

Dog Person

by Cara Hunter

As soon as I see the two of them on the doorstep I know I went too far.

You can tell they're police, even before they hold out their cards. That old adage about policemen going around in pairs evidently applies to the female of the species too. Trouble is, they're usually a lot more observant. My eyes narrow. This isn't good.

The three of them talk for a moment – I think she's offering them one of those visitor parking permits she keeps in the hall cupboard because the tall one is shaking her head and making a face, no doubt saying something sardonic about the traffic round here. Which doesn't surprise me – and believe me, I should know.

She opens the door wider now, to let them in, and I take the opportunity to cross the road and slip down the side passage that leads to the garden. It's a good position. Out of sight, but close enough. With the kitchen window open I can hear every word they say.

"So, Miss Clarke, can you tell DC Somer and myself exactly what's been happening?"

It's the mousey one talking. I can see her reflection in the open window. Needs to do something with her hair, and black definitely isn't her colour. I'm sure that's cat hair on her jacket. I can't see the other one but she's a very different kettle of fish. Tall, blonde, confident. Probably a bit chilly with it.

I can't see *her* from here but judging by the noises she's fiddling about with the kettle. That useless boyfriend never did get that loose connection fixed.

"It's nothing – you know – *dangerous*. Just unnerving. Stuff being moved, going missing - "

She sounds embarrassed. As if she's worried she's wasting their time.

"Like what?"

She hesitates. "Little things. Underwear. A top I really liked. A photo of my boyfriend, well, ex-boyfriend. That's what really spooked me."

I knew I should have drawn the line at the photo. I knew it was a bad idea. But I just couldn't resist.

"The first time I thought it was me – that I must've had a bit of a senior moment."

She laughs. She is only thirty-two, after all.

"And when was this – the first incident?"

"About six months ago?"

As if they know the answer better than she does.

"And where were these items, before you noticed they were gone?"

The kettle's boiled now, and I hear her shuffling mugs, opening the coffee-jar.

"The underwear was on the bed, and the photo was on the dressing-table. I can't remember where the top was. I just opened the wardrobe one day and realised it wasn't there."

"No phone calls – nothing on your social media?"

"No."

“And you haven’t noticed anyone hanging around – no cars you didn’t recognise?”

“No – I’ve been racking my brains but there’s been nothing, nothing at all. And the weird thing is that I never had any sense someone had actually been *in* the house – my sister was burgled once and she said the flat just smelled all wrong - ”

She sighs, “Am I going mad? Because, honestly, sometimes I wonder - ”

I see Mousey glance across at her colleague– one of those knowing professional looks people like that specialise in.

“Is there any possibility it’s your ex?”

“Oh no,” she says quickly. “I know why you might think that but really, it’s not Charlie. We’re still good friends. It just didn’t work out – you know, living together.” She gives a nervous laugh, “He’s more of a dog person.”

Mousey smiles. Well she would, wouldn’t she.

“I’m just checking what you said when you called us.” It’s Chilly now. “You said there were no signs of forced entry – nothing to suggest how someone might have got in?”

“No. But it was the summer. I used to leave the back door open sometimes – just to get some air in, you know?”

I bet she’s blushing now. Biting her lip in that way she does.

Mousey comes to the window and I edge further back. She looks up and down.

“I see you have a side return – have you thought about putting in a gate along here?”

“Yes, I know - Charlie said that too. I just haven’t got round to - ”

“It really is a good idea, you know. People who do this sort of thing – they’re usually very opportunistic. Something as simple as a gate is often enough to deter them.”

“I’ll get it sorted, I promise – I’ve just been so busy - ”

“And make sure you lock your windows as well as your doors.”

“Right, yes.”

I can’t tell if they believe her or not. I mean, they *want* to, obviously – they’re both women, they’re not going to brush something like this off. But all the same, it doesn’t really add up, does it?

They’re giving off leaving signals now. I can tell that – even from here.

“And if anything else happens – if you have even the *slightest* concern about your safety, then do not hesitate to call 999.”

Their voices start to recede; she’s showing them out. I hear her laughing again, saying she’ll get in touch if she finds any of the missing stuff.

She won’t, of course. I’ve hidden it far too well. And in any case, it would never even occur to her that it’s been me, all along. That snarky boyfriend had his suspicions, of course, especially towards the end, but I soon got rid of him.

He wasn’t a keeper, anyway. Not like me.

I hear the door close, jump down off the fence and saunter into the kitchen.

When she comes back down the passage her whole face lights up. Just like it always does.

“There you are, Biscuit,” she says, scooping me up into her arms and burying her face in my fur, “What have you been up to?”

986 words

This was inspired by a true story.