

What Makes a Murderer?

Detective Bush sipped his coffee and stared through the window at the 24 year old sitting on the other side, cuffed hands hidden in her lap under the table. The suspect stared at the wall, eyes drooped and bored. Well, she wasn't necessarily a suspect, more a confirmed murderer; she'd confessed at the crime scene, knife in hand over a mutilated body. It seemed they'd interrupted her before she was to finish writing a note in blood near the corpse, along the wall or floor. The note was the same every time: "Bet you'll appreciate them now". The statement confused Detective Bush, but now he had a chance to ask the writer what she meant. Lila Keaton was short, with pale blue eyes that stared lifeless into empty air. It unnerved Detective Bush. The medical examiner, after collecting DNA evidence from her bloody hands, told Detective Bush that she was malnourished and under-slept, an observation from the sunken cheeks and bloodshot eyes. The medical examiner also suggested that they have a psychologist sit down with Lila, after Detective Bush told her that Lila hadn't spoken a word since she confessed, apart from a giggle during the ride from the crime scene to the precinct.

He finished off his cooling coffee in preparation to enter the room with a serial killer that'd been eluding New York City for six years. He'd spent the entire investigation picturing a forty-something man, up until the last murder, where they'd recovered DNA from the killer for the first time. A strand of blonde hair that when ran through the system, revealed a CPS case of a girl orphaned at ten and living in foster homes and attending schools throughout the boroughs until her eighteenth birthday, where she promptly fell off the grid, like she'd been preparing to do so for years. The killings started immediately after she graduated high school, a straight A student who was a quiet freak, according to peers, but never showed signs of violence, according

to teachers and councilors. She jumped from home to home. When Bush asked the foster parents why, they all said she was well-behaved, but something always unnerved them about her. She didn't act like a normal teenager. Not a well-adjusted one or a delinquent one, the kind that normally goes through the foster system. One of the parents mentioned that whenever she said she was going out with friends, even though the schools she attended said she had no friends, they suspected she was doing something else, be that drugs or a secret boyfriend, but it never caused trouble for her. One parent noticed a trend with her, though. She would happily do chores when he asked her. In fact, it was one of the few times he ever saw her smile, was when she was helping him or his wife out. He assumed she missed her own parents. However, whenever another foster kid refused to listen, talked back, or treated him poorly, she'd look at the other kid with murder.

Detective Bush threw his coffee cup in the trash and took deep breaths in front of the door. He may have been working this case since its inception and putting violent murderers like Lila Keaton away for years, but there was something different about this one. He opened and closed the door. Lila gave no reaction to even noticing Bush's arrival. It wasn't until he sat down in the chair opposite hers, a table between them, that her body shifted, although her eyes continued to stare straight through him. From what he'd glimpsed of Lila's life before the car crash that killed her parents, she was an hilarious child, who loved animals and dancing. Her and her parents went to the zoo every year for her birthday. He'd learned about it from Lila's maternal aunt, a repetitive relapsing alcoholic, who had no interest in raising Lila, hence CPS. The only insightful advice the aunt gave about Lila after the car crash was that something inside

the child broke. She didn't cry during the funeral at all. The last words Lila spoke to her aunt before moving into the foster system was, "it's my fault."

"Hello, Ms. Keaton. My name is Detective Daniel Bush," he said. Lila's eyes didn't move. He tilted his head. "Do you remember me? I was at the crime scene. The one we found you at." After tracing Lila's history, Detective Bush was able to discover that all the victims, while seemingly random in gender and physical features at first, were the mother or father of a student who attended one of the multiple schools Lila transferred to throughout New York City whenever she moved to a new foster home. Oftentimes a daughter, always with a set of parents, un-divorced and seemingly happy. For whatever reason, Lila would murder one parent of the classmate. Why? "Why'd you write 'bet you'll appreciate them now' near your victims? Who was the message for?" Lila blinked slowly. He tilted his head. "Why'd you say 'it's your fault' at you parents' funeral? It's all connected, isn't it?" Bush's heart started racing, for after his little speech, Lila reacted for the first time, a little smirk appearing at the corners of her lips. "Lila?"

"Auntie Anne told you about the funeral. Honestly, I don't remember saying that."

". . . Who was the message for?"

"The bitches," Lila wasn't looking at Bush as she spoke. She seemed to be talking to herself. "They didn't love their parents when they were alive, maybe they'll love them now that they're dead. If I have to suffer for being good, they sure as hell should suffer for being bad."

"Why are you suffering?" Lila looked him in the eyes for the first time. She tilted her head, as if she couldn't grasp how he didn't know the answer.

“Because I didn’t appreciate my parents when they were alive. Bad kids deserve punishment, no? I punished the bad kids,” Lila lifted her hands from her lap, revealing wrists with streams of blood cascading down. A big Joker grin encompassed her face.

“We need a medic!” Detective Bush screamed, jumping up from his seat.