

**LISA  
GARDNER**

**Love  
You  
More**

headline

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# 1

Sergeant Detective D.D. Warren prided herself on her excellent investigative skills. Having served over a dozen years with the Boston PD, she believed working a homicide scene wasn't simply a matter of walking the walk or talking the talk, but rather of total sensory immersion. She felt the smooth hole bored into Sheetrock by a hot spiraling twenty-two. She listened for the sound of neighbors gossiping on the other side of thin walls because if she could hear them, then they'd definitely heard the big bad that had just happened here.

D.D. always noted how a body had fallen, whether it was forward or backward or slightly to one side. She tasted the air for the acrid flavor of gunpowder, which could linger for a good twenty to thirty minutes after the final shot. And, on more than one occasion, she had estimated time of death based on the scent of blood – which, like fresh meat, started out relatively mild but took on heavier, earthier tones with each passing hour.

Today, however, she wasn't going to do any of those things. Today, she was spending a lazy Sunday morning dressed in gray sweats and Alex's oversized red flannel shirt. She was camped at his kitchen table, clutching a thick clay coffee mug while counting slowly to twenty.

She'd hit thirteen. Alex had finally made it to the front door. Now he paused to wind a deep blue scarf around his neck.

She counted to fifteen.

He finished with the scarf. Moved on to a black wool hat and lined leather gloves. The temperature outside had just crept above twenty. Eight inches of snow on the ground and six more forecasted to arrive by the end of the week. March didn't mean spring in New England.

Alex taught crime-scene analysis, among other things, at the Police Academy. Today was a full slate of classes. Tomorrow, they both had the day off, which didn't happen much and warranted some kind of fun activity yet to be determined. Maybe ice skating in the Boston Commons. Or a trip to the Isabelle Stewart Gardner Museum. Or a lazy day where they snuggled on the sofa and watched old movies with a big bowl of buttered popcorn.

D.D.'s hands spasmed on the coffee mug. Okay, no popcorn.

D.D. counted to eighteen, nineteen, twenty—

Alex finished with his gloves, picked up his battered black leather tote, and crossed to her.

'Don't miss me too much,' he said.

He kissed her on the forehead. D.D. closed her eyes, mentally recited the number twenty, then started counting back down to zero.

'I'll write you love letters all day, with little hearts over the "i"s,' she said.

'In your high school binder?'

'Something like that.'

Alex stepped back. D.D. hit fourteen. Her mug trembled, but Alex didn't seem to notice. She took a deep breath and soldiered on. *Thirteen, twelve, eleven . . .*

She and Alex had been dating a little over six months. At

that point where she had a whole drawer to call her own in his tiny ranch, and he had a sliver of closet space in her North End condo. When he was teaching, it was easier for them to be here. When she was working, it was easier to be in Boston. They didn't have a set schedule. That would imply planning and further solidify a relationship they were both careful to not overly define.

They enjoyed each other's company. Alex respected her crazy schedule as a homicide detective. She respected his culinary skills as a third-generation Italian. From what she could tell, they looked forward to the nights when they could get together, but survived the nights when they didn't. They were two independent-minded adults. She'd just hit forty, Alex had crossed that line a few years back. Hardly blushing teens whose every waking moment was consumed with thoughts of each other. Alex had been married before. D.D. simply knew better.

She lived to work, which other people found unhealthy, but what the hell. It had gotten her this far.

*Nine, eight, seven . . .*

Alex opened the front door, squaring his shoulders against the bitter morning. A blast of chilled air shot across the small foyer, hitting D.D.'s cheeks. She shivered, clutched the mug more tightly.

'Love you,' Alex said, stepping across the threshold.

'Love you, too.'

Alex closed the door. D.D. made it down the hall just in time to vomit.

Ten minutes later, she remained sprawled on the bathroom floor. The decorative tiles were from the seventies, dozens and dozens of tiny beige, brown, and harvest gold squares. Looking at them made her want to puke all over again. Counting them, however, was a pretty decent meditative

exercise. She inventoried tiles while she waited for her flushed cheeks to cool and her cramped stomach to untangle.

Her cellphone rang. She eyed it on the floor, not terribly interested, given the circumstances. But then she noted the caller and decided to take pity on him.

‘What?’ she demanded, her usual greeting for former lover and currently married Massachusetts State Police Detective Bobby Dodge.

‘I don’t have much time. Listen sharp.’

‘I’m not on deck,’ she said automatically. ‘New cases go to Jim Dunwell. Pester him.’ Then she frowned. Bobby couldn’t be calling her about a case. As a city cop, she took her orders from the Boston turret, not state police detectives.

Bobby continued as if she’d never spoken: ‘It’s a fuckup, but I’m pretty sure it’s *our* fuckup, so I need you to listen. Stars and stripes are next door, media across the street. Come in from the back street. Take your time, notice *everything*. I’ve already lost vantage point, and trust me, D.D., on this one, you and I can’t afford to miss a thing.’

D.D.’s frown deepened. ‘What the hell, Bobby? I have no idea what you’re talking about, not to mention it’s my day off.’

‘Not anymore. BPD is gonna want a woman to front this one, while the state is gonna demand their own skin in the game, preferably a former trooper. The brass’s call, our heads on the block.’

She heard a fresh noise now, from the bedroom. Her pager, chiming away. Crap. She was being called in, meaning whatever Bobby was babbling about had merit. She pulled herself to standing, though her legs trembled and she thought she might puke again. She took the first step through sheer force of will and the rest was easier after that. She headed for the bedroom, a detective who’d lost days off before and would again.

‘What do I need to know?’ she asked, voice crisper now, phone tucked against her shoulder.

‘Snow,’ Bobby muttered. ‘On the ground, trees, windows . . . hell. We got cops tramping everywhere—’

‘Get ’em out! If it’s my fucking scene, get ’em all out.’

She found her pager on the bedside table – yep, call out from Boston operations – and began shucking her gray sweatpants.

‘They’re out of the house. Trust me, even the bosses know better than to contaminate a homicide scene. But we didn’t know the girl was missing. The uniforms sealed off the house, but left the yard fair play. And now the grounds are trampled, and I can’t get vantage point. We need vantage point.’

D.D. had sweats off, went to work on Alex’s flannel shirt.

‘Who’s dead?’

‘Forty-two-year-old white male.’

‘Who’s missing?’

‘Six-year-old white female.’

‘Got a suspect?’

Long, long pause now.

‘Get here,’ Bobby said curtly. ‘You and me, D.D. Our case. Our headache. We gotta work this one quick.’

He clicked off. D.D. scowled at the phone, then tossed it on the bed to finish pulling on her white dress shirt.

Okay. Homicide with a missing child. State police already on-site, but Boston jurisdiction. Why the hell would the state police—

Then, fine detective that she was, D.D. finally connected the dots.

‘Ah shit!’

D.D. wasn’t nauseous anymore. She was pissed off.

She grabbed her pager, her creds, and her winter jacket. Then, Bobby’s instructions ringing in her head, she prepared to ambush her own crime scene.