Andrew's arms.

ELLA  
Can we get pizza for dinner?

ANDREW  
I don't really like--

Rose's eyes widen in panic.

ROSE  
Yes! Pizza'd be great.

Andrew looks at her, confused.

ANDREW  
You know I hate--

Rose glares at him.

ROSE  
I've been sick most of the day.  
There's nothing to eat. Pizza  
sounds great.

He sighs heavily in frustration.

ANDREW  
Fine.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - LATER**

Rose enters with a pizza box and empty soft drink cans. She dumps them on the bench and takes a deep breath. A noise startles her from behind. She whips around.

Andrew leans against the door frame with a curious stare.

ANDREW  
What the hell's going on?

Rose holds a finger to her lips.

ROSE  
(whispering)  
Is she asleep?

Andrew nods.

Rose hurries toward him, takes his hand, pulls him away from the doorway and closes the door.

ANDREW  
Rose...

ROSE  
(whispering)  
Shhhh. I don't want her to hear.

ANDREW  
Hear what?

Rose leans in close, her voice trembling.

ROSE  
I don't know how, but, Ella...  
she can make people sick.

Andrew frowns as he places a hand on her forehead.

ANDREW  
Are you delirious?

Rose grabs his arm, panic on her face.

ROSE  
(hissing)  
Listen to me! She didn't want to  
go to the doctors today, then I  
suddenly got sick.

ANDREW  
That's ridiculous.

ROSE  
What happened last night? Before  
you got sick? Did you refuse to  
let her do what she wanted?

Andrew's eyes widen in surprise.

Hope surges through Rose.

ROSE  
I'm right, aren't I?

Andrew forcefully removes her hand from his arm and takes a step back.

ANDREW  
You're out of your mind, is what  
you are.

ROSE  
Andrew... please...

Andrew opens the kitchen door, slams it behind him.

Rose stares after him, lip trembling.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - MORNING**

Rose washes the dishes at the sink. Ella sits at the table, drawing with colored pencils.

Andrew strides in and kisses Ella on top of the head.

Rose turns, watches him, but he refuses to meet her gaze. He grabs an apple from the fruit bowl and walks out. A moment later the back door slams.

Ella looks up at Rose.

ELLA  
Is Andy mad?

Rose looks through the window, thinks.

ROSE  
He's always grumpy when the lawn  
needs mowing.

ELLA  
That's dumb.

Rose watches through the window as Andrew wheels the lawn mower into the front yard. She empties the water from the sink, turns to Ella as she dries her hands.

ROSE  
You know, maybe we should give  
him a break, cheer him up.

Ella's eyes brighten.

ROSE  
Why don't we all go down to the  
pool? Wouldn't that be fun?

ELLA  
He won't be grumpy at the pool?

ROSE  
No way. The pool's his favorite  
place. Why don't you go and ask  
him?

Excited, Ella runs out.

**INT/EXT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Rose stands at the window, watches.

Outside, Ella tugs on Andrew's pants. He shakes his head. Ella stamps her foot in protest. Andrew shakes his head again, points inside.

Ella turns away from him, a scowl on her face. She crosses her arms over her chest as she marches back to the house.

Bending over the mower, Andrew pulls the cord until it splutters to life. He pushes the mower, but after a few steps, he stops, a bewildered look on his face.

Rose waits, her eyes wide.

Suddenly, his knees buckle and he collapses to the ground.

**EXT. MACKENZIE FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS**

Rose bursts through the front door, runs toward Andrew. She kneels beside him, the mower loud as it continues to run.

Andrew looks up at her with fear, his face drenched in sweat, his breaths sharp gasps.

ANDREW

Rose?

Rose bends over him, whispers in his ear.

**INT. MACKENZIE LIVING ROOM - LATER**

Andrew lies on the couch with a blanket over him, his eyes half open, his body shivering violently.

Ella creeps in, half a glass of chocolate milk in her hand, a milk mustache on her upper lip. She walks toward the couch, looks at Andrew.

ELLA

Can we go swimming when you're better?

Andrew nods slowly, his teeth chattering.

ANDREW

I'd... love... to.

Ella smiles at him, then takes a long drink of milk.

**INT. MACKENZIE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Ella skips into the kitchen, the empty glass in her hand.

Rose looks up from the magazine on the table.

ROSE

You look happy.

Ella puts the glass on the table next to Rose.

ELLA

Andy said we can go to the pool.

Rose picks up the glass, takes it to the sink.

ROSE  
I don't think so, sweetie. He's  
pretty sick.

Rose rinses the glass, grabs the dish cloth and wipes the milk from Ella's mouth.

Andrew walks into the room. Apart from the fear in his eyes, he looks perfectly healthy.

Ella squeals with delight, runs to him. He scoops her up and looks at Rose.

Rose nods.

ANDREW  
I guess we're off to the pool.

**INT. MACKENZIE CAR - CONTINUOUS**

Ella lies unconscious on the back seat.

Andrew drives while Rose stares back at Ella.

**EXT. BUSH - LATER**

Andrew carries an unconscious Ella through the thick bush. Rose hurries beside them. Tears run down her cheeks as she holds Ella's limp hand.

ROSE  
I'm so sorry, sweetie.

ANDREW  
We have to. Just like you said.  
Leave her where her parents left  
her. Pretend this never happened.

ROSE  
It still hurts.

ANDREW  
It'll hurt more if we don't.  
She'll destroy us. Her parents  
knew what they were doing.

ROSE  
We'll be okay, won't we?

ANDREW  
We will be soon.

**EXT. BUSH - LATER**

Ella wakes in the bush, rubs at her eyes. She sits up and scans the trees.

ELLA  
Rosie? Andy?

The hum of the cicadas swells.

Ella's eyes narrow as her mouth sets in a pout. She gets up, stomps through the bush.

**EXT. MACKENZIE HOUSE - MORNING**

Wearing a dressing gown, Rose opens the front door and picks up the folded newspaper on the doorstep. Turning to go inside, she glances at the paper, notices the headline:

COUPLE'S DEATH A MYSTERY - CHILD STILL MISSING.

Slowly unfolding the newspaper, she reveals a wedding photo of Ella's mother and father. The next fold in the paper reveals a photo of Ella smiling angelically.

Rose stares in shock as she scans the article.

A drop of blood splashes onto the newspaper.

Rose wipes her nose, then inspects the blood now smeared on her fingers. Her hand begins to tremble.

Dropping the paper, she runs inside.

ROSE  
(screaming)  
Andrew! Andrew!

THE END