

LBRIS

We know
books

Good Girl, Bad Blood

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After and Before

You think you'd know what a killer sounds like.

That their lies would have a different texture; some barely perceptible shift. A voice that thickens, grows sharp and uneven as the truth slips beneath the jagged edges. You'd think that, wouldn't you? Everyone thinks they'd know, if it came down to it. But Pip hadn't.

'It's such a tragedy what happened in the end.'

Sitting across from him, looking into his kind, crinkled eyes, her phone between them recording every sound and sniff and throat-clearing huff. She'd believed it all, every word.

Pip traced her fingers across the mousepad, skipping the audio file back again.

'It's such a tragedy what happened in the end.'

Elliot Ward's voice rang out from the speakers once more, filling her darkened bedroom. Filling her head.

Stop. Click. Repeat.

'It's such a tragedy what happened in the end.'

She'd listened to it maybe a hundred times. Maybe even a thousand. And there was nothing, no giveaway, no change as he slipped between lies and half-truths. The man she'd once looked to as an almost-father. But then, Pip had lied too,

hadn't she? And she could tell herself she'd done it to protect the people she loved, but wasn't that the exact same reason Elliot gave? Pip ignored that voice in her head; the truth was out, most of it, and that's the thing she clung to.

She kept going, on to the other part that made her hairs stand on end.

'*And do you think Sal killed Andie?*' asked Pip's voice from the past.

'*. . . he was such a lovely kid. But, considering the evidence, I don't see how he couldn't have done it. So, as wrong as it feels, I guess I think he must have. There's no other explanation -*'

Pip's door pushed inward with a slap.

'What are you doing?' interrupted a voice from right now, one that lifted with a smirk because he knew damn well what she was doing.

'You scared me, Ravi,' she said, annoyed, darting forward to pause the audio. Ravi didn't need to hear Elliot Ward's voice, not ever again.

'You're sitting here in the dark listening to that, but *I'm* the scary one?' Ravi said, flicking on the light switch, the yellow glow reflecting off the dark hair swept across his forehead. He pulled that face, the one that always got her, and Pip smiled because it was impossible not to.

She wheeled back from her desk. 'How did you get in anyway?'

'Your parents and Josh were on their way out, with a very

impressive looking lemon tart.

‘Oh yes,’ she said. ‘They’re on neighbourly welcome duties. A young couple have just moved into the Chens’ house down the street. Mum did the deal. The Greens . . . or maybe the Browns, can’t remember.’

It was strange, thinking of another family living in that house, new lives reshaping to fill its old spaces. Pip’s friend Zach Chen had always lived there, four doors down, ever since Pip had moved here aged five. It wasn’t a real goodbye; she still saw Zach at school every day, but his parents had decided they could no longer live in this town, not after *all that trouble*. Pip was certain they considered her a large part of *all that trouble*.

‘Dinner’s seven thirty by the way,’ Ravi said, his voice suddenly skipping clumsily over the words. Pip looked at him; he was wearing his nicest shirt tucked in at the front, and . . . were those new shoes? She could smell aftershave too, as he stepped towards her, but he stopped short, didn’t kiss her on the forehead nor run a hand through her hair. Instead he went to sit on her bed, fiddling with his hands.

‘Meaning you’re almost two hours early,’ Pip smiled.

‘Y-yeah.’ He coughed.

Why was he being awkward? It was Valentine’s Day, their first since knowing each other, and Ravi had booked them a table at The Siren, out of town. Pip’s best friend Cara was convinced Ravi was going to ask Pip to be his girlfriend tonight. She said she’d put money on it. The thought made

something in Pip's stomach swell, spilling its heat up into her chest. But it might not be that: Valentine's Day was also Sal's birthday. Ravi's older brother would have turned twenty-four today, if he'd made it past eighteen.

'How far have you got?' Ravi asked, nodding at her laptop, the audio editing software Audacity filling her screen with spiky blue lines. The whole story was there, contained within those blue lines. From the start of her project to the very end; every lie, every secret. Even some of her own.

'It's done,' Pip said, dropping her eyes to the new USB microphone plugged into her computer. 'I've finished. Six episodes. I had to use a noise reduction effect on some of the phone interviews for quality, but it's done.'

And in a green plastic file, beside the microphone, were the release forms she'd sent out to everyone. Signed and returned, granting her permission to publish their interviews in a podcast. Even Elliot Ward had signed one, from his prison cell. Two people had refused: Stanley Forbes from the town newspaper and, of course, Max Hastings. But Pip didn't need their voices to tell the story; she'd filled in the gaps with her production log entries, now recorded as monologues.

'You've finished already?' Ravi said, though he couldn't really be surprised. He knew her, maybe better than anyone else.

It had been just a couple of weeks since she'd stood up in the school hall and told everyone what really happened. But the media still weren't telling the story right; even now they

clung to their own angles because they were cleaner, neater. Yet the Andie Bell case had been anything but neat.

‘If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself,’ Pip said, her gaze climbing the spiking audio clips. Right then, she couldn’t decide whether this felt like something beginning or something ending. But she knew which she wanted it to be.

‘So, what’s next?’ asked Ravi.

‘I export the episode files, upload them to Soundcloud on schedule, once a week, and then copy the RSS feed to podcast directories like iTunes and Stitcher. But I’m not quite finished,’ she said. ‘I need to record the intro, over this theme song I found on Audio Jungle. But to record an intro, you need a title.’

‘Ah,’ Ravi said, stretching back, ‘we’re still title-less are we, Lady Fitz-Amobi?’

‘We are,’ she said. ‘I’ve narrowed it down to three options.’

‘Hit me,’ he said.

‘No, you’ll be mean about them.’

‘No, I won’t,’ he said earnestly, with the smallest of smiles.

‘OK.’ She looked down at her notes. ‘Option A is: *An Examination into a Miscarriage of Justice*. Wha— Ravi, I can see you laughing.’

‘That was a yawn, I swear.’

‘Well, you won’t like option B either because that’s *A Study into a Closed Case: The Andie Bell* – Ravi, stop!’

‘Wha— I’m sorry, I can’t help it,’ he said, laughing until his

eyes lined with tears. 'It's just . . . of all your many qualities, Pip, there's one thing you lack -'

'Lack?' She spun her chair to face him. 'I *lack* something?'

'Yes,' he said, meeting her attempt at stony eyes. 'Pizazz. You are almost entirely pizazzless, Pip.'

'I am not pizazzless.'

'You need to draw people in, intrigue them. Have a word like "kill" or "dead" in there.'

'But that's sensationalism.'

'And that's exactly what you want, for people to actually listen,' he said.

'But all of my options are accurate and -'

'Boring?'

Pip threw a yellow highlighter at him.

'You need something that rhymes, or alliteration. Something with . . .'

'Pizazz?' she said in her Ravi voice. 'You think of one then.'

'*Crime Time*,' he said. 'No, oh Little Kilton . . . maybe *Little Kill Town*.'

'Ew, no,' said Pip.

'You're right.' Ravi got up, started to pace. 'Your unique selling point is, really, you. A seventeen-year-old who solved a case the police had long considered closed. And what are you?' he looked at her, squinting his eyes.

'Lacking, clearly,' she said with mock irritation.

'A student,' Ravi thought aloud. 'A girl. Project. Oh, how about *Project Murder and Me*?'

‘Nah.’

‘OK . . .’ He chewed his lip and it made Pip’s stomach tighten. ‘So, something murder, or kill or dead. And you are Pip, who’s a student and a girl who’s good at . . . oh shit,’ he said suddenly, eyes widening. ‘I’ve got it!’

‘What?’ she said.

‘I’ve literally got it,’ he said, far too pleased with himself.

‘What is it?’

‘A Good Girl’s Guide to Murder.’

‘Noooo.’ Pip shook her head. ‘That’s bad, way too try-hard.’

‘What are you talking about? It’s perfect.’

‘Good girl?’ she said, dubiously. ‘I turn eighteen in two weeks; I won’t contribute to my own infantilization.’

‘*A Good Girl’s Guide to Murder*,’ Ravi said in his deep, movie-trailer voice, pulling Pip up from her chair and spinning her towards him.

‘No,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he retorted, placing one hand on her waist, his warm fingers dancing up her ribs.

‘Absolutely not.’