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• SHE'S SO COLD •



The Crowe Family

Day One: Escondido, California

January 21, 1998

6:30 a.m.

Judith Kennedy stirred in her bed, awakened by an irritating buzz she couldn't identify.

Slowly, still not fully awake, she realized it was her granddaughter's alarm clock. It was time for Stephanie and the other two children to get up and start getting ready for school.

Judith lay quietly for a few seconds, collecting her thoughts. *Come on, Stephanie, wake up! Turn off that gosh-darned alarm!*

Reluctantly, Grandma Judith Kennedy pushed back the covers and groped for her robe. She could see Shannon, still fast asleep, on the other bed. Stephanie's 10-year-old sister had not been disturbed by the alarm, and neither had anyone else. There were no signs of movement from any part of the house—the home of her daughter and son-in-law. Judith was sharing Shannon's room, as she always did when staying with the Crowes.

Still groggy, Judith made her way down the hallway. She was barely able to see. It was early and still not light outside. Stephanie's bedroom doorway was inset in a shallow alcove, so there was even less light there. She felt for Stephanie's partly open door, found it, then pushed it open further with her hand. Softly calling Stephanie's name, she moved into the room, striking something with her foot—something large and soft. She fumbled for the light switch and gasped.

On the floor lay Stephanie. She appeared to be covered with mud. *Mud!* Judith's mind madly screamed the instant assessment, while part of her knew that was absurd.

“Oh, my God!” she cried out in horror. “Cheryl! Steven! Come quick! It's Stephanie! She's covered in mud. Hurry, she's covered in mud!” Over and over she shouted the same thing, waking all the others.

All except Stephanie, who remained motionless on the floor.

Steve Crowe flew out of bed and raced down the hall. Reaching Stephanie's doorway, he collapsed to his knees. Still half asleep, he stared at his daughter in shock. His thoughts were a tsunami—he couldn't make any sense of what he was seeing: his daughter lying prone in a pool of brown, her sightless eyes wide and glassy.

Shuddering uncontrollably, he bent over her body and cradled her head. Her eyes were so vacant; her body stiff and cold. It wasn't mud that covered her body, but blood. He quickly scanned

her body, unable to believe what he was seeing. Stephanie was covered in blood!

No! his mind screamed. Steve howled like a wounded animal. “No! No!” he cried out.

He couldn't stop his screams as tears poured down his face. “No! No! No!” His screams were agonizing.

The sound penetrated the very soul of his wife, Cheryl, who had climbed out of bed and made her way to the awful scene. Over Steven's shoulder, she took in the hideous view from the doorway.

Why was Stephanie all covered in brown stuff? Why was she just staring like that? Why was Steve screaming?

Cheryl melted to the floor and lifted her daughter's lifeless body into her arms. Cradling her fiercely, her mind pushed away all coherent thought. She was shaking so severely, she could barely form words.

“Stephanie, it's Mommy... Please talk to me, baby.”

Gently, she stroked her daughter's face, which she could barely see through her wall of tears. “Mommy will make it all better,” she whispered into the dead eyes of her daughter as she rocked back and forth.

I need to warm Stephanie up. That's all I need to do is make her warm again. Once she's was warm, she'll be fine, her tormented mind kept telling her.

Her wail was horrific. “*God, please help me get her warm again!*” she sobbed. She looked up at her mother through tear-drenched eyes.

“Oh, Mom, she's so cold!” Cheryl Crowe wailed, pulling Stephanie more tightly against her. Rocking back and forth, back and forth, she fiercely clutched her daughter to her chest. “We're warm now... we're warm now...” she babbled, her eyes filled with terror.

When the paramedics arrived, Cheryl Crowe was still clutching her daughter's cold body to her breast, drowning in desperation.

Her face a map of anguish, Cheryl refused to let go of Stephanie. The paramedics gently coaxed her until she finally relented. But they may as well have let this mother cling to her child's body. There was nothing to be done by any medic.

Stephanie had been dead for more than six hours.

So began that dreadful day for the Crowe family. And so began a terrible and protracted ordeal that started with the brutal murder of a beloved child and spiraled into a law enforcement and judicial nightmare, indescribable in its impact and its cruelty.

It was the soon-to-be infamous "Crowe Murder Case."