

2011

The Long Red Staircase

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Recommended Citation

Drey, Skye-Raven (2011) "The Long Red Staircase," *The Angle*: Vol. 2011: Iss. 1, Article 17.
Available at: <http://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/angle/vol2011/iss1/17>

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The Long Red Staircase

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"It was cold outside and puddles of fresh rain were scattered along the sidewalk in front of 1400 Sycamore Drive. It was an hour past midnight. red and blue lights painted the fog and sirens pierced the silence of the neighborhood. There was a crowd of people being held off by the police with the lazy look of a cat in their eyes. Bill Ward weaved his way through the crowd, but was stopped by an officer at behind the bright yellow tape."

Cover Page Footnote

Appeared in the issue: Volume 13, Issue 1, 2011.

The Long Red Staircase

fiction by
Skye Drey

It was a cold outside and puddles of fresh rain were scattered along the sidewalk in front of 1400 Sycamore Drive. It was an hour past midnight. Red and blue lights painted the fog and sirens pierced the silence of the neighborhood. There was a crowd of people being held off by the police with the lazy look of a cat in their eyes. Bill Ward weaved his way through the crowd, but was stopped by an officer at behind the bright yellow tape.

"You can't go behind the tape," the officer said in a stern voice.

"I'm Bill Ward," he said pulling out his badge, "I've been assigned to this case."

"Ward? Detective Neville's new apprentice?"

"Yep," Ward said. He wasn't the type to waste time with chatter, even if it was relevant to the situation. "Gonna let me through?"

"Oh, yeah," the officer pulled the tape up and let him through. "So where is the old bat, anyway?"

"He's got a cold," he said as he walked through the front door without another glance at the officer. The house was big and dark with vaulted ceilings and dim lights. Ward looked around. There was a group of people, some with cameras, bending over a lump covered in a white sheet next to a tall winding staircase. Off to the left of him a portly officer was sitting next to a red-faced distraught woman, crying on his shoulder. The group around the white sheet dispersed as Ward walked over to see the reason he was called out on that wet night. He could see the thin outline of curves under the sheet and a red stain growing at the top of the sheet. He grabbed the sheet and threw it off.

A girl lay on the ground. She looked about nineteen, maybe twenty. She was slender and pale, probably far too pale, but that was to be expected under the circumstances. Her legs were bent and splayed away from her; her hands were in the same position. She clad only in a lace bra and seemingly matching underwear. A pool of thick red blood grew around her head. Ward bent over to take a closer look at the source of the blood. Pretty face, he thought to himself. Her eyes were green and had a thin foggy film covering her empty gaze. Her blond hair was stained red at the back and on the tips from the blood and Ward could see it start to clump together.

The Long Red Staircase (cont.)

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He grabbed two latex gloves out of his back pocket and put them on. He lifted her head carefully and turned it to the side. Blood was dribbling out of a quarter-sized hole in her head, staining the white latex covering Ward's hands. He twisted her neck to a greater angle and could see long brown and red marks on her neck.

"Hey!" a voice called from behind him. Ward turned his head to see who yelled and saw a small hairless man in a blue NYPD jacket walking towards him from across the room. "You don't have permission to be touching that body." Ward set the girl's head down gently and stood up.

"I think I have more permission to touch that body than you, and probably any body for that matter," Ward retorted. He took off the blood-covered gloves and folded them into each other while the small man's face turned red.

"Who the hell do you think you are talking to an officer like that," he spat.

"Detective Ward, the lead homicide investigator on this case. And who might you be?"

"Oh! Sorry Ward, didn't recognize you," the small man stuttered, "I'm Officer Jinks. I was sent from SVU."

"What evidence do you have that suggests this is a sex crime, other than the fact that she's in her panties?" Ward asked, with one eyebrow raised. He didn't try to hide the annoyance in his voice.

"Well, we won't have anything until we get the report from the medical examiner once they take her away," Jinks replied a little taken aback.

"Then we'll just have to hold back on SVU procedure until that report comes back. What do you know about the victim?"

"Her name's Cheryl Williams, twenty years old. She goes to NYU just down the block. Her roommate found her about an hour ago." Jinks pointed to the red-faced woman in the corner.

"What about the wound to the back of her head?" Ward said moving on, but keeping his eyes on the woman.

"Too clean to be a gunshot wound, and there's no exit wound that we can find so it was most likely cause by a blunt object."

The Long Red Staircase (cont.)

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“Obviously,” Ward mocked under his breath. “Have you found anything that might be a weapon?”

“Not yet.”

“What about the ligature marks on her neck?”

“What marks?” Jinks sounded stunned. Ward tore his eyes away from the corner and stared down at him.

“There are ligature marks on the very back of her neck. If you missed them, chances are the coroner missed them when he first looked at her. Call him back in here and tell him to document them. What’s the roommate’s name?” Ward turned his gaze back to the corner.

“I’m gonna go see what information she can give us.”

“Candice Miller,” Jinks said as he walked toward the body, bewildered. Ward made his way to the corner and stood in front of the officer.

“I’ll take it from here,” he jerked his head and the officer immediately got up and left. Ward couldn’t blame him. Dealing with witnesses wasn’t his favorite part of the job, especially if the witness was hysterical like this one seemed to be, but it had to be done. When he sat down next to her, he noticed her posture change and immediately realized that his assumption of this girl had been wrong—very wrong. Her back became erect, instead of hunched, and her legs that were planted flat on the floor suddenly crossed themselves in a way that made the hem of her short night shirt fall two inches up her thigh. “Candice,” he said as he looked around him, making sure no one was eaves dropping on their conversation. “My name is Detective Ward. Can you tell me what happened tonight?”

“Well, what would you like to know, Detective?” her voice was smooth and quiet, teetering on the edge of a whisper, enunciating every vowel that came out of her mouth, like a cat trying to coax a fish to the top of the bowl to be swiped up and eaten. She slid to the edge of her seat and leaned forward. Ward glanced down at her nearly exposed chest, then back at her evenly blotched face that was fading back to its normal color. He put two fingers on her shoulder and gave a sharp forceful push that knocked her into the back of her chair.

“How about you start by telling me how your roommate ended up dead at the foot of your stairs?”