

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *BLINDSIGHTED* AND *KISSCUT*

# KARIN SLAUGHTER

A NOVEL

**A FAINT  
COLD FEAR**

## Synopsis | A FAINT COLD FEAR

The third pulse-pounding novel in the Grant County series from the New York Times-bestselling author of *Blindsighted* and *Kisscut*.

Sara Linton, medical examiner in the small town of Heartsdale, GA, is called out to an apparent suicide on the local college campus. The mutilated body provides little in the way of clues—and the college authorities are eager to avoid a scandal—but for Sara and police chief Jeffrey Tolliver, things don't add up.

Two more suspicious suicides follow, and a young woman is brutally attacked. For Sara, the violence strikes far too close to home. And as Jeffrey pursues the sadistic killer, he discovers that ex-police detective Lena Adams, now a security guard on campus, may be in possession of crucial information. But, bruised and angered by her expulsion from the force, Lena seems to be barely capable of protecting herself, let alone saving the next victim.

**KARIN  
SLAUGHTER**

**A FAINT  
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A N O V E L

# ***A FAINT COLD FEAR***

**A Novel by**

# Karin Slaughter

The Third book in the Grant County Series  
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For VS—

*in consideration of love and affection*

# SUNDAY

## 1

Sara Linton stared at the entrance to the Dairy Queen, watching her very pregnant sister walk out with a cup of chocolate-covered ice cream in each hand. As Tessa crossed the parking lot, the wind picked up, and her purple dress rose above her knees. She struggled to keep the jumper down without spilling the ice cream, and Sara could hear her cursing as she got closer to the car.

Sara tried not to laugh as she leaned over to open the door, asking, "Need help?"

"No," Tessa said, wedging her body into the car. She settled in, handing Sara her ice cream. "And you can shut up laughing at me."

Sara winced as her sister kicked off her sandals and propped her bare feet on the dashboard. The BMW 330i was less than two weeks old, and Tessa had already left a bag of Goobers to melt in the backseat and spilled an orange Fanta on the carpet in the front. Had Tessa not been nearly eight months pregnant, Sara would have strangled her.

Sara asked, "What took you so long?"

"I had to pee."

“Again?”

“No, I just like being in the bathroom at the damn Dairy Queen,” Tessa snapped. She fanned her hand in front of her face. “Jesus, it’s hot.”

Sara kept her mouth shut as she turned up the air-conditioning. As a doctor, she knew that Tessa was merely a victim of her own hormones, but there were times when Sara thought that the best thing for all concerned would be to lock Tessa in a box and not open it until they heard a baby crying.

“That place was packed,” Tessa managed around a mouthful of chocolate syrup. “Goddamn, shouldn’t all those people be at church or something?”

“Hm,” Sara said.

“The whole place was filthy. Look at this parking lot,” Tessa said, swooping her spoon in the air. “People just dump their trash here and don’t even care about who has to pick it up. Like they think the trash fairy’s gonna do it or something.”

Sara murmured some words of agreement, eating her ice cream as Tessa continued a litany of complaints about everyone in the Dairy Queen, from the man who was talking on his cell phone to the woman who waited in line for ten minutes and then couldn’t decide what she wanted when she got to the counter. After a while Sara zoned out, staring at the parking lot, thinking about the busy week she had ahead of her.

Several years ago Sara had taken on the part-time job of county coroner to help buy out her retiring partner at the Heartsdale Children’s Clinic, and lately Sara’s work at the morgue was playing havoc with her schedule at the clinic. Normally the county job did not require much of Sara’s time, but a court appearance had taken her out of the clinic for two days last week, and she was going to have to make up for it this week by putting in overtime.

Increasingly, Sara's work at the morgue was infringing on clinic time, and she knew that in a couple of years she would have to make a choice between the two. When the time came, the decision would be a hard one. The medical examiner's job was a challenge, one Sara had sorely needed thirteen years ago when she had left Atlanta and moved back to Grant County. Part of her thought her brain would atrophy without the constant obstacles presented by forensic medicine. Still, there was something restorative about treating children, and Sara, who could not have children of her own, knew that she would miss the contact. She vacillated daily on which job was better. Generally, a bad day at one made the other look ideal. "Getting on up there!" Tessa screeched, loud enough to get Sara's attention. "I'm thirty-four, not fifty. What the hell kind of thing is that for a nurse to say to a pregnant woman?"

Sara stared at her sister. "What?"

"Have you heard a word I've said?"

She tried to sound convincing. "Yes. Of course I have."

Tessa frowned. "You're thinking about Jeffrey, aren't you?"

Sara was surprised by the question. For once her ex-husband had been the last thing on her mind. "No."

"Sara, don't lie to me," Tessa countered. "Everybody in town saw that sign girl up at the station Friday."

"She was lettering the new police car," Sara answered, feeling a warm flush come to her cheeks.

Tessa gave a disbelieving look. "Wasn't that his excuse the last time?"

Sara did not answer. She could still remember the day she'd come home early from work to find Jeffrey in bed with the owner of the local sign shop. The whole Linton family was both amazed and irritated that Sara was dating Jeffrey again, and while Sara for the

most part shared their sentiments, she felt incapable of making a clean break. Logic eluded her where Jeffrey was concerned.

Tessa warned, "You just need to be careful with him. Don't let him get too comfortable."

"I'm not an idiot."

"Sometimes you are."

"Well, you are, too," Sara shot back, feeling foolish even before the words came out of her mouth.

But for the whir of the air-conditioning, the car was quiet. Finally Tessa offered, "You should've said, 'I know you are, but what am I?'"

Sara wanted to laugh it off, but she was too irritated. "Tessie, it's none of your business."

Tessa barked a loud laugh that rattled in Sara's ears. "Well, hell, honey, that's never stopped anybody before. I'm sure damn Marla Simms was on the phone before the little bitch even got out of her truck."

"Don't call her that."

Tessa waved her spoon in the air again. "What do you want me to call her? Slut?"

"Nothing," Sara told her, and meant it. "Don't call her anything."

"Oh, I think she deserves a few choice words."

"Jeffrey's the one who cheated. She just took advantage of a good opportunity."

"You know," Tessa began. "I took advantage of plenty of good opportunities in my time, but I never chased after a married one."

Sara closed her eyes, willing her sister to stop. She did not want to have this conversation.

Tessa added, "Marla told Penny Brock she's put on weight."

“What were you doing talking to Penny Brock?”

“Stopped-up drain in their kitchen,” Tessa said, smacking her mouth around her spoon. Tessa had quit working full-time with their father in the family plumbing business when her swollen belly made it impossible to navigate crawl spaces, but she was still capable of taking a plunger to a drain.

Tessa said, “According to Penny, she’s big as a house.”

Despite her better intentions, Sara could not help but feel a moment of triumph, followed by a wave of guilt that she could take pleasure in another woman’s widening hips. And ass. The sign girl was already a little too full in the flank for her own good.

Tessa said, “I see you smiling.”

Sara was; her cheeks hurt from the strain of keeping her mouth closed. “This is horrible.”

“Since when?”

“Since . . .” Sara let her voice trail off. “Since it makes me feel like an absolute idiot.”

“Well, you am what you am, as Popeye would say.” Tessa made a great show of scraping her plastic spoon around the cardboard cup as she wiped it clean. She sighed heavily, as if her day had just taken a turn for the worse. “Can I have the rest of yours?”

“No.”

“I’m pregnant!” Tessa squeaked.

“That’s not my fault.”

Tessa went back to scraping her cup. To add to the annoyance, she started scratching the bottom of her foot on the dashboard’s burlwood inlay.

A full minute passed before Sara felt an older sister’s guilt hit her like a sledgehammer. She tried to fight it by eating more ice cream, but it