

Excerpt:

The Dead House

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THE SOMERSET HERALD

Friday 4 February 2005

***3 DEAD,
1 MISSING
IN SCHOOL FIRE***

**Prestigious historic high school
becomes scene of horror as flames engulf building**

By DERRECK S. WESTLER
The local community was rocked when firefighters were called to the scene of a major fire at Elmbridge High School on Lord's Hill Street in Taunton at 1:08 a.m. on Wednesday. The school, which was built in 1908, sustained substantial damage to the female dormitory wing and parts of the main building. Official reports put the number of casualties at three, though no names have been released to the press. It has also been confirmed that one student is missing. Arson has not been ruled out. Detective Chief Inspector Floyd Homes of Avon and Somerset CID, who was investigating a

related missing persons case, declined to comment at this time. However, reports of an Elmbridge High student being directly involved in the fire have found their way onto a local website, where Kaitlyn Johnson has been named as a primary suspect. As of yet, no records of a student at Elmbridge High School with this name have been found. The fire burned for much of the night, but with the help of five firefighting crews, the blaze was extinguished before dawn. Elmbridge High School will be closed until further notice, and all students are being temporarily transferred to Taunton School, twenty miles away.

Report Statement

In the early hours of 2 February 2005, a fire at Elmbridge High School in Somerset killed three and injured twenty. For two decades, little was revealed about the tragedy. However, rumors flooded the Internet, linking “Kaitlyn” Johnson, “the girl of nowhere,” to the blaze. This was nothing more than wild speculation.

Until now.

Along with a heavily burned “Message Book,” which was used as a method of communication, Kaitlyn Johnson’s diary has been found in the remains of the attic of the Elmbridge building. In it, Kaitlyn reveals the thoughts of a disturbed mind...and a much more sinister version of events than was ever made public.

What follows is a true account of what has become known as the Johnson Incident. Included in this document is a collation of such evidence as has been made available for examination. All Kaitlyn diary entries have been transcribed with type-font for ease of reading.

This witness testifies that the statements herein are accurate as far as can be reasonably ascertained.

Yesterday, upon the stair,

I met a girl who wasn't there

She wasn't there again today

I wish, I wish she'd . . .

. . . Carly

This altered Hughes Mearns nonsense poem was found scratched into the attic wall. It is presumed to have been cut into the wood near the end of the Johnson Incident by Kaitlyn herself.

Much of the Elmbridge building remains structurally intact, though it has recently been earmarked for demolition under the Building Act of 1984. The attic, where Kaitlyn spent much of her time and where her diary was found, remains in good condition, as does the rest of the central building. All the female dorms and wings, however, were damaged in the fire. The basement, which was initially a crime scene, then a forensic research area used by the University of Somerset, then a site of investigation into paranormal phenomena, is now condemned.

The prohibition on public access to the property remains in force after twenty years because of recurrent disappearances on the site. Despite this, it continues to attract thrill-seekers and the foolhardy.

Part I
The Self That
Isn't Me

*“Either the Darkness alters —
Or something in the sight
Adjusts itself to Midnight —
And Life steps almost straight.”*
~ Emily Dickinson

*“She walks in Beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes”*
~ George Gordon, Lord Byron

I curse anyone who reads this book.

If you touch it, hell will be waiting.

Screw you, happy reading.

Diary of Kaitlyn Johnson

Sunday, 29 August 2004, 12:24 am

Claydon Mental Hospital, Somerset

I am myself again.

Carly has disappeared into the umbra, and I am alone. Ink on my fingers—she's been writing in the Message Book.

Good night, sis! She writes. We'll be back at school soon.
I can't wait!

I wouldn't have done this diary thing, except Carly thought it was a good idea too. See, Dr Lansing thinks that getting my thoughts out of my head and onto paper will allow me to be free of them. She gave us both a journal with lock and key and the instruction to "be honest and whole". Mine is black (ha ha) and Carly's is green. I'd like to think mine is black because it's Lansing's impression of my nature—solid, unchanging, hidden—but really I think she chose it because black's not a color.

You see, Diary...Dr Lansing is convinced I'm not really here.

I'm not the diary sort, but if I'm going to record my life, I'm going to do it thoroughly. Honesty, honesty, honesty. Yes? Lansing can't tell me I don't really exist—product of trauma and all that—when my thoughts and feelings are as real as Carly's

I am real.

I exist.

They won't ~~kill me~~ send me away.

Message Book Entry

Monday, 30 August 2004, 4pm

Kaitie, do you realize that we might never be coming back to Claydon Hospital after this year? Our LAST YEAR at school! Do you realize that? So close! We're so close! We just have to keep going. We just have to stick to it. All the lying will end as soon as we're free.

Okay breakdown in case she tests you tonight.

Breakfast: 2 tablespoons of shredded wheat with skimmed milk

Lunch: Skipped (sorry)

Supper: Tuna sandwich, ~~half~~ a bit less than half

I love you, Kaybear. Please let us ~~sit~~ rest tonight. No breaking the rules. I really need to feel top-notch tomorrow.

xoxoxox

Carly

Diary of Kaitlyn Johnson

Tuesday, 31 August 2004, 2:14 am

Claydon Mental Hospital

A crow caws outside my window each night. I can never see him, but I know he sees me.

Elmbridge High School looms before me like some awful mia—we return for our final school year in as few short hours! Our process has been "admirable." What that really means is that Carly is eating again and that I haven't done anything "potentially self-harming" in weeks. Dr. Lansing thinks she did that, but it was always Carly. What it boils down to is a series of carefully planned and executed lies.

Everything is timed. Everything is coordinated.

Everything is rehearsed.

Carly and I pretend to be recovering from a sickness we don't have. But when no one will believe you, you become the liar they think you are.

We work the system.

After our parents died, they sent us to Claydon. I can barely write the words without flinching. Without the deepest dread sliding over me like freezing water. Claydon is what you'd call a live-in nuthouse—excuse me, "psychiatric facility"—for troubled teens. Really it's a place for embarrassed parents to hide away their mistakes.

Carly isn't the mistake, though. I am.

We were fifteen and orphans and wards of Her Majesty. Wards of the social care system. In 2003, from January to September, they watched us, because they thought Carly might try to off herself. When it became obvious she was mostly

fine, they went looking for a school. I guess Elmbridge High School won because it has a boarding facility. That was last year. We were sent back here for the summer. Until we turn eighteen (count: 274 nights), we're their problem. All the other Elmbridge High pupils go home to their families, but we don't have one of those anymore.

Elmbridge is definitely a step up from Claydon, but it's not the ultimate goal. The ultimate City of Gold is the sweet haze of urban cityscape light pollution, that rot scent of rubbish gone sour, and the endless living night that is London.

Freedom.

Where the night is vivid with noise, people, and anonymity—where the depraved live hand in hand with the righteous. London is awake all night. London is somewhere I can disappear. Or not. As I choose. I can find some kind of life.

Elmbridge is the gateway; Dr. Lansing is the gatekeeper.

Anyway—what else matters except that Elmbridge isn't Claydon? Because anywhere outside of Claydon pretty much takes the cake; a sewer in hell would be a step up. Anywhere that freedom is an option is automatically better than being locked behind a pristine white door, forgotten in a neat little cage.

I'm sorry. I really do try not to get angry. Carly says anger is a weapon, but sometimes I think it's just another cage.

So these are the goals:

Graduate—even if it kills us
Get out of Somerset and to London
Live free

The real reason we ended up in Claydon is because they think Carly's ~~crazy~~ damaged. They think the accident caused a fracture in her mind. I am, apparently, the result of trauma. They think it started that night. They think I don't exist.

It's all about "putting me away again."

See, they think I'm a personality disorder. I touched on this before. I am "a way of coping" when Carly was coping just fine. DID—dissociative identity disorder. I'm a coping mechanism...an alternative personality. I'm a symptom. They think I'm like a disease—I'm infecting Carly.

No one believes that I've always been here. Carly says it's because no one trusts the word of a teenager. And our parents, the only two people who could have told them the truth, are gone forever. I guess Jaime could tell them too, but who believes a five-year-old?

This is how it works:

I'm here courtesy of Carly. I'm anywhere because of her. Not that I'm complaining, and she'd never admit this, but I'm like the wart on her arse she'll never show, but she constantly knows is there. Where she goes, I go.

I am a prisoner of my skin. My bones are my cage. But she tells me she needs me, that I make her so happy, that she couldn't live without me, and I know it's true. It's true for both of us.

Carly and I are closer than sisters. Closer than twins.

We might as well be the same person, because we share the same body. But we are different. You might say she's my better half. We share one life, each getting part.

Carly gets the day.

I get the night.

We live in shifts; it's always been this way. I've always been here. Always, always, al
ways.

Wish they'd believe that.

Unfortunately, I was unlucky enough to be born to the night watch, so I'm the one nominated for ~~deletion~~
integration

The

Big

Nothing

Dr. Lansing says it's a good thing, but I'm not much tempted by oblivion. Not today, anyway.

I don't blame Carly for being the one in the light. I love her more than anything. She's my opposite completely, and she'll say she's the weaker half of our equation, but the truth is she's my rock. She is everything I wish I were.

~~See how honest I'm being, Lansing, dear?~~

During the crossover, at dawn and dusk, just as the sun is moving behind or above the horizon, I can sometimes feel Carly coming. It's hard to describe. I get sort of dizzy...like I'm high...and just as I'm about to go, I feel her brush past me. Not quite touch...more like a familiar scent or a gentle breath. It's the closest we get to touching. I can almost talk to her in those endless minutes when we are neither one nor the other.

Almost.

But, since that's impossible, we use other methods—the Message Book and little notes scribbled on purple Post-its stuck here and there.

Gotta go—I hear the nurse coming for checks.

Purple Post-it

Found between the pages of Kaitlyn's journal

Remember to behave tonight. Only one night, OK?

PS: Grabbed you one of those gross marshmallow concoctions you love from the canteen. Under the bed.

Also, Jane Eyre from the library.

Go nuts. Be good.

Xoxo

C

4:04 am

Gotta go—I hear the nurse coming for checks.

Where was I? Oh, yeah. Now that we're heading back to Elmbridge High School, it's safe to write in the Message Book again. For a while, back in late June,

Dr. Lansing read it without our knowing, and would say things that could only have come from reading our exchanges. But we figured it out soon enough, and that was the last time we wrote in it. Lansing wanted that, of course. She saw it as Carly indulging in her alter ego—an "enabling behavior." When Carly wasn't writing to me there, Lansing probably smiled and put a neat little tick next to a task box that read "stop all messages." But she was wrong if she thought that would stop us.

We wrote to each other in the bathroom mirror, in steam. We wrote Post-it notes, which we hid in unlikely places and swallowed after reading (not the nicest thing to force down your esophagus, but they checked the bins to make sure I wasn't smoking). She forced us underground, and underground we'll stay, until the day we pack our bags and head for the city, where the night never sleeps.

For now, my nights are full of nothings, and Carly's days are full of everythings.

2

155 days until the incident

Session #45 Audio

Dr. Annabeth Lansing (AL) and Carly "Kaitlyn" Johnson (CJ)

Tuesday, 31 August 2004, 8:34 pm

(AL): How are you feeling tonight, Carly?

(CJ): Today was a good day.

(AL): Last day here. No anxieties about the upcoming school year?

(CJ): I like being at Elmbridge...

(AL): But?

(CJ): [Pause] They sent a notice that they're giving me a new room. Apparently, it's a little smaller.

Different. It's in the "L," so I'll be able to see the boys' dorms across the courtyard, which is weird.

(AL): And it bugs you? The change?

(CJ): A bit. But it will be good being back.

(AL): Change affects us all in different ways. It'll get easier as more time passes. Tell me, how much did you manage to eat?

(CJ): I ate in the hospital canteen today. I had salad and some tuna.

(AL): I'm pleased to hear that you ate...but you know that a salad really isn't enough nourishment for the day.

[Pause]

(CJ): I know. Actually, I'm starving.

(AL): I have cookies. Would you have one?

(CJ): Okay.

[Rustling of plastic.]

(CJ): Thanks.

(AL): This is remarkable progress. Are you sure this is Carly I'm speaking to?

(CJ): You think I'm Kaitlyn?

(AL): Or maybe a new alter ego altogether. If you are, you're welcome to speak.

(CJ): I'm Carly.

(AL): Kaitlyn, I know it's you.

(CJ): [Pause] Then why ask what I ate? I know they report everything she eats to you.

(AL): It isn't as prison-like as you make it sound. Carly doesn't eat. We all know that.

[Silence]

(CJ): My answer told you who I was.

(AL): So why don't you be honest with me, huh? Tell me how you are.

(CJ): [Mumbled incoherence]

(AL): Yes, I do care, Kaitlyn. About you, about Carly. Once upon a time, you trusted me, and I did everything I could to help you. Remember?

(CJ): You keep secrets from me. You won't tell me what happened that night. You won't tell me.

(AL): We've spoken about this. Carly isn't ready to know what happened. Neither are you. You both need to work towards it. You need to integrate. [Pause] It's been a while since you mentioned the Voice. Tell me what's been happening with him.

(CJ): Why? So you can tick "crazy" on your little forms? So you can tick "Communicative"? So you can go home to Mr. Lansing and your perfect daughter and laugh about your demented patient?

(AL): Kaitlyn, you know I'd never do that.

[Silence]

Besides, Margo's not perfect. [Pause] [Sigh] She was just suspended for mooning her English professor.

(CJ): No way, don't lie. You're totally fucking shitting me!

(AL): Don't swear, please. And no, I'm not.

(CJ): [Laughing] Oh, my God!

(AL): So. The Voice—your Aka Manah. Has he been bugging you?

(CJ): You know already. I don't like to talk about him. You think he's a construct. You think he's not real.

(AL): Tell me why you chose to call the voice Aka Manah. Why that name?

(CJ): That's just his name. Arcane. Scary. Which is what he is.

(AL): And if I told you that in Zoroastrian mythology, Aka Manah was associated with evil thought? That, traditionally speaking, he was a kind of demon known to affect the mind? The thinking of people?

(CJ): So?

(AL): Don't you think it's telling? You give your auditory hallucination a name that implies he's in the mind, *influencing* the mind? You have control over that. And this is a clue.

(CJ): A clue to what?

(AL): A clue telling you—begging you to see—that Aka Manah isn't real.

[Silence]

(CJ): I'll just agree with you, shall I? Get it over with?

(AL): Kaitie, I can't help you unless you're honest with me. Unless you try. We were friends once, right?

[Pause]

(CJ): Once.

(AL): Please.

[Pause]

(CJ): [Whispering] Aka Manah used to be far away...I could tell because he shouted at me. I didn't really feel him around me. Now...sometimes...

[Silence]

(AL): Sometimes? [Gently] What, Kaitlyn?

[Rustling]

Kaitlyn, use your words. You can do it.

(CJ): I don't want to talk about him. He'll hear me.

(AL): Is he here now? [Pause] How do you know he's here?

(CJ): [Barely audible] He's closer. He'll hear you.

(AL): How do you know? Is he shouting at you?

(CJ): [Barely audible] No. He's whispering.

(AL): Whispering at you? Right now?

(CJ): [Whispering] No...at you.

[Silence]

(AL): I see.

(CJ): Sometimes...

[Silence]

Sometimes I can feel him...his breath on me. But sometimes it's worse. I can feel him...inside me.

[Silence]

(AL): Kaitlyn, enough.

[Rustling]

Kaitlyn, enough. This isn't a game.

[Silence]

(CJ): Screw you, Lansy-pants. You never listen.

(AL): I think that will do for this evening.

(CJ): I want to see Jaime.

(AL): That's enough for this evening.

(CJ): I said that I want to see Jaime! I'm entitled to see my little sister every month. It's been three.

(AL): Kaitlyn, that is enough.

[Scraping of chair, followed by footsteps receding]

(CJ): [From a distance] You never listen! You can't stop her from visiting. Keep trying that, and you'll see what you push me to!

[End of tape]

Dr. Lansing Therapy Notes

Session #45: Carly/Kaitlyn Johnson

Tuesday, 31 August 2004

Carly continues to dissociate into Kaitlyn. Continuing attempts at deception indicate the need for an adjustment in her medication. Delusions also persist with regard to "the Voice." Consider readmittance to Claydon Psychiatric Hospital, inpatient department for a few more months.

A visit from Jaime Johnson is long overdue. I have been reluctant to grant one in hopes that Jaime could be used as a restraining tool, but withholding visits has had an adverse effect, as tonight's was the first dissociation into Kaitlyn that Carly has experienced in at least a month, as far as I can tell.

Dr. A. Lansing MChB MD PhD

Several recovered fragments of Carly's journal remain intact. One has been replicated below; chronological integrity is maintained.

Diary of Carly Luanne Johnson

Wednesday, 1 September, 7am
Claydon

12 blue pills
4 white pills
16 yellow capsules

I don't know what else to write.

This morning my mouth tasted like stale cigarettes and old beer, and I dreaded opening my eyes, because sometimes Kaitie leaves me in strange places. She forgets about me. It might be on the roof or under the bed. Once it was a closet, and I understood what she meant by dark that day. That's why I'm so careful about where I am around sunset. I don't want to discard her in the middle of a conversation (if she has any) or cause a scene. Because Mum used to say that some of our transitions could be pretty weird-looking. Eyes rolling, all that stuff. So I'm careful.

I asked Kaitie to behave again last night, but I guess two nights of behaving were too much.

I had to mentally scan my body before I felt brave enough to open my eyes. Just like the old days when our biggest problem was Mum not understanding Kaitie's life. Her loneliness.

Dear God, save my sister.

I know she was drinking again last night. I can taste it. I really don't know how she manages it. Getting out of Claydon, especially at night, sounds impossible. And terrifying. But she did it, because here is the waxy coating on my tongue.

Leaving to go back to Elmbridge High School in a few minutes. Bags packed.

I'm sorry, Kaitie. I know you wanted us to do this whole diary thing, but I don't know what to say.

10 blue pills
3 white pills
14 yellow capsules

Left her a Post-it. "Don't flush my pills. We need them."

