



## Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You

By Laurie Lynn Drummond  
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### Introduction

"Be careful with your heart on this job. And get used to the stink of death, there's nothing you can do about it," warns a veteran police officer in Laurie Lynn Drummond's debut collection, **Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You**. The officer's advice is worth taking, as Drummond's own candid insider perspective unfolds in ten riveting stories, grouped into five fictional portraits of Baton Rouge policewomen. With an authentic ear for the jargon of the precinct, devoid of melodrama, Drummond writes persuasively of both the banal routines and logistics of the job, and the violent crimes that would be tabloid fodder in a lesser writer's hands.

The first three stories follow Katherine, tracing her career arc from rookie to legend, as she sees "what movies and TV never show" and catches her husband's killer on a shift the two were working together. New cadets at the academy idolize her, but in reality Katherine copes with her grief in a rather unorthodox manner.

Liz starts out as an independent recruit who discovers a neighbor's shocking secret in "Lemme Tell You Something," but nine years later, a shattered leg forces her uneasy journey back to civilian life in "Finding a Place."

Perhaps the most haunted of the women, Mona grew up in the shadow of her father's dual personality: decorated officer, abusive parent and husband. Now also in the police force, she helplessly watches herself continuing the cycle of violence in "Cleaning Your Gun."

In "Something About a Scar" Cathy comforts a woman accused of faking an assault, despite the nine-inch knife buried in her sternum.

After a secret vigil for a brutally mutilated and murdered woman goes horribly awry in "Keeping the Dead Alive," Sarah tries to outrun her guilt, and finds redemption in the deserts of New Mexico.

Avoiding the conventions of police procedurals and detective stories, Drummond writes of people -- officers and victims -- with an unflinching intimacy. We ride along in patrol cruisers, feel a wool uniform itch on humid Southern days, smell the myriad odors a dead body exudes during the stages of decomposition, cope with hips bruised by heavy gun-belts, and learn the hows and whys of reloading a gun, entering a room, reading the body language of a suspect -- to name but a few things that yank the reader into her world, which, after all, is the blue-suited part of our world. A part never described before with such startling clarity.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why does the academy staff retell the story of Katherine and Johnny to each successive class? What lessons do the cadets learn from Katherine's conduct on the force? Would the cadets still aspire to her level of professionalism if they knew the reality instead of the icon? Do you think Katherine's gifts of St. Michael's medallions are her way of honoring Johnny's memory?
2. In "Katherine's Elegy," seasoned officer Joe Boudreaux says, "Doing good and helping people is crap." Why is idealism counterproductive in a police officer? As Drummond traces the career arc of an exceptional police officer, from rookie to trainer to legend, how does she reveal the process by which youthful idealism fades to jaded experience? Is this process accelerated for a police officer?
3. In "Lemme Tell You Something," George appears to be simply a garrulous and slightly comic neighbor, chatting away as he cuts back a tree. What are some of the many topics George brings up with the titular phrase? How does this litany of opinions and fact disarm the reader? Is it effective in amplifying the shock of his final revelation? What questions does this story raise about what we are capable of doing, and the unexpected things we could learn if we just listen?
4. Liz realizes that her time on the force "had permeated my skin, blood, cells, brain chemistry," in "Finding a Place." She wonders what to do with her bulletproof vest, equipment, guns, etc. In "Where I come From," Sarah eventually buries the accoutrements of her former life on the force. Why or how does police work permanently affect the women? What are some of the habits that make it difficult to re-enter civilian life? Do the gender specific aches and pains of police work -- hipbones bruised by the weight of the holstered gun, breasts sore and chafed by bulletproof vests, for example--highlight the additional difficulties faced by women officers? How do these details immerse the reader in the lives of each officer?
5. In "Under Control" and "Taste, Touch, Sight, Sound, Smell," policewomen confront situations with the potential to escalate violently. How does each woman attempt to diffuse each situation? What signs of impending violence do they look for? How does each scene illustrate the hair-raising difficulty of assessing a situation "without understanding all the pieces--like entering a movie already in progress"? How does the title "Under Control" play out a family drama on two distinct yet simultaneous levels? What does Mona control? Is she effective?
6. "Cleaning Your Gun" is clearly Mona's story, yet Drummond writes in the second person, as if addressing the reader. How does this alter the impact of the story? When Mona's husband says to her, "your father was the job and nothing more," why does Mona defend her father? Does the fact that her father used "you're just like your mother" as the ultimate insult affect her (perhaps unconscious) choice of role model?
7. In "Something About a Scar," how was Marjorie further victimized after she was brutally stabbed? What does Cathy mean when she wonders what "new white snake was twisted into being deep inside from my inability to say, 'Yes, Marjorie, I believe you?'" What can we infer about physical and psychic scars, and how each could be formed, from this story?
8. In "Keeping the Dead Alive," Sarah is asked, "All this with the dead bodies and guns and no-good sumabitches. How d'you do it?" What responses flicker through Sarah's mind, and how does she eventually answer? Consider Sarah's take on crime scene

detectives: "I figured anyone who worked every god-awful crime scene in the city -- and Watson was up over eight hundred murders -- needed to be odd simply to survive." Or Liz ("Finding a Place"): "Inside, another part of me withered. A boy was dying, and I didn't want blood on my uniform." How do you think the constant exposure to human depravity affects these officers? How does each of the five women cope? What are the more benign methods and what are the most self-destructive?

9. "He'd never pull this on a male cop," Sarah thinks about a male peer in "Keeping the Dead Alive." A male detective expects Katherine to hold his coat in "Taste, Touch." Do male officers belittle the female protagonists in some instances? How did the women react, or prove themselves, in each situation?

10. In "Taste, Touch, Sight, Sound, Smell," Katherine reveals "what they don't tell you, what the movies and TV never show." What are other instances, in addition to parking ticket quotas, taking roll call or breaking into a house, in which Drummond corrects or corroborates TV depictions of police work? Why do you think the television views police work through a tidy, sanitized lens?

11. The women have to be tough, aggressive and macho to hold their own within the force. How do they reconcile their femininity with the job? Examine Drummond's description of Gwendolyn Stewart in "Keeping the Dead Alive?" Does Gwen embody both the social expectations of women and characteristics of an efficient, effective cop? Why, or why not?

12. Why does Drummond conceal the narrator's identity for so long in "Where I Come From?" Are there any clues to her identity as the story unfolds? What do you think her dreams of dancing hands represent? Does she find peace among the singing trees?

13. What draws each woman depicted in **Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You** to the police force? Do they have personality traits or characteristics in common? What does Sarah mean, in "Keeping the Dead Alive," when she says, "It's what most cops live for, whether we like to admit it or not, that feeling of something gone wrong?"

### About the author

Laurie Lynn Drummond's short story collection, **Anything You Say Can and Will Be Used Against You**, was published by HarperCollins in February 2004 and won the 2004 Violet Crown Texas Book Award in Fiction. Laurie's stories and essays have been published in *Story*, *Southern Review*, *Fiction*, *Black Warrior Review*, *New Virginia Review*, *Louisiana Cultural Vistas*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Fourth Genre*, and *River Teeth*, among others, and translated into Farsi for *Golestaneh: Iranian Cultural & Arts Monthly*. She was a Tennessee Williams Scholar in Fiction and a Walter E. Dakin Fellow at the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and she received an AWP Intro Award in Fiction and two fellowships from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. She is working on a novel, **The Hour of Two Lights**, also for HarperCollins, and a book-length memoir, **Losing My Gun**. She teaches in the MFA program at the University of Oregon in Eugene.