

APPARENTLY EXISTING

Lauren woke up with a gasp of breath, feeling everything in the world around her come into crisp detail with the invigorating oxygen like a fire flaming up from being stoked. Trees loomed over her in the daylight, their skinny arms all dancing in the breeze. Dry and dead leaves were crunched under her cheek.

She muttered to herself, only half able to articulate the thought, “What in the hell... woods?”

She sat up, and gathered her thoughts. As she did, she noticed a little homemade bracelet on her wrist: a strand of yarn tied in a loop, threaded through a scrap of paper with a hole in it. On the paper was drawn a circle with a vertical line through it from top to bottom, and two dots outside of the circle, one at 12 o’clock and the other just shy of 2.

Lauren muttered to herself, “Oh my fucking god. Really?”

The pieces were coming together. Some of the pieces. Most of the important pieces, probably. She remembered—and felt in her aching insides—that she had been drinking yesterday. And apparently had blacked out, because, she didn’t remember going out into the woods. But blacked out drunk her had apparently definitely gone out into the woods trying to get abducted by aliens. She had seen, before, in visions that were shared to her when she was growing up, Their symbology—there were many languages that They used, but the one that she had been completely informed of was based on psychically sharing symbols with one another. The one that she had written, the circle with the vertical line inside of it represented herself, and

dots and other symbols could be placed at various locations in and around it to indicate various intentions and feelings and even ailments. The dot at 12 represented Pacifism. The dot just shy of 2 represented Horny.

Lauren groaned, and rubbed her face with her hands. She ripped the paper off of the yarn and crumpled it up. No longer an accurate reflection of her state. And, she certainly didn't want to be taken for a liar, if They finally did decide to retrieve her, like They had promised to so many years ago. She would move the dot from just shy of 2 pretty much all the way around to 7, which would indicate Non-Life-Threatening Discomfort (NLTD). The Pacifism dot at 12 was at least pretty much a constant for herself.

Sitting there in the woods, she patted down her pockets for her phone, and didn't find it.

She stood up, and stared up into the sky for a moment. Past the skinny branches of the trees, the sky was a uniform bright blue. So much was up there, but so far away, and Earth so blind to so much of it so often.

She took a deep breath, feeling clarity settle in, that she had been overly ambitious last night, to think that it was the night. They would likely inform her when it was. It wouldn't happen out of nowhere.

Or it would happen out of nowhere, but They would know that that's what They were doing, and account for any unpreparedness on her part.

They were not cruel, and They understood very much more than even she did.

She took her eyes away from the sky, and looked around on Earth. Turning about 180 degrees from where she had woken up facing, Lauren saw, past some trees, a park benches-and-table thing. She didn't recognize these woods at all. She didn't think she had been here before in her life, before apparently coming here last night.

She walked towards the table. Coming out from among the trees, it seemed she was in a campground: here, there was a table, a campfire ring, and space for a tent. All around across neighboring hill slopes, there were other pairings of tables and campfire rings.

No one was camping at any of them.

She wondered if she was the Only one on the planet.

On the table that she had arrived at, there was a phone that looked a lot like her phone, a wallet that looked a lot like her wallet, a toothbrush that looked a lot like her toothbrush, and a partially used tube of toothpaste that looked a lot like her partially used tube of toothpaste.

Lauren groaned again, “Oh my godddd...”

Well, easy to find out if anyone else was still around, at least. She grabbed her phone. It unlocked with her thumbprint, and behind all of her apps was her background photo of some sailboat she had seen a week ago that had looked cool. She had bars here, enough to pull up the internet, and 41% battery. Standing there at the table, she opened the internet, searched “news,” and found a bunch of political bullshit dated from hours ago, some from minutes ago.

Yup, definitely still others around on the planet yapping.

Her stomach ached. She groaned. A shame she hadn’t packed water or a baggie of scrambled eggs.

Searching for further hints about last night, Lauren opened up her phone call history, didn’t see anything from all of yesterday, kind of a relief.

No new notifications icon on the text messages either, but, she opened that up to see if anything had been sent after she had stopped holding down record on the ol consciousness box last night.

Seeing what was there in the texts, Lauren closed her eyes hard, and groaned, “Uggggghhhhhh nooooooooo...”

There, right at the top of her recent texts, was Tasha, a teacher’s assistant in one of her classes from last semester. Archeology. Some gen-ed bullshit. Tasha had been fun to joke with about old vases and embarrassing skeletal remains and stuff, but, they hadn’t exactly said... anything... to one another since the class ended. Until last night, apparently.

She would have to look at it.

Or she could not.

But, she changed her mind back to yes, she would have to look at it. She wanted to. Wanted to see what had been on her mind last night to share with a near perfect stranger.

She tapped on it, scrolled up past a number of messages, and started from the start of last night's conversation.

23:57, Lauren B.: omg Tasha I heard you got a lab.

0:14, Tasha M.: I did!

0:14, Lauren B.: This is Lauren btw.

0:15, Tasha M.: haha yup I still see our messages about that one assignment with the wrong due date. The dog's name is Abeline. I got her from a friend of a friend, she's been very good.

Sitting there in the woods, Lauren had absolutely no idea Tasha had gotten a dog. She had probably been up to some social media stalking the night before, among, apparently, other activities, like wandering out into the woods with a toothbrush packed, ready to dip on Earthskis.

Anyways, new lore for the world, Tasha, Lauren's old TA, had a dog now, apparently.

0:15, Lauren B.: Can I see!!!

A few pictures came next, timestamped 0:18. In the pictures, there was indeed a yellow lab with a black collar on. One picture of her sitting in front of a bookshelf facing the camera seeming very amused to be asked to sit still and look forward. One of her running in a fenced in field, presumably a dog park. One of her on her back, and Tasha's hand reaching forward and rubbing her belly, and, Lauren also noted, as she looked (re-looked) at that picture, the dog's cooch was actually enormous, like, actually.

She closed the pictures.

0:19, Lauren B.: omg she is so sexy

Lauren dropped the phone onto the table, cheeks filling with heat.

She shook her head vigorously, picked up the phone again, and kept going.

0:20, Tasha M.: hahaha

0:21, Lauren B.: I want to make out with her on a bed of roses and go down on her for as long as she needs

0:21, Tasha M.: LAUREN

0:21, Lauren B.: WHAT

0:22, Tasha M.: Lauren that is a dog you know.

0:22, Lauren B.: I mean it!

0:24, Tasha M.: Hey good for you girl. If that's actually a thing for you, I can lend you a copy of My Secret Garden, there's some pages in there you might find really resonant.

0:24, Lauren B.: I want to make whoopie with your dog

0:24, Tasha M.: MAKE WHOOPIE

0:25, Lauren B.: I want her puppy maker in my face

0:26, Tasha M.: MAKE. WHOOPIE.

0:26, Lauren B.: gtg

0:28, Tasha M.: MAKE WHOOPIE AAAAAAA

Lauren groaned to herself, “Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck...”

She sighed, and looked at the one last message remaining. From Tasha, timestamped a little while after the other messages, and apparently Lauren had either never seen it or decided not to respond to it, because, it ended after this.

0:44, Tasha M.: Hey, in all seriousness, I think zoophilia is pretty natural. What you are describing wanting to do all sounds very sweet :) I don't know if you were joking or not, but that's what I think either way.

Oh. Huh.

Lauren's stomach grumbled. She groaned. She looked around. Still no one nearby here. It would be a good idea to be moving towards somewhere with water, somewhere with...

She reached out and flipped her wallet open on the table, rooted around in it, found that there was plenty of cash in there.

So, yeah, somewhere, anywhere, that had any kind of food. Getting to a food place would be pretty great.

But, nah. More importantly, at least start the conversation again with Tasha, before the idea went cold.

6:31, Lauren B.: I was the drunkest last night.

There. Good, accurate start. Mitigate liability, in case Tasha had had a change of heart in the meantime, and decided someone flirting with her dog wasn't cool anymore. She had been nice the night before. Very nice. But, people weren't trustworthy. Lauren had broken a personal rule of hers in a big way last night by even bringing up to anyone that dogs were an interest anyone could have, let alone herself.

It was strange, sitting with the feeling that someone knew now. Not comforting. Someone was out there who could really go and ruin her entire life if they suddenly had a mind to. No one would ever want to hire her, allow her to rent a place from them, ring up her groceries, getting liquor was completely out since she'd literally have to ID herself, and, nope, over. She might basically have to move to China or something.

Lauren's text chime went off. So, confirmed, not the only person on the planet.

6:32, Tasha M.: girl.

Keep going.

6:32, Lauren B.: *girl I don't remember any of this.*

Lock phone, take a deep breath of the cool morning air, sigh.
Ding.

Unlock with her thumb, look at the screen.

6:33, Tasha M.: *I was rollllling XD Abeline was all concerned trying to nudge the phone out of my hand and lick my face to make me better, and that just made me laugh so much I wasn't able to breeeathe, imagining how sexy you would think her licking your face was.*

Do or die.

Maybe both.

Alright.

6:33, Lauren B.: *I would have squirted for sure.*

6:33, Tasha M.: *XD*

6:34, Lauren B.: *That is sooooo funny though, omg*

Lauren closed the phone, breathed, waited.

Apparently they were leaving it there for the time being.

Fine enough. What Lauren would most want would be to erase this little tidbit from Tasha's memory. But, short of the aliens doing her an enormous favor, it was more likely that she would just have to endeavor to keep this topic as something that was a flattering shade of dumb and funny in the TA's mind.

She stood up and went to find a place that would sell her food.

After getting her bearings, she discovered, firstly, that apparently there was a campsite way closer to where she lived than she ever realized, because she was less than an hour's walk from her apartment, and secondly, the path between this apparently existing campsite and her apartment would take her by the place for burgers food, which would be doing their breakfast menu.

After a feast of eggs and meats and cheese stuffed into buttery cleaved biscuits, she walked the rest of the way home feeling better.

She had also decided she was going to go a different route with Tasha.

Sitting on the edge of her bed, she ventured back into her texts with the TA. Former TA, or, at least, former to her, she didn't know one way or the other if Tasha was doing that again this semester for another gaggle of mostly gen-ed mostly twenty year olds.

8:01, Lauren B.: So like, obviously I would want to have said it all better, but jokes aside I really am more of a dog attracted person than a humans attracted person. I think humans look icky. Dogs are more my vibe.

8:03, Tasha M.: Right on. Like I said, you sound very sweet about it.

8:04, Lauren B.: Thank you, that's really a comfort to hear.

8:04, Tasha M.: Do you actually want to meet Abeline?

8:04, Lauren B.: omfg yes how soon

8:05, Tasha M.: haha, I'll be free from classes a little after 4PM, if you want to meet us at the dog park that's kinda if you follow the road north from downtown for a couple of miles and then take a left into those parks. I can find the name and address if you have no idea what I'm talking about.

8:06, Lauren B.: I know the ones you mean I will be there!

Lauren tossed her phone back onto the bed, and then whisper shouted to herself, so that the neighbors wouldn't hear, "I did it! I'm doing it!!!"

She was having conversations she was pretty sure could only happen on creepy outdated forums on the less-indexed parts of the internet. It was probably going to ruin her life, but, if the cat

was out of the bag, she was going to take the approach where she got to meet a dog and maybe even make a human friend. And both objectives were going... way better already, actually, than she had thought they would be. Meeting a little after 4 o'clock. Awesome.

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The chosen one's face was open in a big, uncontainable smile. Bumping into the table as ti arrived at it, ti set ter luggage down and then crawled up onto the table terself, and laid there flat against it looking at ter phone. The dog human had gotten back to ter about the dog. Ti channeled English words through the device until ti got back photos of the dog. Ter entire body delighted. Ti cupped the front of ter pants with one hand, the hand that already had ter nametag marking ter as horny, and ti began rubbing, getting terself more worked up, readier.

The chosen one informed the dog human of its good work in transmitting these images of supreme sexuality.

The dog human seemed amused.

The chosen one decided to leave the Earth with a farewell of one last joke, something to remember ti by.

I want to make whoopie with your dog

The dog human loved it.

One more, while ti was on a roll.

I want her puppy maker in my face

The dog human had liked the first one better. No matter. The dog human still had the first one, still loved it, it hadn't been erased by the smaller follow up. The chosen one said farewell.

gtg

The chosen one left the device and went to find the pickup location.

→

Lauren rolled up to the dog park, in her red car. Tasha and Abeline were already there, presumably having arrived in the only other car parked in the gravel rectangle, a blue SUV.

Lauren went through the double gates, and as she was closing the second one behind herself, she was approached at speed by a yellow lab. Right away, completely on instinct, Lauren got low onto the ground, meaning to just crouch, but then the dog's quick approach and nudging nose knocked her over, and so she fell onto her ass as the dog ran in circles around her, wagging and sniffing.

Tasha, some ways down the park, raised her arm in a greeting.

Lauren raised her arm back, and then got up onto her knees and pet the dog as the dog ran back and forth in front of her, pausing before Lauren again and again to be petted.

Eventually, the dog ran back towards Tasha, who was walking nearer.

Lauren stood up.

The two humans walked towards each other, and eventually, Tasha broke the ice first, shouting over a slightly larger-than-conversational gap in space between the two of them:

"Bestiality is in Egyptian records!"

Lauren looked around for cameras, like if this was a reality show. Seeing none, she spoke back at a raised voice, "Is that good?"

Now arriving at a close distance they could almost use their normal voices at, Tasha said, "It's not new."

Abeline ran around, dashing back and forth between the gap between the two humans, slapping both of their shins with her tail.

"This is fun," Tasha said to Lauren, and then turned to look at Abeline, who had just dropped a ball and backed away expectantly.

Tasha crouched down and grabbed the ball, and threw it.

Abeline chased after.

Lauren admitted, "I don't even know what I'm supposed to say."

Tasha seemed actually perplexed, and asked, "Is there stuff you're supposed to say?"

"Maybe?" Lauren answered. "Like, I mean, I'm here on a lot of really optimistic thinking that you're not going to kill me."

Tasha sounded actually hurt as she responded, “No, what? Is it that bad?”

“Is what, like.” Lauren paused.

A ways off in the park, Abeline had abandoned the ball, and was sniffing around near the fence.

Lauren went on, “I just don’t know what people say. Or like, what people are supposed to say, about. Sorry if what I already said was so bad. Like, I’ve never looked this kind of thing up, what I’m supposed to say. I have tried a few times to look up, like, zoo animal fucker, forums, and not ended up sticking around long enough to learn like anything. I get scared and close it all so fast.”

“Oh my god, you’re fine,” Tasha said, to begin with. “No just. Do you know at all who this dog used to belong to?”

“Um. You said a friend of a friend, I think?”

“Girl, he was a zoo.”

“Wait um what, like,” Lauren began, and really considered if she was going to have to get back in her car and escape quickly here. “Why did it not work out? Was he not good to her?”

“He offed himself.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. Trent, from Archeology 102.”

“Oh.” Lauren had heard that he had died, but, holy shit. “Trent fucked dogs?”

“Well, yeah.”

“I literally never knew that.”

Tasha nodded. “Um, anyways, yeah. Left her with my friend, and then, went home, bullet in the head. No note, but, I mean. Obvious suicide. My friend thinks it was because of. Well. Not because he was a zoo as in, being a zoo is the same thing as being suicidal. Not that. But.”

Hearing Tasha struggling a bit for words, Lauren tried to help. “Yeah I get it though, what you mean. The sense that you don’t belong in the world, that comes with that.”

“Yeah,” Tasha said, and nodded. “Yeah and like, it doesn’t have to, right? He was great to her, no one should have batted an eye.”

Abeline was sniffing back and forth over a patch of grass very intently off by the fence.

Tasha asked, "Can I hug you?"

Lauren, freezing a little, asked, "Um. Why do you want to?"

"So you know I'm here. So you know you're okay and you know that I think you're okay."

Lauren answered, "Okay but I will be uncomfortable the whole time, but, yeah."

Tasha responded, "I understand. I am an icky human."

"Ha."

"Okay. Ready?"

Tasha held out her arms, facing Lauren. Lauren kind of mirrored it. Then Tasha came in, wrapping her arms around Lauren, holding her, for like, a whole little while. Then Tasha gave a couple of last pats to the back, and backed away.

Abeline had come back over, and was sniffing Lauren intently, her curiosity apparently provoked anew.

Tasha asked, "So like hey, do you like, want to try and see if she's into you? I feel like she's being deprived, and like, we're alone out here."

"Oh my god um," Lauren started, and then looked around, and, yeah, it was just the three of them out there. "Real?"

Tasha shrugged. "Up to her?"

"No of course but. She's giving me the signs." Abeline literally was. Tail held firmly to the side, literally backing her thing into Lauren's shin. "Like. I. Literally would, kinda, do sex stuff with your dog, right now."

"If you're a zoo and you're saying that's what she wants, I mean, she seems to like you, I'd take your word for it."

Lauren got down on her knees.

Abeline jumped up on her a couple of times, giving fake-out kisses, and then presented her hugely in-heat cooch, backing it up straight into Lauren's view.

Lauren put her pointer finger into her mouth quick, wetting it, and then she pressed it against the dog's cooch, as though she was getting ready to finger her own, kind of leading with the pad, and it slid right in.

There she was, her finger inside of a dog's birth canal, the passage by which a dog penis entered—or, a human penis probably had before, by the sounds of it—and puppies, in theory, could come out. It was warm, an intense heat holding

her. Abeline was the door of pleasures, and Lauren was the key placed in the lock.

Lauren took her finger out. Stood up.

Lauren said, "That was really great, but, I would want a more private place than outside in public to do more."

Tasha acknowledged, "Totally fair."

Lauren licked her finger.

Tasha asked, "Do you want to come back by my place, and, I can leave you two alone in the bedroom?"

"Oh wow um. Would you do that?"

"That was SO smooth, I never could have done what you just did."

Lauren asked, "Put my finger in?"

"Yes!"

"You never like, with yourself?"

Tasha began, "That is," and then paused, and started again, "The fact that's how you think of it says you're farther along here than I am, I wouldn't have even known it was so close."

"They're like, flesh and hormones and all of the same sex stuff too, I think."

"If you say so. It does seem that way."

"Um yes though please let's go back to your place. She is flagging me something fierce right now, so, yes, I think both of us would really like that."

"Alright. Cool," Tasha said. "Let's do that."

All of them got into the cars, and Lauren followed Tasha back to hers.

Overall it had been a good Wednesday, Lauren would do 100% of it exactly the same way if given a do-over. The day before too, fuck it.

She held her finger in her mouth as she drove.