



Anonymous Anonymous

**Slender Man**

«HarperCollins»

## **Anonymous A.**

Slender Man / A. Anonymous — «HarperCollins»,

LAUREN BAILEY HAS DISAPPEARED. As her friends and the police search for answers, Matt Barker begins to dream of trees and black skies and something drawing closer. Through fragments of journals, blog posts and messages, a sinister, slender figure emerges and all divisions between fiction and delusion, between nightmare and reality, begin to fall. The urban legend of the Slender Man has inspired short fiction, viral videos, and a feature film. Gathered from onlinewhispers, Matt's story reveals the true power of the internet's most terrifying creation.

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# S L E N D E R M A N



## Copyright

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welcome

Don't take this personally, but I don't like you very much.

I don't see the point of you, I resent the time I'm being forced to spend on you, and – to be honest – I just see you as an obligation, as something that I have to put up with until I can get rid of you.

But that's not going to be for a while yet, so to hell with it.

Here we go.

— — — —

**March 12<sup>th</sup>**

*Dear Diary ...*

You see, that's just stupid. Why would you address a diary like it's the grandparent you only see a couple of times a year? I get that this is risky territory under the circumstances, but it seems to me that when you start talking to inanimate objects like they're people then you've reached the point where you need to check that all your screws are fully tightened. But maybe that's just me.

Either way, let's try that again.

— — — —

**March 12<sup>th</sup>**

*Journal entry 1*

Better. Much better. When I hear the word diary, I think of a bright pink book with a felt cover and a little lock and a keyhole that lives under the pillow of some twelve-year-old girl whose heart is just **so very full** of hopes and dreams and secrets. Not a Word document on the desktop of a MacBook Pro that only exists because your therapist told you it had to.

She thinks the act of writing this will be good for me, that it will help me keep things ordered and she thinks I might surprise myself. I guess there's always a chance that she's right, but I'm really not going to be holding my breath.

It's been a long time since I surprised myself.

I have to see Dr. Casemiro once a week, on Tuesday evenings after school. My parents are making me do it. I've been having nightmares for a little while now, and my mom says I've been crying out in my sleep, although part of me thinks they just got tired of being one of the only couples they know who doesn't have at least one child in therapy. I asked them why – if they're worried about me sleeping properly – they didn't just get me referred to an actual sleep therapist, and Mom told me that she thinks – and I'll quote her now – *That it's always better to get to the root of what's going on, and that it never hurts to give yourself an emotional roadworthiness test.*

I'm still not sure what she expected me to say in response to that.

Anyway.

I asked Dr. Casemiro what she wanted me to write about, whether I was supposed to keep an actual diary where I write down everything I do each day and every place I go and everyone I talk to, and she said that she wanted it *to be an outlet for personal reflection*, so what I put in it was entirely up to me.

Which was really helpful, obviously.

It must be such a weird balancing act, being a therapist. I get that the whole point is to try and lead people to realize things about themselves, rather than just tell them what's wrong, but that relies on people being brave enough to look as hard at themselves as they do at other people, and I don't know how many people are really, actually, that brave. People want easy answers, and they want pills that make them feel better.

It must be especially weird these days, where you know that if you give a patient advice that turns out to be unhelpful, they'll almost certainly sue you. That must really sharpen your professional focus, although I wonder if it makes you reluctant to actually take a position on anything. I wonder if that's why she says "Let's explore that a little further" about fifteen times every hour.

In the end, I managed to get her to at least suggest a few things that she thought it might be helpful for me to write about: family, friends, school, how I spend my spare time. Nothing that I couldn't have guessed myself, but you take what you can get, I guess.

So fine. I'll do what she says.

You know how in movies and stories, the hero usually has some destiny that they aren't aware of? Like how Luke Skywalker is destined to be a great Jedi and lead the Rebel Alliance to victory but he doesn't know it because he's living on Tatooine, or that Frodo is destined to destroy the One Ring in Mount Doom but he thinks he's going to live his entire life in The Shire?

There's a whole academic theory about it: it's called The Hero's Journey. People who go from small lives to some great grand thing, where they become part of something bigger and more important than they could ever have imagined.

I guess it's why those stories work so well, because everyone wants to believe they're more important than they really are, that any moment now some incredible thing is going to happen that turns everything upside down and they'll breathe a massive sigh of relief because they always knew they were special, *deep down they always knew it*, and all the disappointments and bullshit and trudging through dead-end days will have been worthwhile.

Me? I'm destined to be a lawyer.

Glamorous, right? **World-changing**. I can't wait.

I explained this to Dr. Casemiro during our first session, when we were still in the getting-to-know-you part of the process, and she told me I was wrong, that I can do anything with my life that I put my mind to, but all that proved is something I already knew, that a person can be **really intelligent** and **really stupid** at the same time.

*Of course* I can technically do whatever I want with my life. America's still just about a free country, and I'm white and male and my parents are wealthy and I go to a good school, so I have about as many advantages as it's possible for a person to have. But my options – like everyone else's – are limited by stuff that people don't like to talk about, because it doesn't fit with the all-American ideal of a meritocracy, that the only thing standing between you and your wildest dreams is hard work and a good attitude.

Which, frankly, is an absolute crock of shit.

My dad is a lawyer. Three of my four grandparents were lawyers. It runs in the family. It's in our blood.

My mom isn't a lawyer, but that's only because she got pregnant with me and never finished law school. By the time I was born my dad was the youngest partner at his firm, and I guess neither of them ever saw the point in her going back to work. I barely see her any more than I see my dad, though: she's on the boards of about a dozen charities and non-profits, and a lot of the time it seems like she works longer hours than he does.

I don't think Dad will try to tell me what major I pick when I go to college next fall, because that doesn't really effect the path he has got laid out for his only son, a path that was set in stone when I was still swimming around in his balls. But if I suggest not going to law school after I graduate? That's going to be a **really** awkward conversation.

Think of it this way:

There are things that live at the bottom of the ocean, down where only the strongest submarines can go, the ones with windows that are six inches thick. Things that are much weirder than anything in movies or novels, things that look like the guy who designed the creature out of *Alien* took a whole bunch of acid and just went nuts on a sketchpad. The pressure at the bottom of the ocean would crush a person to death in about a nanosecond, but the creatures I'm talking about thrive on it. They're used to it, because they've never known anything else.

So. Anyway.

Dr. Casemiro likes talking about my parents. LOVES talking about them, to be honest, even though I'm still scratching my head to understand how whether or not I think my mother loves me relates to me having the occasional bad dream.

I mean, I could lie and say that they neglect me, or beat me, or that dad sexually abused me when I was little, but Dr. Casemiro has met them and I don't think there's any way she would buy it. They're just too boring to have that kind of darkness inside them, even hidden away deep down where nobody else can see it.

The – equally boring – truth is that my mom and dad are kind, decent, upstanding members of the community. They probably both work more than is totally healthy, and there are times when it doesn't really feel like they're very interested in me, but find me a teenager in America who doesn't feel like that some of the time. If you can, it'll be because you've found someone who doesn't have any parents, which is a whole different thing altogether.

Jamie always tells me that I'm lucky that my mom and dad are so busy, that they always have so much stuff going on. His dad's a lot older than mine – he retired last fall, and him and Jamie's mom decided to go full super-parent for the last couple of years before their son flies the nest. Homework at the kitchen table, both of them helping out. Parent governors at Riley, both of them going along on

every college visit. His mom holding the stopwatch while he does practice SAT papers. Jamie says it feels like being smothered.

Calling Jamie my best friend seems a little bit pre-pubescent girl, and calling him my bro would mean I was the kind of douchebag who actually uses the word bro. I've always liked mate, which is the British word for friend, but I don't think you can pull it off out loud unless you're Jason Statham.

He's my **closest** friend. That'll do.

We don't hang out all the time, because nobody ever really does that. And there have been times where we barely saw each other for weeks, or even months. There was the time Jamie broke his ankle playing lacrosse and I got really into *World of Warcraft*. There was the period when he was dating Lucie Goldman and just wandered around every day with this big goofy grin on his face, like he was the first person in history to ever get to third base.

But most of the time, we're pretty tight. He forwards me every dumb thing he finds on the internet, and I text him the movies he should have seen but hasn't, and we swap comics, and records, and we gossip about things that happened at school, sometimes barely minutes earlier. Because things happening aren't enough: the important part is hyper-analysing them afterwards. Obviously.

I do a lot of the same things with Lauren too, although hardly anyone knows that. She's probably my oldest friend, although it's not the same as it used to be, at least in public. I'm not sure most people at Riley even know that we know each other, and the weird thing is that I think both of us have sort of come to enjoy that fact. Our parents are friends, and we were super-tight until we were about eight, as stupid as that sounds now. We went to different middle schools, and when we got to Riley we lived in different worlds. But we still text all the time, and she gets to show someone every weird bit of creepypasta and the horrendous gore photos she always finds weirdly hilarious without freaking her friends out and I get to indulge my mild obsession with *Riverdale* without Jamie wondering if I've lost my mind.

It works, is what I'm saying. At school, we barely acknowledge each other. And that's OK. Because – and I'm not being hyperbolic here – Riley is a judgemental cesspit. And that's putting it mildly. It's mostly the same drama that happens in every school, the who-fucked-who, who-said-what, who-did-what stuff that seems so unbelievably important for about five minutes. Although Riley being Riley, there are times when the shit hits the fan from a slightly different direction.

There was the time one of the girls in my class had to go to the emergency room and get her stomach pumped because she had been out celebrating her mom winning a Tony.

About a quarter of the class of 2010 went from being **THE OFFICIAL KINGS AND QUEENS OF THE SCHOOL** to applying for bursaries and free lunches when Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers went under.

Last semester two kids from the class below mine disappeared after there was a coup in the Democratic Republic of Congo and their father fled to Switzerland, taking about half the country's GDP with him. One day they were there, the next they were on a plane.

So it goes. It's a cliché to say that nobody knows what the future holds, but it's also the truth.

Nobody has a fucking clue.

— — — —

Excerpt of police interview transcript.

**APRIL 22ND 2018, 20TH POLICE PRECINCT STATIONHOUSE, MANHATTAN, NY**

**Participants:**

Detective John Staglione

Detective Mia Ramirez

Jamie Reynolds

Donald McArthur (Attorney-at-Law)

**DET. STAGLIONE.** OK. Everyone set?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Fine.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** You know you're not in any trouble, Jamie. That's been made clear to you?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Yeah.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** We get that this is difficult.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** We really do.

**DONALD MCARTHUR.** Could we dispense with the "we're all friends here" act?

**DET. STAGLIONE.** Your attorney's a cynic.

**DONALD MCARTHUR.** Detectives.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Fine. No problem.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** How long have you known Matthew Barker, Jamie?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Since second grade.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** So more than ten years?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** I guess so.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** Where was that?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Sorry?

**DET. STAGLIONE.** Where did the two of you attend second grade?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Don't you know that already?

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Just answer the question, Jamie.

**DONALD MCARTHUR.** I'm going to ask you to take a less combative tone with my client, Detective. Mister Reynolds is not under arrest, and is cooperating fully with your investigation.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** Of course. Sorry about that. So can you tell us where you met Matthew Barker?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** At Sacred Heart.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Sacred Heart Preparatory School? On West 75th?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** So you did know. Why ask me?

**DET. STAGLIONE.** We're interested in your recollection of events, Jamie. In what you can and can't remember. We're not trying to trick you.

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** I met Matt at Sacred Heart. Like I said.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** OK. Do you remember what you thought of him?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** What do you mean?

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Your initial impression.

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** I was seven.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** So that's a no?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** We were kids. I don't remember any more than that.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Was he popular?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Matt?

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Yes.

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** I don't know. I mean ... I guess so. Yeah. People liked him.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** What about later on? At Riley?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** He was quiet. He always has been, I guess. So he wasn't exactly the most popular kid in school. He didn't play football, and he wasn't into the kind of activities that Riley kids care about.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Which activities are those?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Usual shit. Debate. Band. Model UN.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** And Matt wasn't into any of those?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** No.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** So what was he into?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Usual stuff, I guess. He liked movies, liked TV, liked games. He read a lot. He wrote stuff, too, although he never let me read any of it.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** What sort of stuff?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Stories. Comics too, I think. I know he used to draw a lot, when we were younger.

**DET. STAGLIONE.** But he wasn't unpopular?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** No.

**DET. RAMIREZ.** Did he seem happy to you?

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** What does that look like?

**DET. STAGLIONE.** I don't know, Jamie. You were his friend.

**JAMIE REYNOLDS.** Yeah. He seemed happy enough.

\* \* \* \*

**March 14<sup>th</sup>**

*Journal entry 2*

I went to Whole Foods with Jamie after school let out, because he read somewhere that you burn more calories drinking wheatgrass juice than there are calories in wheatgrass juice. Which is *really, obviously* bullshit, but he says he wants to lose ten pounds before the summer because apparently he's turned into the kind of person who thinks you are supposed to weigh a certain amount at a certain time of the year and I just didn't have the energy to call him out on it. He bought two litres of the stuff and all I could think about was how green his piss is going to be before he goes to bed tonight.

We walked back through the park and he was talking about how Steve Allison has been talking shit about Lauren to anyone who will listen since she dumped him while apparently texting her about a hundred times a day asking her to take him back. I didn't really say much, even though I knew more about it than he did. He knows that we're friends – or at least, that we used to be – but he doesn't know we text all the time, because I've never told him. Like I said, it's nice to have at least one secret.

Like most of the boys at Riley, Jamie is at least a little bit in love with Lauren. I sometimes think I'm the only person who could put their hand on their heart and honestly say that they're not. It's not like I blame them – she's pretty and funny and smart and popular – but that's just not how I see her. I think I've known her too long for that. And it's hard to crush on someone who sends you videos of people walking across railway crossings and getting splattered by trains.

Anyway.

She's not the hottest girl at school. Last year there was a senior at Riley called Erin whose older sister is a Victoria's Secret Angel, and she was just about the best-looking person I've ever seen in real life. It sort of hurt to look at her, if that makes any sense. The school email server almost burned down two Septembers ago when she "accidentally" sent a folder of photos of herself in about a dozen different bikinis on the beach at Cabo San Lucas to everyone in the cheerleading squad and the athletics programs. I don't think there's ever been a link that was forwarded and downloaded more quickly in the history of the internet.

Lauren isn't as pretty as Erin was. But Lauren would also never send a folder of photos of herself in swimwear to half the senior class and claim it was an accident, so she's got that going for her.

Lauren's mom doesn't work, because her dad is this insanely sought-after gynecologist. He's clearly an asshole – he's tall and handsome and loud and is one of those guys who really pride themselves on being **CHARMING** – but he's funny, if nothing else. I was talking to him once at a parent-teacher event at Riley and he told me he's the only man in the world who has seen more supermodel vaginas than Leonardo DiCaprio. Lauren looked like she was going to die from embarrassment, but I just about fell over laughing.

I actually ran into her on Central Park West this morning and we walked to school through the park together. That happens maybe once or twice a week, and it's a good start to the day. We talked and we walked and we got coffee at one of the little carts in the park and about ten minutes later we got to Riley and told each to have a good day.

It was nice, like it always is.

In all honesty, I was glad to see her this morning because I was in a shitty mood by the time I left our apartment. I told my mom over breakfast that I wanted to stop seeing Dr. Casemiro, that it was making me feel awkward and that I clearly wasn't getting anything out of it because I'd had a nightmare two nights before, but she wasn't having any of it. She loves to really lean into that parental hypocrisy of telling me I'm an adult when she wants me to take more responsibility or stop doing something she doesn't like but refuses to actually let me make anything resembling an important decision for myself. She said the same stuff she always says: that when I'm eighteen – a legal, court-authorized adult, which is an unbelievably stupid concept if you take even a second to think about it – I can do whatever I want, including refusing to see Dr. Casemiro anymore.

Until then, I basically have to eat shit and smile about it. My words, not hers.

I told her thanks very much, but I don't think I managed to fill it with as much sarcasm as I intended, because she just nodded her head and told me to have a good day.

In fairness, it actually *was* a pretty good day, but there was no way I was going to tell her that when I got home. She got the noncommittal grunt she deserved before I came in here to my room and slammed the door. Because two can play at being unreasonable, if that's the game she wants.

No problem at all.

AP Math was painfully boring, but English was OK. We're studying *Tender Is the Night* and today we were talking about the treatment of Nicole's mental illness, about how Fitzgerald lets the reader know via flashback what's actually happening although Dick Diver keeps it a secret from the other characters for as long as he can. It carries a lot more weight when you know that Nicole is really Zelda Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald is basically telling the real story of their life together in the novel. It's clever, in a sort of meta way. I hated *The Great Gatsby*, but I'm quite enjoying this one.

We had a free period after lunch, and I got a little bit of work done on the story I've been writing. It's still not working quite how I want it to, and I'm still not totally sure how to fix it, but I wrote a few paragraphs that I'm pretty pleased with, and I think I can make them better tomorrow if I get time. I would work on them tonight, but I'm about an hour's grind from levelling up my new Warlock and I think that's about all I've got the energy for right now.

I'm really tired. Not the kind of tired where you're going to feel great if you give yourself an extra hour's sleep: that kind of deep tiredness that makes it feel like your bones are made of lead, like someone has turned all your dials down to zero and locked them.

This is what Dr. Casemiro is supposed to be helping me with. She's clearly doing an awesome job, although I'll admit that actually going to sleep before one in the morning would probably not be the worst idea in the world.

But fuck it.

I know I'm my own worst enemy :)

— — — —  
*From the desk of*

**DR. JENNIFER CASEMIRO, M.D.**

**596 WEST 72<sup>ND</sup> STREET, NY 10021**

*March 15, 2018*

*Dear Paul and Kimberley,*

*Further to our call yesterday, please find below my assessment of my first month working with Matthew. Please be assured that I understand your concerns about what you perceive to be a lack of visible progress – I can only attempt to reassure you that such progress rarely occurs at the speed you are (understandably) hoping for and, in my experience, its absence does not signify anything more significant than the issues of trust-building and boundary-testing that are common to the early stages of a professional relationship of this type.*

*Matthew possesses high levels of intelligence and awareness, and has made it clear that he is unwilling to work with me on the issues for which he was referred. Despite that, I believe significant progress has in fact been made.*

*His initial statements were that he did not want to talk to me, and that he considered my attempts to induce him to do so to be a violation of his human rights. This grand language is not unusual, especially in teenagers of Matthew's intelligence. It is a common form of diversion, in which he avoids the issue of why he doesn't want to talk to me by expanding our conversation to a point of general absurdity, in this case the issue of human rights.*

*In the last week or so, Matthew's objections to working with me have changed. He no longer states that he does not want to – he has now repeatedly stated that he does not see any point in doing so. This marks a significant shift, in my experience. He has moved past a dogmatic refusal to talk to me, and has moved onto a more personal objection, i.e. that he does not believe I can help him with what he perceives to be a medical issue. This, although it may not seem so to you, is progress. It suggests a willingness to engage with our process, provided that I can convince him of its potential usefulness. This is what I have focused on during our last two sessions.*

*As you know, I have asked him to keep a diary. He has apparently done so – he has shown me the pages he has written, although I (obviously) cannot guarantee that he is taking it seriously – although it is clear that he resents it. We have discussed it, however, and those conversations have been illuminating.*

*Persistent refusal to engage requires a level of self-control that few teenagers possess, and even Matthew, who is both intelligent and unquestionably composed, is not able to neuter his speech entirely. Our conversations have revealed the frustrations and doubts that are entirely common to this period of late adolescence, the period in which most teenagers find themselves caught between the desire to be in charge of themselves and the unavoidable reality of the rules and restrictions that come with living at home.*

*He makes several references to his belief that you will be disappointed in him if he chooses any career other than the law, so much so that he believes you would actually prevent it by refusing to pay for college tuition in any other field. I do not know whether this is something that you have ever made explicitly clear to him, but it has become a deeply-held belief. I suggest that you discuss this with each other, and then with him.*

*I am also convinced that his frustration and worry are at least partly responsible for the issue for which you referred him to my practice, i.e. recurrent nightmares and sleeplessness. This is the central issue that I will continue to focus our sessions on.*

*I hope this sets your mind at rest. There are no reliable timetables for the work that I do, and while I know from long experience that this can be frustrating, I would ask you to allow the process to continue. I can assure you that we are making progress, even if you are currently struggling to see it.*

*Yours sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jennifer Casemiro', written in a cursive style.

*Jennifer Casemiro, M.D.*

**TRANSCRIPTS OF AUDIO RECORDED ON MATTHEW BARKER'S  
CELLPHONE**

**Recording begins: March 16, 03:24**

Jesus  
That was  
Hold on  
Let me just  
OK  
OK

It's 3.24 in the morning, and I know that exactly because I've been staring at my phone screen for the last ten minutes waiting for my heart to slow down. It was on the pillow when I woke up. I must have fallen asleep still with it and right now I'm really grateful for that because if it was on the bedside table where it usually is I would have been fucked. I tried to turn on my lamp a few minutes ago and I reached out and my hand disappeared and I couldn't see it anymore and I started wondering what I would do, what I would really actually really *do*, if fingers closed around my wrist and I pulled my hand back and put it under the covers and I could feel my whole body shaking like I was freezing.

So  
Jesus  
I need to

**Recording ends: March 16, 03:26**

**Recording begins: March 16, 03:30**

OK.

It's 3.30 now and it feels like my head is sort of starting to clear. I just ... Jesus. Seriously. I don't know if that was the worst nightmare I've had since they started but if it wasn't then I'm just really glad I can't remember the ones that were worse.

I can still feel it. Does that make sense? Like it was an actual thing, like a physical thing that attached itself to my skin and it feels like I can't scrape it off. Like if I close my eyes I'll be back inside it.

I managed to turn the lamp on. It took literally every ounce of bravery I've got, but I feel a little bit better now.

I never used to be able to remember dreams, not the good ones or the bad ones. I sometimes had that vague feeling when I woke up that I had been dreaming, because it felt like I wasn't really as rested as I should have been for the amount of time I'd been asleep, and sometimes there were images I didn't recognize in my head, like photographs I know I didn't take, but the dreams themselves, the details, were always gone by the time my eyes opened.

For the last couple of months it hasn't been like that. At all. And this one was no different. I can remember every single bit of it.

I already know it's going to sound stupid but right now I don't give a shit. Like, at all. Because dreams always sound stupid. They don't translate properly to other people, because they come out of some place deep inside yourself and what's absolutely fucking terrifying to me probably means absolutely nothing to you, or to anyone else. But I have to get this out. I think it will be less, afterwards. Like it's diminished or something. I don't know.

There were trees everywhere. Everywhere. That's the main thing I remember. I don't know what they were, or where. Because Central Park is two blocks away I guess it would make sense to assume that was where I was, but I don't think that's right. I didn't see any paths or gardens or anything familiar. And the trees seemed older. Like they were wild, like they had just grown wherever they wanted. I was totally surrounded by them and I remember looking up and seeing the sky, and it was black. Not dark purple or dark grey or dark blue or the pale glowing yellow that always hangs over Manhattan. Proper black.

Pitch black.

I was walking. I don't think I knew where I was going, or if I did then I've forgotten. There's no logic to dreams, no narrative of A to B to C that makes sense. Or, at least, not that I've ever known. Maybe it's different for some people.

I was walking, and there were trees and the black sky and I sort of knew that I was cold, like I was just sort of aware of it, but it didn't worry me. I just walked and shivered and walked and I can't remember actually thinking about anything, or doing anything else. I just walked.

And then

I think

Jesus. Come on, for fuck's sake. Get your shit together.

Come on

Come on

**Recording ends: March 16, 03:33**

**Recording begins: March 16, 03:35**

OK

So

There was something behind me.

I just knew there was, as surely as I know my name and where I live and that if I swing my legs out of bed there's going to be a floor there. It was just a fact. It was behind me, and it was getting closer.

I didn't look round, because I think I knew that it would catch me if I did. Like that was the rule, like I was fucking Odysseus or something. If I looked round, I would see it right behind me, and I didn't want to see it. I didn't want to know what it was.

But I knew I couldn't run either. If I ran, then it would definitely catch me. I knew that too, without any doubt at all, the way some things just *are*. It's like someone installs the rules of the dream into your head before it starts.

So I kept walking. I was sort of trying to go quicker, like I was going to push the no-running rule as far as I could, but nothing really happened. That's the worst thing about dreams: that there's nothing you can do. You're basically helpless.

I know people talk about realising they're in a dream while they're still having it and being able to change things and do whatever they want, but I don't buy that. I think maybe that's how they remember them, and maybe that supposed realisation was actually just part of it, like it feels like they were making choices and exercising free will afterwards, once they're awake, but I don't think that's ever actually what happens. I don't think your consciousness is engaged in dreams. I think they're like movies with you in them, where you can't actually change what's happening. You're just a passenger along for the ride.

Anyway.

I was walking and it was dark and the thing that was behind me, whatever it was, was getting closer. It didn't make any sound, it's not like I heard its footsteps speeding up or anything like that. I just knew it was getting closer. And I knew it was going to catch me. I didn't know how long it was going to take, or whether there was any way for me to stop it, like I might reach the end of the trees and be safe. It was following me and I was walking and it was getting closer and closer and I was trying to hurry and I didn't dare look around because I knew what would happen and then I decided to run because I didn't care anymore I just needed to run because I couldn't just walk through the trees and wait for it to catch me but my legs wouldn't do what they were told and I think I screamed then but I'm not really sure and then I knew – I just absolutely knew without any doubt whatsoever – that it was right behind me and that if I reached my hand out behind my head I would touch its skin and then I definitely screamed and I felt something on the back of my neck like its breath or maybe it reached out and touched me with the tips of its fingers and

**Recording ends: March 16, 03:37**

**Recording begins: March 16, 03:42**

I've been awake for exactly twenty-eight minutes. I went to get a glass of water but my hands were shaking so much that I spilt most of it on my way back from the bathroom.

So. Yeah. I think

I think

I don't know if I screamed out loud. Probably not, because I guess someone would have woken up. The apartment is all dark and on my way back from the bathroom I stopped outside my parents room and I could hear my dad snoring.

So I guess I only screamed inside my head. It was enough to wake me up, though. My heart was racing in my chest and for the first couple of seconds I couldn't breathe, just couldn't breathe at all. It was like someone had tied a belt around my chest and pulled it tight. It was dark and the scream was ringing in my head and I couldn't see anything and I honestly thought I was dying. I thought my heart had stopped and I thought I was dying and there was a thought in my head, just one thought, going over and over and over.

*It got me.* I was too slow, and it got me.

Jesus

I'm pretty sure that's it for sleep for me tonight. Dad's alarm will go off in about three hours and I'm not moving from this spot until then. The lights are staying on and I'm staying right where I am and I'm not moving until the sun comes up.

I'm done

**Recording ends: March 16, 03:44**

**LAUREN**

So I read it. It's good.

**MATT**

You thought so?

**LAUREN**

I mean, I'm not exactly a literary critic. But yeah. I really liked it. The first bit, the dream, was really scary.

**MATT**

Awesome. I know you don't scare easily :)

**LAUREN**

Damn right ;)

**MATT**

You really liked it?

**LAUREN**

You know I wouldn't say so if I didn't. You should show it to someone.

**MATT**

I did. I showed it to you :)

**LAUREN**

Smartass.

**LAUREN**

Seriously, though. Maybe Professor

Trevayne?

**MATT**

Why?

**LAUREN**

He might like it too?

**MATT**

He might. Or he might tell me it's a piece of shit. Either way, what does it matter?

**LAUREN**

What are you talking about?

**MATT**

You've met my dad, right?

**LAUREN**

Once or twice :)

**MATT**

Do you know how much writers make?

**LAUREN**

I would guess it depends on the writer.

**MATT**

Now who's being a smartass?

**LAUREN**

You started it.

**LAUREN**

Why does it matter how much writers earn?

**MATT**

Because me telling my dad that I don't want to be a lawyer, that I actually want to be a writer so would he mind financially supporting me for the rest of his life, is not a conversation that's likely to go well.

**LAUREN**

That's bullshit.

**MATT**

What is?

**LAUREN**

Even if you're right. You enjoy writing.

**MATT**

Was that a question?

**LAUREN**

Nope. I know you enjoy it. So you should want this story to be as good as it can be.

**MATT**

OK.

**LAUREN**

So show it to someone who knows what they're talking about. Like Professor Trevayne. He gives you advice, you finish the story, then the next one you write is better. I don't see the problem.

**MATT**

I wish I hadn't sent it to you.

**LAUREN**

Well that's just tough shit I'm afraid.

**LAUREN**

I'm going to bed. Two questions first.

**MATT**

OK.

**LAUREN**

One. When are you going to send me part two?

**MATT**

When it's ready.

**LAUREN**

Spoken like a true writer :)

**LAUREN**

Two. What's the title going to be?

## THE DAWN ALWAYS BREAKS

*by Matt Barker*

He had no idea how much time had passed when he saw it.

Time seemed malleable inside the forest, to the point where it had ceased to have any meaning. The rain had stopped briefly, then started again more heavily than ever. In the brief moments when water wasn't falling from the sky, the air had cleared and felt fresh, before thickening again as the rain returned. It had felt like the first storm had passed, only for a second, stronger one to arrive within minutes. Which was impossible, of course. The storms that battered the valley were huge, vast sheets of dark clouds that blanketed the entire sky. They took hours to move across the sky, and it was unheard of for one to follow another directly.

But that was what had happened. Stephen was sure of it.

The trail was still there, rougher and more overgrown than ever, now boggy with mud and with streams running either side of it, but it was still there. Stephen had considered what he would do if – when – it ended, if he found himself faced with the impenetrable wall of undergrowth and tree trunks that ran along both sides of the trail, but had pushed the thought away. He would deal with that if and when it became necessary to do so, and there was no sense worrying about it until then.

Thunder rolled overhead, a ceaseless drumbeat that shook great quantities of water down from the trees and trembled the trail beneath his feet. He paused, feeling the crackle in the air in his teeth and the bones of his jaw, then flinched as lightning burst across the sky, lighting the entire forest blinding white. A smell of burning filled his nose, the electricity in the air lifted the hairs on his arms and the back of his neck. The thunder rolled again, and this time he braced himself, ready for the flash when it came.

The lightning struck with a noise like the end of the world. It sounded like it was close – too close – and the blaze of light was long and hurt his eyes. In the blue-white seconds before it faded, leaving dancing spots of red and yellow in front of his eyes, he saw the scale of the place he now found himself, saw the trees stretching away in every direction, tall and old and endless. And away to his left, where the trail made a gentle turn to the left, he saw something else.

For a millisecond, he thought it was a tree. It was tall, and spindly, composed of straight lines and edges.

Then it moved ...

Stephen allowed reality to come slowly, to wash over him like warm water. For long, stretched-out moments the divide between sleeping and waking was a blur of dark grey, the familiar surroundings of his bedroom bleeding into the equally familiar horror of his nightmares.

They were always the same, and he had accepted that they would never leave him. Not entirely, at least: there were nights, sometimes as many as three or four in a row, when he slept as he had before the war, and he was never less than grateful for such respite. Because he always knew it was only a matter of time before the things he had done invaded his unconscious mind again, and soaked his dreams with blood.

He swung his legs out of bed, pulled on his boots, and stood up. He felt the aches in his back, the pull of his shoulders, and grimaced. He had seen his own father stretch and wince in a similar way in the mornings, but that had been because he had been an old man. Stephen was barely thirty, although he could no longer claim with a straight face that he felt his age. He felt tired, and worn out.

He felt used up.

The physical hardships of the war had been severe, but he understood instinctively that this was something deeper. He had no learning of medicines and ailments, but he felt that a malaise had settled into his bones during his time in the west. Perhaps the old men and women of the village had

been right when they proclaimed that there was a price to be paid for taking a life. If so, Stephen owed the kind of debt that would give even a king pause for thought.

He slid the bolt on his door – there had been much scoffing when he had hammered the metal plates into place, but then the farmers and blacksmiths and tailors who called the village home had never hacked a foreign king's nephew's head from his neck while his limbs still twitched and his body was still warm – and stepped out of his house.

Spread out ahead of him to the east were the fields that he had worked as a boy, first for his father and then under the unfailingly critical eye of his mother. The small stone church, abandoned since the dawn of the Age of Reason, stood at the north-west corner of the largest field. For three winters now the villagers had waited for its roof to fall in, but still it held.

To the north, the valley sloped down to the river and the rich lands beyond. It would never cease to feel strange to Stephen that when he looked in these two directions, everything he could see now belonged to him. He had protested the King's decision to make him the Lord of these lands, but only once: the King appreciated humility but did not appreciate argument, especially if the topic under discussion was a gift that was – by anyone's standards – extremely generous.

Perhaps gift was the wrong word. The lands that had always been known as Wrong Side were a reward, earned a thousand times over on the battlefield in the protection of the Realm. And had they been any other parcel of lands of equal size and value, Stephen would not have protested even once. He knew what he had done, and what it was worth. It was only the men and women who lived on and worked these lands that had given him reason to be uneasy. He had grown up amongst them, a boy no better than any other, and now he was their Lord, by order of the King.

It was fair to say that there had been varied reactions to the news.

The small village square was busy, as it almost always was.

A small queue had formed in front of the well; the hard women who worked the land with a stubborn determination that was at least the equal of their husbands, waited patiently with wooden buckets in their hands. He could not hear their voices across the distance between them and him, but Stephen was extremely confident that gossip would be flowing between them as rapidly as the water being drawn from the cool rocks below.

Down by the river, he could see clothes being washed and children playing happily along the water's edge. Arthur Allen, who would turn fifteen in a month's time and was making the most of his last summer as a boy before the duties and responsibilities of adulthood made themselves known to him, was leading a group of smaller boys and girls in a circle along the riverbanks, orchestrating a game the rules of which Stephen could not even begin to fathom. There were sticks involved, and the covering of one eye with a hand, and an intricate series of loops and whirls had been scratched into the dust. It was beyond his understanding, but the children appeared to have no such problem.

Watching the game from a tree stump at the edge of the clearing was Mary Cooper. She was already fifteen, and was now usually to be found in the Cooper fields up near the edge of the forest, turning out plough-splitting rocks and dragging twisting vine-weed up by the roots. Hard work, as Stephen knew as well as anyone. The kind of work that aged you, that added lines to the face and a stoop to the back. He was sure that would eventually be Mary Cooper's fate, unless a gentleman from the castle happened to ride down into the valley and sweep her up onto his horse and take her away to be his wife.

Mary Cooper was by no means fully grown – even though he disagreed with it, Stephen was not minded to challenge the village's assumption that fifteen was the threshold between childhood and adulthood, not when there were other matters more pressing that would cause less consternation amongst his neighbors – but the beauty she would become was already extremely apparent. Mary Cooper was a good girl, kind and decent and hardworking. Her father had died when she was young, and she and her mother lived together in a small cottage at the point where their two small fields met. She was a quiet girl, although Stephen suspected there was a hard streak in her that she could draw

upon when needed: she was no fool, and she did not appreciate being taken for one, although exactly that assumption is often made about girls as beautiful as Mary Cooper.

Her hair was the color of a wheat field in afternoon sun, the lines of her face soft and pleasing to the eye, the curves beneath her dress long and smooth. Stephen had noticed the village men allowing their gaze to linger on her longer than was necessary, an occurrence that was becoming regular enough that he feared the time would come when he would no longer be able to hold his tongue.

But whereas they tried – half-heartedly in some cases – to disguise their lechery, Arthur Allen looked at Mary with the open adoration of the young, his eyes wide, his mouth almost always hanging slightly open, as though he could not truly believe the vision before him. His very open infatuation was the subject of gossip around the village, and some mocking. It was mostly gentle though, for, despite all their hard edges, the men and women of Wrong Side could – mostly – still remember what it was to be young and in love.

As he led the children in their game, Stephen saw Arthur cast stolen glances in Mary Cooper's direction. She gave no indication that she noticed – her gaze remained fixed on the slowly running river – but there was the faintest curve at the corners of her mouth, the tiniest hint of something that might – with appropriate encouragement – turn into a smile, that made him think that not only did she notice Arthur looking at her, but was content for him to do so.

Stephen watched for a little while longer, savouring the quiet contentment that had settled momentarily over the village. It wouldn't last, he knew. It never did. By mid-afternoon, when the temperature rose and so did tempers, there would be arguments that needed settling, disputes that needed resolving, and the good mood that was currently filling him would be a distant memory.

But in this moment, Stephen was content. In this moment, a thought – one that was exceptionally rare – occurred to him. He considered it, and allowed it to lodge in his mind, warming him from the inside.

This is why we went to the Borderlands, and why we waded through blood to come home.

This is what we fought for.

Stephen's first instinct, as always, was to reach for his sword.

The banging was loud, and insistent, and coming from somewhere close by. His eyes flew open, and he instantly registered that it was still dark. Not the deep night – the shutters that sealed the windows were edged in deep, velvet purple rather than rendered invisible by black – but still some hours before anyone ought to be knocking on his door.

He swung his legs out of bed and picked up his sword. It never lay out of reach, even when he was asleep, and he felt the familiar sadness at how neatly the weapon's handle fit into his hand. It had been rewrapped in leather half a dozen times, but within a few days it had always taken on some essential shape that was now part of the weapon itself. His fingers fit into faint grooves, his thumb rested against a worn blister of leather. It was an extension of himself, and even now – many months since he had last swung it in anger – he felt incomplete without it in his hand.

He crossed the small room of his dwelling in his night-shirt, his bare feet padding silently across the rolled earth. Some of the village houses had floorboards, and the grand homes that surrounded the castle had intricate tiles and even marble as floors. Stephen could have afforded the same, but such things were not in his nature. He liked the hard earth beneath his feet. He had fought for this land, killed and maimed for it, and he liked to feel connected to it.

The banging came again, long and loud. Stephen paused three yards from the door, beyond the range of any spear that might be thrust through the gap between it and the wall.

"Who goes there?" he shouted.

The reply was instant. "Sarah Cooper, my Lord."

Stephen grimaced in the darkness. The title still didn't sit well with him, and he was starting to doubt whether it ever would.

"What is it?" he asked.

“It’s Mary.”

“Is she hurt?”

“I don’t know, my Lord,” said Sarah. “I can’t find her.”

Stephen frowned. Then he reached out, unbolted the door, and swung it open. Sarah Cooper stood outside, her shawl pulled tightly around herself. It got cold at night in Wrong Side, even in the summer. The wind blew all the way down from the mountain, welcome during the day but capable of slicing you to the bone once the sun had set.

“What do you mean?” he asked. “When did you last see her?”

Sarah shuffled her feet against the cold. “After supper,” she said. “She went out for a walk before the sun went down. Said she had thinking to do. I told her not to be more than a half hour, and she promised me she wouldn’t be. That was getting on for six hours ago.”

Stephen looked past Sarah to the dark silhouettes of the village. The first fingers of dawn were threatening to rise above the eastern horizon, but it would not be light for another hour, at least.

“I should have come sooner,” said Sarah. “I didn’t like to think bad of her, though. I know the Allen boy’s been coming around, and I know they go walking some when she thinks I’m sleeping. She thinks I don’t know, but I know. Ain’t nothing wrong with it.”

“Nothing at all,” said Stephen, because he knew that was what she wanted to hear. But his attention was no longer on the frightened woman standing at his door. He was thinking about the Cooper farm, and the forest that lay just beyond its borders.

Wild things lived amongst the thick tangle of trees, things that could bite and claw. The men of Wrong Side had hunted the wolves that slid silently through the darkness almost to the point of extinction, but their howls could still sometimes be heard on the stillest nights. It was rare for them to emerge from the forest and threaten a human being, but it was not unheard of. When an animal was sick, or starving, Stephen had learnt that there was little they would not do, given the right circumstances.

There were bears in the deep forest, towering brown creatures that reared up on their hind legs and blotted out the sun. There were wildcats, barely larger than dogs but with mouths full of razor-sharp teeth and claws that could disembowel. There were snakes that spat and hissed and spiders that crawled silently over your skin, their shiny abdomens swollen with poison.

And some said there were other things too, things from before the Age of Reason that waited in the deepest dark, patient and hungry. Children told tales of such things around campfires, scaring each other silly while their parents watched on disapprovingly. There were places inside the forest – Stephen had seen them with his own eyes – where the blood in your veins ran cold and the hair on your arms stood up, even though the sun was warm overhead. Old places.

Bad places.

He was getting ahead of himself, he realized. There was more than enough bad and wicked in the world without worrying about monsters and demons. People did terrible things to other people every day, for no better reason than greed, or jealousy, or a short temper. The obvious had to be dealt with first.

“My Lord?” asked Sarah Cooper.

He looked at her. “Wake Simon Hester,” he said. “Tell him I said he’s to ride to the castle right away and fetch the King’s Master at Arms. Tell him I said to take his fastest horse.”

Sarah nodded. Her face, which had been as pale as a ghost’s when Stephen opened his door, now flushed with determined color. He knew, from long experience of commanding soldiers, that people usually felt better when they had something to do, a task to focus on.

“I’ll go right now,” she said. “What are you going to do?”

Stephen gestured at the long night-shirt he was wearing. “I’m going to put some clothes on,” he said. “And then I’m going to talk to Arthur Allen.”

**First time showing anyone anything.** (self.writing)

submitted 2 hours ago \* by breakerbreaker1989

Actually, that's a lie. I showed this to a friend of mine. But she's pretty much obliged to be encouraging, so it was only a white lie. Forgive me.

This is the first part of a story I've been working on. I'm not sure whether it's a short, or a novella, or maybe even the opening of something longer. I guess it's high fantasy with a touch of grimdark (as much as I hate that word) and I would think the influences are going to be pretty clear to anyone who gives it a look – Tolkien, Sanderson, Abercrombie, King, etc.

It's called *The Dawn Always Breaks*. 3k words. And I know this is probably a forlorn hope on a reddit sub, but please try to be kind ... :)

<http://www.dropbox.com/kjuehma7h>

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sorted by **best**

**[-] creativewritinggrad** 2 points 2 hours ago

Will check this out.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] breakerbreaker1989** 2 points 2 hours ago

Thanks. Hope you enjoy it.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] banksculturefan** 0 points 2 hours ago

Not my thing. Sorry.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] moviefan2.1** 3 points 1 hour ago

I bet OP really appreciates you taking the time to tell him that.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] banksculturefan** 0 points 14 minutes ago

Who cares what you think?

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] roofing\_contractor\_indiana** 0 points 2 hours ago

Tolkien sucks.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] mrdoloresclaiborne** 2 points 1 hour ago

Just read the first couple of paras. Liking it so far.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] breakerbreaker1989** 0 points 1 hour ago

Thanks a lot.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] creativewritinggrad** 4 points 28 minutes ago

OK. Have read and digested. Here are my thoughts, for you to take or leave as you please ...

On the whole, I think it's got a lot of potential – I like the style (although I'm sure you already know it needs a deep polish for repetitions and the occasional clunky sentence construction) and I like the creation of atmosphere: I can see Stephen's village clearly, and the opening sequence is enough to whet my appetite.

Stephen himself is immediately intriguing – he definitely leans into the trope of the good man who has done bad things, but that isn't necessarily a problem in itself. There is scope to do a lot with him. And the world of the story feels alive without you having deluged the reader with detail – I read a lot of fantasy and there is nothing more likely to make me put a book down than fifty pages of description of geography and family trees and complex systems of government before I even know who the main character is.

My suggestions for things for you to consider are as follows (I am aware that you may already have plans for some or all of them as the story progresses, but you asked for feedback on what is there right now):

The opening is excellently atmospheric and creepy, and I'm assuming it will serve as both a dream and a flash-forward to Stephen's search for Mary Cooper. It's a device I like, although it raises a problem: unless you intend to show us more of these prophetic dream moments, having only one might appear like cheating, as though you don't have quite enough confidence to pull readers into the story without leaping ahead to an out-of-context moment of drama.

I don't know whether you intend to flashback and show us the campaign Stephen fought in the Borderlands – if you do, then I would think very carefully about structure. It can get extremely complicated if you make the decision to have a main narrative plus flashbacks and dream-sequence flashforwards. I'm not saying you shouldn't do it, just that you will need to be very careful if you do.

And that's all I have right now. If you write more, I'd be happy to read it. Sorry if that was more criticism than you wanted, but I wouldn't have bothered if I didn't think this was a story worth continuing. It's good, and I have no doubt you'll make it better.

Best of luck with it. Peace.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] breakerbreaker1989** 0 points 8 minutes ago

Thank you. That's given me a lot to think about. I really appreciate you taking the time to read it and to give it so much thought. It's fucking cool of you.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] creativewritinggrad** 0 points 4 minutes ago

No problem at all. Keep at it.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] roofing\_contractor\_indiana** 0 points 19 minutes ago

Srsly tho. Tolkien sucks fucking donkey balls.

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**[-] creativewritinggrad** 4 points 3 minutes ago

Something's been eating at me for the last half an hour or so. The dream sequence (?) opening reminded me of something, and I've been trying to place it. And I think I've got it. Did you ever read any Slender Man fic?

**perma-link embed save report give gold reply**

**March 16<sup>th</sup>**

*Journal entry 3*

I can't believe Lauren didn't pick up on that.

You wouldn't really think it to look at her, and most of her friends would be absolutely shocked to hear it, but creepypasta and nosleep and all that sort of stuff is totally her thing.

**I know about Slender Man.** I remember when it was massive, when there were new photoshops on reddit and somethingawful pretty much every day, when loads of people were writing **really** average stories about him and arguing about what he was and what he could do. I watched *Marble Hornets*, for fuck's sake.

I don't think that's what I was thinking about when I wrote that section. To be honest, I don't even really know what the thing in the forest was going to turn out to be, I just knew there needed to be something in there that Stephen would have to confront if he wanted to get Mary Cooper back. I think that's why I left it so vague, so I would have time to think of something good by the time I actually got to that bit.

But I can see what the guy who commented is talking about. The thin, spindly shape in the dark, the missing teenage girl, something that almost seemed to be a shadow until it moved.

I'm not sure whether I should change it or not. I don't know if I'll actually ever show it to anyone else, despite Lauren getting on my case to do so, but if I do I don't want them thinking I'm writing some cheap Slender Man fanfic. Although – to be fair – if I do show it to Professor Trevayne I really don't think it's a reference he's likely to pick up on ...

I mean, everything comes from somewhere else. Nobody is immune to influences, even if they don't know they're being influenced. Everyone steals cool bits from other things, and then steal even more without knowing they're doing it. But this was the first thing I'd written in a while that I was even a little bit happy with, and I don't like the thought of anyone thinking I ripped it off from some fucking online forum.

I don't know. I'll sleep on it.

I'm sure it will be clearer in the morning.

— — — —

**JAMIE**

Did you hear?

**MATT**

About what?

**JAMIE**

Jesus. How can you not know? Our class group has gone fucking crazy.

**MATT**

I quit that group. Too annoying.

**JAMIE**

You need to get back in. Right now. I'll invite you.

**MATT**

Why? What's so urgent?

**JAMIE**

It's Lauren.

|                                                                                                                         |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                    |       |
| Holy shit. This is crazy. None of you are even going to believe this.                                                   | 06:03 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                                                                      |       |
| How come you're even awake, Steve?                                                                                      | 06:05 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                    |       |
| My mom just woke me up. Lauren's missing.                                                                               | 06:05 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                                                                      |       |
| What???                                                                                                                 | 06:06 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                                                                     |       |
| What do you mean missing?                                                                                               | 06:06 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                    |       |
| I don't know. She didn't come home last night or she went out in the middle of the night. The point is she's not there. | 06:07 |
| <b>José Sanchez</b>                                                                                                     |       |
| She's not home?                                                                                                         | 06:07 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                    |       |

|                                                                               |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| No. Her mom called mine.                                                      | 06:08 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                            |       |
| Why?                                                                          | 06:08 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                          |       |
| How the fuck should I know? I guess maybe she thought Lauren was here?        | 06:08 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                           |       |
| But she's not?                                                                | 06:08 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                          |       |
| Why the fuck would I say she was missing if she was here?                     | 06:09 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                           |       |
| Jesus. Calm down. Did you see her yesterday?                                  | 06:09 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                          |       |
| Not after school.                                                             | 06:09 |
| <b>José Sanchez</b>                                                           |       |
| Anyone else see her?                                                          | 06:10 |
| <b>Bruce Underwood</b>                                                        |       |
| Lauren's missing?                                                             | 06:10 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                            |       |
| Read the thread, Bruce.                                                       | 06:10 |
| <b>Laura Muller</b>                                                           |       |
| I saw her after school. She was coming out of Dean & Deluca.                  | 06:11 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                           |       |
| On Madison?                                                                   | 06:11 |
| <b>Laura Muller</b>                                                           |       |
| Yeah.                                                                         | 06:11 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                          |       |
| What time was that?                                                           | 06:11 |
| <b>Laura Muller</b>                                                           |       |
| Right after school. Maybe ten after four?                                     | 06:12 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                            |       |
| Was she on her own?                                                           | 06:12 |
| <b>Laura Muller</b>                                                           |       |
| I think so.                                                                   | 06:12 |
| <b>Andy Lindburgh</b>                                                         |       |
| What's with all the notifications? If I wanted an alarm I would have set one. | 06:13 |

|                                                                                                                              |       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                                                                                                           |       |
| Lauren Bailey's missing.                                                                                                     | 06:13 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Put your fucking phone on silent then.                                                                                       | 06:13 |
| <b>Andy Lindburgh</b>                                                                                                        |       |
| What?                                                                                                                        | 06:14 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                                                                          |       |
| She should be at home but she isn't.                                                                                         | 06:14 |
| <b>Andy Lindburgh</b>                                                                                                        |       |
| Who saw her last?                                                                                                            | 06:14 |
| <b>José Sanchez</b>                                                                                                          |       |
| That's what we're trying to work out.                                                                                        | 06:15 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Everyone stop shitposting and catching each other up. Read the thread and shut up unless you've got something useful to say. | 06:15 |
| <b>Andy Lindburgh</b>                                                                                                        |       |
| Eat a dick, Steve.                                                                                                           | 06:15 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                                                                          |       |
| So nobody saw her after I did?                                                                                               | 06:16 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Fuck you Andy.                                                                                                               | 06:16 |
| <b>Jamie Reynolds</b>                                                                                                        |       |
| Jesus. This is fucked up.                                                                                                    | 06:16 |
| <b>Rachel Kluber</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| I saw her about nine.                                                                                                        | 06:16 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Where?                                                                                                                       | 06:16 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                                                                                                          |       |
| Where?                                                                                                                       | 06:17 |
| <b>José Sanchez</b>                                                                                                          |       |
| You saw her?                                                                                                                 | 06:17 |
| <b>Rachel Kluber</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Outside her building. She was smoking.                                                                                       | 06:17 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| Did she look OK?                                                                                                             | 06:18 |
| <b>Rachel Kluber</b>                                                                                                         |       |
| She looked fine to me.                                                                                                       | 06:18 |

|                                                 |       |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                              |       |
| That was at nine? You're sure?                  | 06:18 |
| <b>Rachel Kluber</b>                            |       |
| Pretty sure.                                    | 06:19 |
| <b>José Sanchez</b>                             |       |
| What time did she go missing?                   | 06:19 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                            |       |
| Her mom didn't say.                             | 06:20 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                             |       |
| Her building has CCTV.                          | 06:20 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                            |       |
| Obviously.                                      | 06:20 |
| <b>Elle Solomon</b>                             |       |
| So it should be easy to work out when she left. | 06:21 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                              |       |
| Right.                                          | 06:21 |
| <b>Jamie Reynolds</b>                           |       |
| Who talked to her yesterday? Did she seem OK?   | 06:21 |
| <b>Brady Goodman</b>                            |       |
| I sat next to her in math. She seemed fine.     | 06:22 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                            |       |
| What did you talk to her about?                 | 06:22 |
| <b>Brady Goodman</b>                            |       |
| I don't know. Nothing serious.                  | 06:22 |
| <b>Steve Allison</b>                            |       |
| Then how do you know she was fine?              | 06:23 |
| <b>Amy Linares</b>                              |       |
| Take it easy Steve.                             |       |

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