

Crime of Passion
By Michael Danese
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The sweet aroma of the vanilla candle on the nightstand filled the air. The candlelight flickered and danced around the room. Marie rolled over in the bed and kissed her lover on the cheek. “I really live for these nights! When all the stars are aligned – George is out of town and Missy has a sleepover! It’s my nirvana!”

Trish brushed her soft hair from her face and stared into the bright blue eyes of her soul mate, “I know dear. It’s like a mini-vacation for me.” she said as she looked away.

Marie pulled her close and stroked her cheek. “Are you okay? You seem a little out of sorts tonight, I feel that something is off. Is it me? Did I say something?”

“No! No, it isn’t *you*! You could not be more perfect,” said Trish as she pulled Marie closer and gently kissed her on the lips. “It isn’t you. It’s just ... I wasn’t going to say anything ... but I have a feeling that George is fooling around again.”

“Oh no. How can he do that to you! Do you think he knows about us?”

“No, he would never even give that a thought.”

“What do you know? Did you see something, find something?”

“No, he is too careful. You know lawyers! I can’t get into his phone or computer, but I can sometimes get a faint whiff of perfume on his clothes, and recently his client dinners have been ending later than they used to. And, this out of town meeting, I just have a feeling it is some type of get-away.”

“Is it possible that you are just imagining things? I mean, he could certainly be meeting with women clients or attorneys.”

“I know, but I just have a certain feeling. After the last time I told him that I would throw him out and he would not see Missy. He really seemed to take that to heart. He apologized a hundred times and promised that he would change. He doesn’t want to do anything to jeopardize his relationship with his little girl.”

“I know that you love him, but after all of the hurt that he has caused you, I have to say that for my own selfish reasons, if he was out of your life I think you would be happier. I would see to that!” said Marie.

“I know, dear, but Missy would be devastated, and she would probably blame me,” said Trish.

“So ... what are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. Probably nothing for now. Just hold me for a minute.”

The couple hugged tightly. Trish is in her mid-thirties. She is tall and thin with green eyes, shoulder length red hair and a face full of freckles. She is a CPA and used to work at a top investment firm, but a few years ago she decided to work from home to be with her daughter, Missy. She does some consulting and is remarkably busy during tax season.

Marie is a few years older. She is a larger woman with short blond hair and a muscular physique. She placed near the top of her class at the police academy. She knew that she had to, because she knew she would always be compared to the men at the station. She was regarded as an exemplary officer, respected, and well-liked by the others.

The next morning Trish pulled into the driveway of Missy's friend's house. It was a large, two story colonial with a three-car garage, almost exactly like her own house. She knocked on the door and it was quickly answered. The inviting aroma of coffee and cinnamon French toast greeted her.

"Hi Trish, come on in. I'm just pouring coffee."

"Hi, Jen. Sounds good," she said as she gave her a quick hug. Jen was about her age, with large brown eyes and long brown hair, pulled back in a ponytail. She was still wearing her plush purple robe and matching fuzzy slippers.

"Mommy!" said Missy as she ran over and kissed her mom. Missy is a bright eyed eight-year-old with a long red hair and freckles. She is wearing Frozen pajamas and pink slippers. "Is Daddy home yet?"

"Hi sweetie! No, he won't be home until tonight. But we can spend the whole day together!" said Trish as she hugged her child.

"Okay, I just wanted to tell Daddy about the movie we saw," said Missy.

"Well, you can tell him tonight," said Trish.

Later that day, Trish was in the kitchen preparing dinner when the door opened, and George entered with his overcoat and suitcase. He is tall with wavy brown hair. He is a year or two older than Trish. He's a bit of a workaholic, as we assume most lawyers are. He appeared to be a little weary, but quickly brightened when he saw his little girl.

"Daddy! Daddy's home!" said Missy as she ran to him and jumped into his arms.

"Hi honey! I missed you so much!" he said as he hugged her.

Trish came out of the kitchen wiping her hands on a dish towel. She gave George a small hug. "Good trip?"

"You know, same old same old. What's for dinner? I'm starved," he said.

Later that night Trish was doing the laundry. She buried her face into George's clothes. Sure enough, she caught a whiff of that perfume.

The next day was Sunday. Missy had two friends over to play Barbies in the playroom in the basement. Trish made them lunch. George spent the day reading the paper and watching football.

After dinner Trish helped Missy with her homework. George read with her before bedtime.

When she was asleep, Trish poured two glasses of wine and sat with George as she handed him a glass.

“Thanks. A perfect cap to the weekend,” he said.

“Actually, something is on my mind, bothering me,” she said.

“Really?” he said, a little squirmy.

She locked eyes with him and laid it on the line. “Are you cheating on me?”

“I can’t believe you are asking me that! No!” he said as he looked away.

She knew immediately that he was lying.

“I can’t believe that you’re *even* asking me that!” he muttered.

She took a long drink from her glass, almost emptying it. Got up and went into the den and sat.

George slowly came in. “You know how much I love you and Missy. I don’t want to hurt our family.”

“I know you’re lying. Don’t shit me. I can *always* tell,” she said as she felt her blood pressure rising.

He tried to hug her. “I ...”

“Take your hands off of me and just get out of my sight,” she whispered angrily.

George didn’t say anything. He went to sleep in the spare bed in the playroom in the basement.

The next morning George left early for the office.

Trish hugged Missy extra-long and hard before she got on the school bus.

“Are you okay Mommy? I had a dream that you and Daddy were fighting, and I was scared,” said Missy.

“Oh, yes little sweetie, I’m fine. Have a great day at school. I love you!” she said as she hugged her again.

But she *wasn’t* fine. As soon as the bus left, she called Marie.

“He all but admitted it, then the silent treatment began. The usual pattern. He’ll mope around, then he’ll come clean and tell me it is over and expect that that will make everything okay,” she ranted to her confidant.

“Trish, I know that you’re wounded, and I simply can’t and *won’t* stand by while he inflicts all this on you again! I love you, and when you hurt, so do I!” said Marie. “Please promise me, right now that this is *over* and that you’ll divorce him!”

“I know, but I have to think of Missy. Losing him will kill her, and she’ll blame *me*,” sobbed Trish.

“Sometimes you need to make hard choices. You need to do what is right for *you*. Your parents divorced for the same reason and look how great you turned out!

“Yeah, pretty great. Trapped in an unhappy marriage with a cheating husband while I carry on my own affair with my lesbian lover. Story book *for sure*,” said Trish.

“Don’t sell yourself short. You are an amazing mother, the best friend in the world, and a talented accountant. You volunteer for every charity; everyone *loves* you and you brighten every room with that smile! You’re as good as it gets,” said Marie.

“Thanks for that. That’s why I love you,” said Trish.

“I need to get back to work. We’re going to arrest a drug kingpin this afternoon. Look for me on the news tonight! We’ll talk later. Don’t worry. We’ll get through this. I love you,” said Marie.

“I love you too,” said Trish as she hung up the phone.

The next few weeks crept by at a glacier’s pace. Most nights after dinner Trish helped Missy with her homework then they read or played a game before she went to bed. Then she sat in front of the TV with a glass of merlot. George usually came home late, ate leftovers, and went to the basement.

It was about ten o’clock on Thursday and Trish was talking to Marie, like she did most nights. “No, he isn’t home yet. He usually isn’t *this* late. I’m getting worried,” she said to her lover. “Wait, I think I hear him. I’ll talk to you soon. Love you,” she said hanging up the phone as George entered.

The first thing she noticed was the smell, like a bar on Bourbon Street after closing time. He staggered in and dropped his coat and briefcase on the floor. Then he almost knocked a lamp off the end table, then he leaned against a wall and peered up at his wife.

“I’m so sorry. I love you. I love Missy,” he slurred as he looked at her through bleary eyes.

Trish didn’t say a word. She was just letting the process play out.

“It’s over. I promise. I ended it for good tonight. I will never have any contact with her again,” he said as he started to sob.

She hadn’t seen him this snookered in a long time. Sure, he usually came home buzzed after a “meeting,” but this was way worse. She grabbed him by the arm and helped him upstairs to their bedroom. He kicked off his shoes and threw them into the closet and somehow removed his pants and shirt and flopped onto the bed. Trish watched in disgust. She climbed into bed with her daughter and hugged her.

Trish woke George in time to get a shower and go to work.

While they were waiting for the bus, Missy said, “Is daddy okay? I thought I heard him crying last night.”

Trish hugged her daughter and said, “Yes, dear. He’s fine. He just wasn’t feeling well.”

It was about 11 o’clock when Trish’s phone rang. “ Hello, ... George? ... where are you calling from? I don’t recognize this number?”

“I’m ... at the police station, don’t worry,” said George.

“What? Of course I’m worried!” said Trish.

“They want to question me about ... a murder,” said George.

“What? Who? What’s going on?” said Trish.

“I didn’t do anything. Peter Jenkins from the firm is on his way. I’m waiting for him,” said George.

“If you didn’t do anything then why do you need a lawyer?” Trish pleaded.

“Peter’s here. Please don’t worry. This should be over soon. I’ll call you as soon as I can,” said George.

Trish hung up and immediately called Marie. “George called me from the police station! They’re questioning him about a *murder* and he has his lawyer with him!” said Trish.

“What? George? Let me see what I can find out. I’ll be over soon,” said Marie.

“What would I do without you?” asked Trish.

Marie arrived in a few minutes and immediately hugged Trish. “I’m sorry, honey, but it’s bad,” she said.

“Bad? How? George is a *bastard*, but he certainly isn’t ...”

“There’s evidence to lead the police to believe that he was involved in a murder. That’s all I know right now, but the lead detective is a friend and he’ll keep me apprised. I’m so sorry, honey. I’m going to stay here with you for the weekend. I don’t want you to be alone right now,” said Marie.

Trish began to cry and got a little hysterical as Marie hugged her and tried to comfort her.

“What am I going to tell Missy? She’ll be home in a few hours,” asked Trish.

“I don’t know. We’ll figure it out. Let’s just take this one step at a time. I’m going to bring my bag upstairs, then I’ll need to go back to the station for a bit, but I’ll be back as soon as I can,” said Marie.

Marie took her bag upstairs then came right down, hugged Trish, then headed out.

A few minutes later there was a knock at the door. Trish looked out to see two detectives. She slowly opened the door. "Hello?"

"Hello, Mrs. Johnson?" said the detective.

"Yes?"

"I'm Detective Walker and this is Detective Morrison. We need to ask you a few questions. Can we come in?" he said as the men displayed their badges.

Walker was a short, stocky man in his late 40s. What's left of his hair was gray. His brown suit was well-worn, and his shoes could have used a shine. Morrison was younger and taller, with brown hair and a mustache. His blue suit and tie had the look of a life-long bachelor. An iron and updating could have helped.

"Yes, please come in. Do I need a lawyer?" asked Trish.

"Did you do something wrong?"

"Not that I'm aware of," said Trish.

"We need to ask you about your husband, and last night," he said.

"Your husband is a person of interest in a murder. Jenny Dougherty, a lawyer at his firm was found dead last night. Her doorbell camera recorded your husband arriving around seven o'clock, then leaving around nine," he continued.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know her, he never mentioned her to me," said Trish.

"Where were you last night between seven and nine?" asked Detective Morrison.

"Me? Surely you don't think I'm a suspect!" Trish exclaimed.

"No, but we need to ask these questions. Your husband told us he was in a causal relationship with Ms. Dougherty ..."

"Oh, *did* he!" Trish said angrily.

"Yes, he did. I'm sorry to tell you that, we assumed that you knew ..."

"Well I *didn't* know, not really," she said.

"So, where were you last night? Walker asked.

"I was here; I have a young daughter. After her bath she went to bed, around eight," she said.

"And you didn't go out?" asked Morrison.

"Certainly not!"

"Can you prove that?" asked Walker.

“Of course not! Well, maybe...I was on the phone with my friend from about 9:30 until about 10, right before George came home,” she said.

“Okay, we’ll need her name. We can check the phone records,” said Morrison.

“Marie D’Agostino. She’s a police officer,” said Trish.

“And a good one too,” said Walker. “And, when he came home, did you notice anything unusual?”

“Well, he was falling down drunk, so yes, I’d say *that* was unusual, but it doesn’t make him a murderer.” said Trish. “Are we almost done here, my daughter will be home soon, and I don’t want you to be here.”

“Yes, for now, we’ll be in touch soon,” said Walker.

The detectives left and Trish collapsed in a chair and began to cry. She reached for her phone and called Marie.

“Two detectives were just here asking me all kinds of questions.” said Trish

“Was one Walker?” asked Marie.

“Yes.”

“He’s a good man. They’ll get to the bottom of this,” said Marie.

“I’m not sure I really want them too,” she said.

Later that afternoon, Trish was reading with Missy in the living room when there was another knock at the door. Trish was horrified when she looked out. There was a barrage of police officers.

She opened the door and Detective Walker handed her a paper. “We have a search warrant for your home, I’m sorry to ask, but can you and your daughter please vacate until the team is finished. Also, I’ll need the clothes that George was wearing last night.”

“I’m sorry, but I washed them this morning, I can get them if you want ...” she said.

“Ok, that’s unfortunate. No worries,” said Walker.

Trish took Missy by the hand and tried to stay calm, even though she was terrified. They got in the car and drove down the street.

“It’s okay honey, they are just looking for something, we can go home soon,” said Trish.

The officers went room by room. They took some of George’s clothes, his hairbrush, and a pair of his shoes.

Trish called Marie again. “My house is filled with police. They had a warrant!”

“I’m so sorry, honey. I’m afraid they found more evidence, hair, semen and some bloody footprints,” said Marie. “I’ll be there soon. Please hang in there.”

“This is like some kind of nightmare, he couldn’t possibly ...” said Trish.

“It’s quite possible, and likely probable. Listen, you need to start to think about yourself and Missy. Things could really get ugly. You may want to go to your mom’s and drive Missy to school. We’ll talk more when I get there,” said Marie.

“Mommy, when is Daddy coming home? Why are those men in our house?” asked Missy.

Trish hugged her daughter and said, “It will be okay, it will be fine. We might go to Nana’s, okay?”

“But I miss Daddy!”

“Daddy had to go away. He might not be here for a while. We’ll be okay,” said Trish, trying to comfort her daughter.

After a while, they went back into the house. It was in disarray. Everything was tossed. Drawers were emptied, pictures were off the wall, trash cans overturned, even Missy’s toys were dumped. Missy began to cry, which caused Trish to cry again. They hugged each other and Trish was at the end of her rope. Just then Marie showed up. She hugged them both and they all cried together.

The next several months were a continuation of the nightmare. In the beginning, there were TV crews camped outside of the house. Trish kept Missy home from school because kids were calling her dad a murderer. George was on the news nonstop for the first week, then occasionally after that. Things settled down for a while but heated up quickly once the trial started.

From the beginning it didn’t look good for George. He cooperated as much as he could. He admitted the affair, being there that night and having sex with her. But he was adamant that he didn’t kill her.

The bloody knife used to slit her throat was found on the floor next to the body, but the handle was wiped clean. However, the bloody footprints, and the matching blood on George’s shoes were just too overwhelming. And his own words, ‘It’s over. I promise. I ended it for good tonight. I will never have any contact with her again’ certainly didn’t help.

The quote was brought into evidence when Walker questioned Marie about the phone conversation she had with Trish. It was corroborated by Trish as well.

The prosecutor, a tall young man with brown hair in a blue pin-striped suit obviously saw this case as an opportunity to jump start his career. He argued that George tried to break up with her and she became upset, then enraged, and then they began to fight. He was drunk and felt threatened and, on impulse, he cut her throat with the knife on the counter.

George’s lawyer objected that it was all speculation, but really could not counter the accusation. There certainly was no evidence of anyone else being there. No sign of a break in, only George

on the front door camera. He did his best, but the case against him was strong. The jury found the prosecutor's argument plausible and George was found guilty of second-degree murder, a crime of passion. He was sentenced to twenty years in a maximum-security prison.

As time passed, Marie and Trish became much closer as a couple. Marie sold her house and moved in with Trish. They seemed content.

"Do you miss him?" asked Marie.

"That bastard? Not for a second!" responded Trish.

"Are you happy? With us?" said Marie.

"Of course! I love you! You've been so strong for me, and for Missy," said Trish.

"I was just so tired of seeing you in pain, so deeply unhappy, because of him. The lying, the cheating, the disrespect, all those nights alone. I just couldn't take it anymore," said Marie.

"I appreciate that, but *you* couldn't take it anymore?" asked Trish.

"Yes, it was just too much. I had to do something ..." said Marie.

"What *exactly* did *you* do?" questioned Trish.

"I tried so hard to get you to divorce him, but you wouldn't. You were accepting your *own* life sentence. He was never going to change. I had to end it," said Marie.

"What did you *do*?" asked Trish again.

"I did it, I killed her," said Marie in a whisper.

"What? How?" said Trish as she slipped into shock.

"I tailed him to find out where he was going and to establish his pattern. When I identified my night, I went to her house during the day and picked the lock on her back door. I unlatched a window so I could get in later. A few days before, I took a pair of his shoes, which I wore that night. When he left, I climbed in the window. I found her in the kitchen. She was sobbing and cleaning, just a small, slip of a girl. I grabbed a steak knife from her counter and slit her throat from behind. I'm sure that she never felt a thing. I wiped the handle clean and dropped it on the floor. I walked into the pool of blood, just enough to make sure there were footprints and that the blood was on the shoes. I walked toward the front door, then slipped off the shoes, went to the back and re-latched the window, and left by the back door, locking it behind me. When I got to my car around the corner, I removed my gloves."

Trish was deep in shock and just kept backing away as Marie continued, almost proud of herself.

"As soon as I could, I called you on the phone. I made sure that we talked as long as possible. I figured it would be an alibi for *both* of us, if it came to that. The next day when I came with my things to spend the weekend, I returned the shoes. During the investigation, I made sure to mention to Walker about what George said when he got home about it being finished and he would never see her again."

Trish looked at her and screamed, “Murderer! Murderer! How could you?”

Marie walked toward her and said, “but I did it for you, for us! *I love you!*” She outstretched her arms to embrace Trish, but she pushed her away.

“Don’t you touch me! Get out! I’m calling the police!” said Trish.

Marie came to hug her again and said, “For you, for us!” and embraced her.

In her rage, Trish said, “Get away from me, murderer!” and pushed her away hard. Marie lost her balance and fell backward. Her head caught the sharp, pointed corner of the marble table. Blood began to gush out. Trish was still in shock. She ran to the kitchen and grabbed a towel and tried to apply pressure to the open wound. She knelt beside her lover and watched the life drain from her body. She sat there for a minute or two, shaking her head as her mind was flooded with a thousand different emotions and thoughts.

She went to the counter leaving a trail of bloody footprints. She grabbed a dish towel and tried to wipe the blood from her hands before she grabbed her phone and punched in 911.

Soon the house was filled with paramedics and police. It was all a blur to Trish.

A short time later she found herself at her kitchen table as Detective Walker said, “Now let me get this straight. You’re telling me that Officer D’Agostino was your lover, and that she killed Ms. Dougherty and framed your husband?”

“Yes,” mutter Trish, in a whisper.

“And she had just confessed that to you before you pushed her, and she hit her head and died?”

“Yes.”

“Do you realize how preposterous that sounds?” said Walker.

“That’s exactly what happened,” whispered Trish.

The media had a field day with the story. Trish and George were branded ‘The Murder Couple’ and ‘Murdering Mates’ among other catchy phrases.

George’s lawyers appealed his case, but the judge wasn’t hearing any of it since the evidence against him was so strong. Also, the state certainly didn’t want to admit they made a mistake and blame one of their own for the murder. The Blue Code reached high.

Trish was sentenced to eight years for involuntary manslaughter. It certainly didn’t help her case that she killed a respected police officer. In prison she developed an extreme case of post-traumatic stress syndrome and eventually went to the psychiatric wing of the prison.

Missy went to live with her Nana.

A large part of Trish’s mental illness was her constant worrying about how all of this will affect her daughter.

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