

⚠ WARNING:
MATURE CONTENT

Whatever Happened to Megan Marie?

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PAGETURNERS®

Chapter 1

Cathy North had been teaching U.S. history for four months. She was twenty-two and the youngest teacher at Cascade High School. This morning she was especially looking forward to her class. Today was the first day of student presentations.

It was a presidential election year. And the students had been learning about the political process. In the weeks before, they'd been talking about how the media covered a campaign. They compared online news to TV news.

This election was particularly heated. Both sides were attacking each other. The candidates for president were accusing each other of being dishonest and unqualified.

The polls showed that Americans were split down the middle. One half was for the male candidate, Senator Dean Mason. The other half supported the former vice president Jan Hudson.

The class assignment was to choose a candidate and make a campaign video for either online news or TV news. At the end the students would vote for their favorite video.

The first presentation was going to be from Megan Marie Kane. And Cathy couldn't wait to see it. The sixteen-year-old had actually met with Senator Mason. Her father had paid for her to travel to his headquarters. It would be interesting to see how she used that in her video.

Right now there was no sign of her. But Cathy wasn't worried yet. It could be that Megan was running late. Although even that seemed unlikely. She was always on time. Then the bell rang. And her desk in

the front row was still empty. Cathy didn't remember that the girl had ever been absent.

Megan seemed to be the perfect student. She was smart and respectful. She was always excited about learning new things. Besides having excellent grades, Megan was also a good athlete. She was on the school's soccer team. It was students like her that gave Cascade High a good reputation.

"Has anyone seen Megan?" Cathy asked the class.

Nobody had seen her. After class, Cathy went to the school office. She wanted to see if Megan's parents had contacted the school. Maybe she was sick. But no call or email had come in.

"I'll be calling her parents in a few minutes," the office clerk said.

"Give them my number," Cathy said. "Ask them to call me so she can make up her presentation."

There was a reason the teacher felt so

connected to her student. Megan reminded Cathy of herself at that age. They both had short curly blond hair and blue eyes. And they were both very focused. Cathy had always put school over a social life. Megan was the same way. The two could have been sisters. Cathy went back to the office.

“Let us know if you hear anything,” the clerk was saying into the phone. Then she hung up and looked at Cathy. “That was Mrs. Kane. She said Megan left for school at the usual time this morning. Seven o’clock.”

Cathy nodded. It seemed odd that the girl hadn’t made it to school. Normally Cathy wouldn’t be this worried about a student being late. But this was different. She knew how disciplined Megan was. She even parked in the same spot every day.

“Maybe she had a flat tire. Or she ran out of gas,” the clerk said.

“You’re probably right,” Cathy said. It was time to teach her next class.

Right afterward, she checked again with the office clerk. “I haven’t heard a word,” the clerk said. “But I wouldn’t worry. Kids are like this. They get an urge to skip school. And nothing can stop them.” She smiled. “I remember doing it, don’t you? It wasn’t that long ago for you.”

Cathy wasn’t smiling. Clearly the clerk didn’t know Megan. She would never skip school. She was too responsible. And the idea that she had car trouble didn’t make sense. She would have called road service or let someone know. Cathy was beginning to wonder if something bad happened to her student.

Chapter 2

The last bell rang. School was over. After Cathy organized her desk and straightened up the classroom, she headed for the parking lot. Once inside her car, she checked her phone. She'd received a call from Megan's mom. Cathy decided to wait and call her from home.

As soon as Cathy entered her apartment, she sat down and called Mrs. Kane.

"Kane residence," a voice said.

It must be the Kanes' housekeeper. Cathy asked to speak to Mrs. Kane.

After a few seconds, she heard a voice.

"Hello?" a woman said.

"Hi. This is Cathy North, Megan's history teacher. I got your message, Mrs.

Kane. And I'm so glad you called me. I've been a little worried about Megan. Is everything all right?"

"No, it isn't," Mrs. Kane said. "We don't know where Megan is. Her friends don't know anything either. My husband has called the police. I was just wondering if maybe you'd heard from her. She's told me how much she likes you. I thought maybe she'd contacted you."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Kane. She hasn't. I wish there—"

Before Cathy could get the words out, she heard talking in the background. It sounded like a man's voice. Then there was a commotion.

"Who is this?" the voice said into the phone.

"This is Cathy North. I'm one of Megan's teachers."

"We're very busy right now," the man said.

“Please—” Cathy heard Mrs. Kane say. But it was too late. The man had hung up.

It must have been Megan’s father. He sounded so upset. Cathy could understand his reaction. What didn’t make sense was that Megan had just vanished.

Cathy set the phone down. Then she opened her laptop. Her favorite news website loaded. She scanned the headlines. The top story was about Senator Mason. He was the candidate that Megan interviewed. Cathy watched the video. Mason was making a speech. The crowd cheered and chanted as he spoke.

Mason was a good-looking man. He had a great smile. These were two qualities that could definitely help a politician trying to charm voters. Cathy knew that Megan was thrilled to meet him. She respected his policies. And she’d been so excited to give her presentation. She would never have missed it if she could help it. So what happened?

The video ended, and Cathy closed her laptop. She checked her phone for a text from her boyfriend.

Jeff Martinez worked for a software company. Cathy met him when he came to the high school to upgrade the computer system. That night, the two of them were supposed to go out to dinner. Jeff hadn't texted. But just then Cathy's phone rang. It was Jeff.

"Can you be ready by seven?" he asked.

"Sure. I'll see you then."



As Jeff looked at the menu, Cathy started to tell him about Megan. "Her family has no idea where she is," Cathy said.

Jeff looked up and smiled at her. "Maybe she skipped school," he said.

"She's not like that, Jeff. Megan is the type to come to school when she's sick," Cathy said. "I was the same way."

"Even the best students skip school

sometimes. Look at me. I was an A student. And I did it all the time.”

“Yeah, well. I’m not sure I would be bragging about it,” Cathy said with a smile.

Jeff laughed. “And I wouldn’t brag about going to school sick and spreading your germs around.”

“You could be right about that. But seriously, Jeff. I’m worried about Megan. It’s not like her to just not show up,” Cathy said. “I wonder if she could have been kidnapped. I hear so many stories like that.”

“Maybe she had a fight with her parents. She’s hiding out somewhere until she calms down. Or until her parents do.”

“You don’t know Megan,” Cathy said.

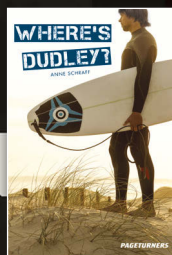
“You don’t know her either, Cathy. Not really. Sure, you know what kind of student she is. But she might be somebody entirely different outside of school.”

PAGETURNERS® MYSTERY

Whatever Happened to Megan Marie?

The pretty high school junior seems to have everything going for her—until she mysteriously disappears. Has she run away from home? Was she kidnapped? And why is the missing girl's father blaming first-year teacher Cathy North?

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