The Mirror

She coos, cradled in his loving arms. He caresses her cheek, murmurs in her ear. “You’re my beautiful baby. I’ll love you forever.” She drifts off to sleep, comforted by his warmth.

She jumps, arms waving, until she is scooped up by his strong hands. He swings her around, and she squeals in delight. He pulls her close. “You’re my beautiful baby. I’ll love you forever.” She snuggles against his warm neck and sinks into the contours of his body.

She stands in her prom dress, waiting for him to take a picture. He snaps it. She has his attention; she’s always had it. “You’re my beautiful baby. I’ll love you forever.” She smiles and kisses his cheek.

She tucks her graduation cap under her arm and clutches his hands. His face shines. His eyes twinkle. “You’re my beautiful baby. I’ll love you forever.” She is enveloped in his arms.

She embraces him and he holds her for a long moment. She doesn’t want him to let go. He starts to give her away, but pulls her back. “You’re my beautiful baby. I’ll love you forever.” She steps toward the altar.

She squeezes her fiancé’s hand and waits to be prompted. They face each other and she stares into his eyes. He says, “I promise to love and respect you. Cherish and protect you.” Her heart swells.

Her head aches after talking with family and friends. They’d called and emailed, but the messages didn’t reach her. She questions him. He attempts to cover the truth. “You’re mine. You’ll be with me forever.” Her muscles tighten.

Her tears flow as harsh words penetrate her ears. Guilt floods her for wanting to work outside the home. She’s crazy. She’s selfish. She doesn’t value him. “You’re mine. You’ll be with me forever.” Her breathing quickens.

Her cheeks blush when he insults her in front of her friends. She tells him he hurt her. He mocks her and then slams his fist on the dining room table. “You’re mine. You’ll be with me forever.” Her stomach churns.

Her blood pulses when he glares at her. He throws a picture frame across the room. Her deceased father’s smile disappears beneath broken glass. He jabs his finger in her face. “You’re mine. You’ll be with me forever.” Her body trembles.

Her hand shakes as she applies cosmetics to conceal the dark bruise under her left eye. She looks into the mirror and sees her father smiling back. Her eyes water and she blinks. Her husband stands behind her, staring. “You’re mine. You’ll be with me forever.” Her heart breaks.