

Lily Dodge

Mystery/Suspense | 1st person | Past Tense | 1.5k words

“Derek, we’ve got an incoming call.”

My partner, Karissa, poked her head into the rec room at the police station, narrowing her eyes at the sight of me. I’d been napping on the threadbare couch next to the broken foosball table - a choice she never approved of.

“I can’t believe you don’t have lice yet, from sitting on that thing. Or bedbugs, or something.”

“It’s not that bad,” I said, standing up and stretching. “Comfiest spot in the station.”

“So not worth it.” Karissa scrunched up her nose, crossing her arms as she waited for me. “I’m pretty sure they hauled that in from a dumpster off Welch Street. I’d rather sleep in the back of a patrol car.”

“Suit yourself.” I pulled on my jacket and followed her out to her desk, where a red flashing alert was visible on the computer screen. We get most of our assignments that way - dispatch sends them to our laptops, and we just go where we’re sent. I miss the days when detectives worked locally, connecting to the communities we served, but at least this way I get to see the whole city.

“Says it’s a homicide. Victim dead on scene from blunt force trauma and multiple stab wounds. No suspect.” Karissa grabbed her gun from her desk drawer, and together we hurried out to our car.

“No suspect, huh?” It was my turn to drive, so I slid behind the wheel as Karissa hopped into the passenger seat. Dispatch had sent the address directly to the car’s GPS, and I realized it wasn’t that far from the station.

I swerved out into traffic, almost hitting a minivan, before turning on the lights and sirens.

Karissa pulled up the dispatcher’s report on her tablet. “Officers say there was no sign of forced entry, nothing stolen, no sign of drug activity.”

I smiled, hoping that this would point to an easy solve. Some people might think that this total lack of evidence would make things harder on a detective, but in reality, a situation like this almost always points in one direction.

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“Was the guy married?”

Karissa shrugged. “Doesn’t say.”

I wasn’t surprised. Uniformed officers don’t always take very detailed notes, and when they do, they don’t usually make their way through dispatch to us. We’d just have to check things out when we get there.

“You’re thinking it was the wife?” Karissa asked, still poking at the tablet as if it was suddenly going to give up more information.

“Can’t draw any conclusions ‘til we get there,” I cautioned, “but from what you described, that sounds about right so far. No forced entry, nothing stolen - the motive wasn’t robbery. Sounds like the guy was pretty brutalized, which tells me it was personal. From what we know now, all signs point to the wife.”

“Makes sense.” For the first time since we raced out to the car, Karissa looked up from the tablet, taking in the surroundings. “Hang on. This is my neighborhood.”

I’d only been to Karissa’s house a few times - we hadn’t been partners for long - but once she mentioned it, I realized that the streets did look familiar.

“Nice area,” I observed, turning into a small cul-de-sac crammed full of police cars and other emergency vehicles. “Should make it even easier to catch the perp. Not much violent activity around here.”

“Wait a minute.” Karissa, usually unflappable, seemed to be getting a bit frantic as we pulled in. “That’s - that’s my house!”

She leapt from the car even before I’d put it into park, racing up the driveway of the two story brick house at the center of all the commotion.

“Richard! Richard!” Karissa shouted, sprinting at full speed toward the front door.

I ran after her, holding up my badge as two uniformed cops tried to stop her from entering. “We’re detectives! Let her in!”

Inside, the house was swarming with police and CSI, but together, Karissa and I shoved our way through, taking the steps two or three at a time.

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Karissa skidded to a stop just outside the master bedroom, and I nearly crashed into her before catching my balance. She went silent, her face white, one hand over her mouth.

Over her shoulder, I could see the body of Richard Moorland - husband of Detective Karissa Moorland - sprawled on the floor. A deep red bloodstain surrounded him, with streaks and smears of blood on the walls and bedposts.

“Karissa,” I said as gently as I could, putting a hand on her shoulder. “Let’s go back downstairs.”

“No!” Karissa shrugged out from under my hand, stepping into the victim’s bedroom.

Her bedroom.

“I’ve got to do my job,” Karissa whispered, looking around with wide, panic-stricken eyes. “We have to find out who did this.”

I swallowed, shoving my hands into my pockets as I watched her survey the scene. I’d seen her do this dozens of times - she’s a good investigator. Skilled. Focused. Detail oriented.

But this time, I wasn’t just following her gaze as she looked for clues. I was watching her.

Karissa stepped carefully around the blood soaked carpet, doing nothing to disturb the evidence. Standing over the body, she leaned down, examining the wounds. Her hands twitched at her sides, like she was holding herself back from touching him.

“Richard,” she said, her voice wobbly. I listened closely, noting the tension in her voice.

Was it grief? Shock? Or something else?

She said nothing else, pulling her lower lip between her teeth as she looked around the tidy bedroom. Dispatch had been right - there were no open drawers, no signs of robbery or ransacking. Everything was in its rightful place, from the fresh vase of flowers on the nightstand to the pressed suit hanging up by the bathroom door.

Did she consider Richard to be in his rightful place, too?

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A CSI agent came up the stairs, then, a baby faced kid in white cover-alls and booties holding a plastic clipboard. “You’re the detectives?” he asked, sounding a bit breathless.

“Yep.” I didn’t take my eyes off Karissa as she circled the room.

“Medical examiner says he’s been dead eight, nine hours.”

“Puts time of death around seven this morning,” I said, rolling the new information around in my head.

Seven am would be exactly one hour before Karissa and I started our shift.

Things were starting to make less and less sense. “If he’s been dead all day, why are we only here now? Who called it in?”

The CSI agent flipped through a few pages on his clipboard. “Says here it was a concerned neighbor, called around two this afternoon. I guess the victim usually walks his dog every day at lunchtime, and since he wasn’t out today, someone decided to call the police. Took them a few hours to get here, since they figured it was just a local busybody - but once they did, they found this.”

Something didn’t add up. Karissa had disappeared into the bathroom attached to the master bedroom, so I called after her. “Moorland, you never told me you had a dog.”

“We don’t,” Karissa yelled back, her voice echoing strangely off the bathroom tile.

“Who was the caller?” I asked, turning back to the CSI agent. He squinted down at the sheet on his clipboard before looking up at me apologetically.

“Don’t know. They didn’t give any information. Guess they wanted to be anonymous.”

I rubbed my forehead, trying to make sense of the timeline. Richard Moorland was murdered sometime early this morning, before Karissa and I got to work. Then someone called the police to check on him this afternoon, based on a completely phony tip about his non-existent dog walking routine.

“The caller must have known about the murder,” I said, thinking out loud. “They wanted us to find the body - not right away, but today.”

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“Maybe they needed time to clean up the scene?” The CSI agent sounded just as puzzled as I was. “But wanted to make sure police got to the body, before...before what?”

“Before his wife got home,” I said under my breath. “Someone didn’t want Karissa to be the one to call it in.”

Karissa stepped out of the bathroom, her hands held primly behind her back. It was in our training not to touch anything at a crime scene without gloves on, but it occurred to me that her fingerprints would already be all over this scene, since it was her own house.

So why was she being so careful? Was it just ingrained in her through years of detective work, or was she hiding something?

“Moorland,” I said, doing my best to keep my voice friendly and even. “We’ve got to go back downstairs. Now.”

Karissa just shook her head. “I’m not done here.”

“Karissa, come on.” This time, my voice was much more insistent. “You can’t be in here.”

“Why not?” She turned towards the doorway, her hazel eyes glistening with tears even as she glared at me.

“Because...” I took a deep breath, trying to force the next words out of my mouth. “Because you’re a suspect.”