

**Robin Burton**

*“She left this for you.”* Her mother's soft, timid voice rang in Sarah's ears every time she looked over to the scratched up black laptop sitting on top of her desk, under a few papers from school. She often forgot it was even there, but occasionally the light would hit the shiny silver lettering of the computer's brand name in just a way that it would catch her eye as she lay on her bed. That shimmer would draw her attention that night as she idly flipped through channels with near mechanical patterning: *1...2...3... click 1...2...3... click.* The pretty light was a welcome distraction from the mundane routine she found herself in. Fine.

Lifting herself from the twisted mess of blankets and sheets, she walked silently to her desk, brushing aside the papers with chicken-scratch handwriting and off-centered xeroxed copies. Her chair made a soft squeaking noise as she sat, lifting the lid of the nearly forgotten piece of technology, the bright backlight coming on with the push of a button. For a moment, she thought perhaps it should have been dead, not having been charged since receiving it some weeks ago, but the luminosity emitting from the screen showed no sign of dimming.

Sarah's sister Angela had left her the computer when she left two or three weeks ago, as Sarah always complained about having to use the family computer in the living room. She could remember commenting that her mom was too noisy when she cooked and her dad watched 'the game' – how many 'the game's could there be?! – up too loud and shouted too much. She couldn't get anything done! So, Angela left the beat up old Acer for her little sister, and this was the first time it was being used since. It wasn't that Sarah didn't have homework to use it for nor that she didn't just want to

browse the net, but the laptop became a reminder that her sister had left. Everyone knew Angela wasn't happy there, but to go so abruptly and so far... Sarah couldn't help but feel abandoned.

That feeling of loneliness flared up as she opened the only web browser Angela had installed: Internet Explorer. She couldn't help but shake her head as it loaded, shaking her head slightly as the default home page came into view. Angela never was particularly tech-savvy. In fact, Sarah was the one who had to help her sister pick out the computer, as she couldn't have told you the difference between MAC and Windows. Laughing to herself at the thought, Sarah casually began scrolling through Angela's bookmarks, trying to decide whether or not to delete them. On one hand, she wouldn't ever need them, but they were silly reminders of her: makeup review sites, free movie sites, and... what was that? Sarah's eyebrows furrowed together as she looked at the bookmark named “Sarah's Facebook.” Her Facebook? Why would Angela have that bookmarked? She clicked it, only to be brought to a state of even more confusion. What came up wasn't Facebook, but a site called “Survivors”. Survivors? Sarah's mind immediately jumped to cancer, but Angela hadn't mentioned being sick. She didn't have too long to ponder it before her eyes scanned the rest of the site: it wasn't a cancer survivor site, but one for domestic abuse victims.

Domestic abuse victims? Why would she have something like this in her bookmark tabs, and rename it to “Sarah's Facebook” no less? Angela left herself logged into the site, and so she went snooping around, fueled by curiosity, worry, and a need to put that worry to rest. Angela probably wanted to help a friend or something... right? Finding her sister's activity history, Sarah browsed

through the chronologically set up list beginning nearly two years ago; it started with views of posts made by others, but then Angela began replying to the posts that she was reading. Her first comment read: "That sounds horrible! I can give u some makeup tips to cover the bruising if u want. Did he even say sorry after? Derrick always does and so I forgive him. Hard to stay mad u know? xoxo – Angie."

Sarah could feel her stomach twist and turn as she read her sister's reply. Derrick had hit her? The guilt of her ignorance surged through her body, goosebumps forming on her arms as the hairs on the back of her neck stood up straight. Despite the goosebumps, her face was blazing, a slight red tint coming to it as anger and embarrassment stung her cheeks and locked her jaw. Angelina was a cosmetologist, and thus could obviously hide any bruising inflicted upon her, but she should have noticed *something* – they were sisters, after all! Despite the guilty nausea that was beginning to set in, Sarah's eyes kept locked on the computer screen, looking for something to make her believe that there had been a mistake or things had at least gotten better. Before she read Angela's next comment, which was made about two months after the first, she clicked on the post it responded to, reading it slowly:

November 3, 2012 4:56am

Posted by: Reida C.

I don't know what to do. He keeps saying sorry. He keeps saying he loves me – he was just angry. And I believe him. I've seen this kinda stuff on TV, and I promised myself I'd never be that girl... but I am. I know I am, and that's the worst part. I'm scared and I hate him when he starts yelling, and I cry and cry and scream when I feel his fists hit my face... but then the rage passes, and he starts to cry, and I can't stand seeing him like that. I love this man. He's a good

man. He's just lost sight of that, I think. I was there before the alcohol and I want to be there after. I've seen the man he can be. I can't leave him, even if I go against what I believe in. How do I help him?

Angela's comment read simply: "Can give makeup tips... but talk to him. tell someone. 'Sorry' doesn't mean nothing if he did it again. Trust me. xoxo -Angie."

There was barely a pause before she found herself clicking on a post Angela responded to a few months after that one, her hand having a mind of its own as it brought her to the new page, her eyes taking in the digital words spelled out across the web page:

February 15, 2013 10:01am

Posted by: Erick H.

What kind of man am I? My wife wears the pants in the relationship: she makes all the decisions and takes care of the bills and all that shit. I mean I work and whatever, but she still calls me a lazy piece of shit, yelling at me to grow a pair, just because I'm not top dog at my job. It's not like I wanna work there forever anyway dammit! But it doesn't matter. I'm not good enough for her. I'm too lazy. Too weak. Too whatever the hell she's pissed about that day.

The other day I was just chillin on the couch after work when she got home. Apparently I was supposed to do the dishes before she got home. I don't even remember her telling me to but either way. She flipped out on me, calling me useless, selfish, all that junk. Then she lost it. I guess it upset her that I didn't seem upset, so she just started hitting me with her bag, and man that shit is heavy. I had a huge bruise on my cheek that night. When I pointed it out, she just said I deserved it for not doing what I was

suppose to. Man, I feel like a prisoner in my own house – in my marriage. If I divorce her, I'll have nothing but I don't know if I can keep doing this. I'm tired of getting screamed at and insulted and now beaten. This is so fucked up!

Angela's reply came not too long after the post was made:

“She doesnt have the rite 2 do that 2 u. They say 2 b a man and tough it out but thats not rite! She cant treat u like that. Wat about ur feelings??? U can alwys message me 4 help! xoxo -Angie.”

The sound of a sharp and sudden inhale momentarily drowned out the background noise made by a random and forgotten program on the TV as Sarah's lungs burned from her having been holding her breath. Her left arm stung just above her elbow as she brought herself back into reality, a sympathy pain for the OP of the survival story. Survival story. These were *survival* stories, because with each post, someone lived through something horrific, was given another day when someone who should love them and protect them turned against them, betraying them and hurting them. These strong people, who are seen as weak and unable to make the “right” decision, were coming to grips with what was happening to them and fighting for their right to live. While people complained about trivial things like being a few minutes late for work or not having enough milk for their cereal in the morning, these people were just happy for another day as they searched in themselves for the will to survive.

With elbows resting on the desk just in front of Angela's laptop, Sarah hid her face in her hands as she took another deep breath, attempting to register all the horrors she had just read, the realizations she had begun to come to about the reality of her sister's relationship, of her life. She thought back to the missed calls from Angela, placing so

much more importance on them now than she had back then, wishing she hadn't placed so much more importance on this or that than on time with her sister. Why was it so easy to lose track of what is really important in life?

Lifting her head back up, Sarah repositioned herself in her cheap IKEA-bought office chair before scrolling through more of Angela's activity history, reading through comment after comment, unable to bring herself to read the story they were in response to. Finally, she couldn't scroll anymore. After a moment of mental preparation, she clicked to read this survivor's story:

October 1, 2013 6:43 pm

Posted by Katie R.

He raped me again. Someone please tell me what to do because I can't do this anymore. No one seems to think that your boyfriend can do this to you. I told like 2 people and they both acted like I was the one that was wrong because I should always want to please him. Sex isn't something you owe in a relationship. No still means no. I'm scared to go to the cops, because I always hear about them acting like the chick was asking for it. Like it was her fault. Brushing it all off. What if they do that to me? What if he finds out and the cops dont wanna help me and I have to deal with him by myself? I'm so scared. Someone please help me. I can't do this anymore. I feel like the only way out is to be dead. I don't wanna die. Please. Help.

Angela's reply: “Ur so strong. I cant imagine having 2 deal w/ that... Get help girl dont put up w/ his shit!! Im here if u need nething. Srsly tho GET OUT NOW!! While u can! It's not 2 late 4 u. xoxo -Angie”

She didn't give herself time to let that story sink in, if she did, she knew she would lose her nerve to read the very last thing

Angie posted; not a comment, but a post of her own. Her story. The sound of her clicking on Angie's story echoed in her ears as her mouth ran dry and her heart began to race. Her hands trembled as she brought her knees up to her chest and she rested her chin atop them, curling herself into a ball as she read the most important story of them all:

June 6, 2014 3:03am

Posted by Angie C.

I dnt kno y I let this go on 4 so long. I dnt have much time 2 rite so Imma make this short. So many of u say u stay b/c u see good in them. B/c u love them. Plz stop lying 2 urself. I finally realized that my fiance is garbage who will never be nething else. Hes beaten me 4 yrs, taken me from my family, n' it needs to stop. 1 way or another it needs 2 stop. I am going 2 get away from him or die trying... I dnt mean that figuratively. If I tell ne1 Im scared he will hurt my family. Im alone. My wonderful mom and amazing sis live 3 miles away but I feel like im on an island. Plz n e 1 who reads this kno that u r worth something. If u let anyone keep hurting you in any way it wnt stop. I promise. It wnt stop. So take care of u baby... or they will. I have 2 go b4 he wakes up. Wish me luck. I luv u all for everything uve done for me.

Xoxo  
-Angie

The entire world seemed to disappear around her as her eyes stayed glued on the final punctuation mark of her sister's writing. Hot tears streaked down her face, running her mascara and stinging her eyes, making them red and puffy. She felt as though she might vomit, but her throat felt too tight to allow anything to pass, should anything come up. The horror and guilt wrapped her in a veil of fear and misery, which only intensified as she knew that what she felt could not come close to comparing to the fear and misery Angela had to have been enduring. Missed calls. Canceled plans. She could have gotten Angela away from him on so many occasions, but she had been blind and stupid, too wrapped up in her own life to see that her big sister needed her.

Wiping the tears from her face, Sarah reached across her desk with a trembling hand, picking up a white tri-fold piece of paper, looking intently at the picture of Angela printed on it, just under the words "In Memory of Angela Rogers." More tears formed and fell from her face, drops landing on the paper, causing the ink to bleed ever so slightly. With a deep breath, Sarah stood and left her room, her steps slow and shaky as her nerves refused to relent.

"Sarah! What's the matter?" Her mother's voice only welled more tears in her eyes as she inhaled to speak, having to force the words out, voice cracking as she did.

"Mom, I need you to take me to the police station... Now."