

Derek Madison frowned glancing at the unknown phone number. He held his breath waiting for what had become an all too familiar message.

Before he could count to three, the mysterious voice came alive. “I’m sorry to be the one delivering this message but it’s better to find out what’s going on now than to learn later.” A pause. “Go home and learn the truth. That way you can verify whether I’m telling the truth. If I’m wrong you’ll never receive another call from me.”

“If I go home what am I supposed to learn?” Derek’s voice was loud. “Don’t hang up without telling me what I should be looking for.”

Instead of an answer, Derek heard the all too familiar “*click.*” He slammed down the phone, infuriated with the caller. For weeks, this person had taunted him. No matter how hard he listened, Derek could not distinguish if the individual calling was male or female. He or she had gone to great lengths to disguise his or her voice. To learn the identity of the caller, Derek dialed the number back, but no number appeared. He assumed it must have been a throw away phone.

Every call was always the same—“*Go home and learn the truth.*” This time was the exception when the person added—“*If I’m wrong you’ll never receive another call from me.*”

Derek took this as a challenge. He sat thinking about when the mysterious calls began. They started about two weeks ago. At first, he dismissed them as being a prank. Today, the person’s message caught his attention. It was as if Derek had no choice but to prove the caller wrong, especially if he wanted the calls to stop.

Is that why Derek left work—to put an end to this farce? As he drove home, he was tense and nervous, not knowing what to expect. As he made the right turn onto his street, a strange sensation came over him.

Why did he feel uncomfortable as he drove closer to his house? He had no reason to feel worried. It’s not as if he had never been home during the day. However, he had always called beforehand. If that’s what was bothering him then why hadn’t he called Heather to say he was stopping by?

He slowed the car and glanced to his right and to his left, checking out the neighborhood. The street was quiet and to his knowledge, there were no unfamiliar parked cars. In addition, he didn’t see any unfamiliar individuals walking down the street. Not knowing what he was looking for, he drove slowly, alert to his

surroundings.

Approaching his house, Derek began to feel foolish. Instead of pulling into the driveway, he parked in an empty space three doors down the street. It gave him an advantage point to see anyone going inside or leaving his house. He could also see if anything seemed out of the ordinary.

Derek turned off the car's ignition and asked, "*What am I doing here? Why am I listening to a stranger? Why today?*"

Primarily, Derek wanted to put an end to the calls. What bothered him more than anything was he had no idea what to look for. The caller's messages were always vague with a hint of mystery.

Each time Derek tried asking the caller questions, he received nothing but a hang-up. Although Derek hated to admit it, part of the reason he had listened to the last call was his curiosity. It had gotten the best of him.

After the first call, Derek laughed it off by saying the caller had dialed the wrong number. The second and third call annoyed him. He began to question why someone would single him out to insinuate something was going on at his house that he should know about.

Closing his eyes, he listed the reasons why the accusation was absurd. Heather had been nothing but a loving, caring, wonderful wife and mother. Everyone loved her. Derek let out a nervous chuckle. Maybe not everyone.

As Heather put it, most women disliked her because they were jealous of her voluptuous body, thick hair and model-like looks. If Derek was honest, Heather's flirting and teasing with women's husbands, fathers, brothers—any man—was the reason they seemed to detest her.

He loved and trusted his wife and although he couldn't speak for Heather he was happy with their suburban life and three children. Maybe he was kidding himself but he had no reason to believe she didn't feel the same.

So what was nagging him? Why couldn't he totally dismiss what the caller was indicating? Why was he wasting his time, sitting in his car, waiting for what?

He opened his eyes and ran his hand over his face. If he had no doubts about his marriage then why would a few calls disturb him? Instead of sitting in the car, waiting for something to happen, he decided to go into the house.

Exhaling, he opened the car door when someone caught his attention. A man was coming out of his house. Derek let out a nervous chuckle. It was the freaking mail carrier.

Joe was a kind hearted, friendly man who had been delivering their mail since he and Heather first bought their house. Everyone in the neighborhood knew and liked him.

Derek felt like a fool. He waited until Joe was out of sight, started his car and left.