

Dear Louis

August 15, 1944

*Dear Louis,*

*I am leaving. Don't worry, it's not you, and tell mother it's certainly not her either. Something has just simply come up. Do understand, please. I have met someone. He is that young fellow Harry Marshall, you know, the one that I brought to my party. He has promised to take me around the world with him! You know how that's what I have always wanted. We are leaving in a couple of hours, so I do not have time to come back to you and mother to properly say goodbye. He said our first stop will be flying across the Atlantic, to France, and we'll be going east from there. I will try to keep in touch, but if not I will see you whenever we get back.*

*Much love, your sister, Anne*

*P.S. I told Harry to send this letter because I'm so busy packing.*

Brooke finished reading the letter and set it down on the dusty attic floor where she had found it. Brooke Kennedy, and her parents, Lisa and Dan, had just moved into their new house earlier that week. It was a Maine Victorian house, right in the middle of a shady, quiet street. They had moved in right before the end of summer.

*The return address said Anne Straton, Brooke thought, why does that name sound so familiar?*

She tried to think if she had heard it somewhere else before, but could come up with nothing. Still, she wouldn't stop thinking that she knew the name from somewhere.

"Hey, Mom! Dad?" Brooke yelled, wanting to ask them about the name. She hoped her parents hadn't left for work yet. They both were scientists, and always had a 'rational' explanation for everything.

No response. "Hmm," Brooke murmured. She decided she would look up the name instead. She walked to her parent's study and logged onto the computer.

'Anne Straton' got over 1,000 hits on Brooke's Google search. Brooke felt a sense of pride. She knew the name sounded familiar. She remembered that she had heard it once, briefly, on the news a few years back, showing all of the cases yet unsolved.

Brooke looked at the first result that came up. The key words she saw were ‘disappeared’ and “1733 Lanthome Street”. Brooke’s address.

Brooke opened up a new tab and typed in her address. “1733 Lanthome Street” got about 700 hits. She read that Anne Straton had once lived at her house.

*Why would a letter she addressed to her brother still be at her house? Why hadn’t she sent it?* Brooke continued thinking about this as she went back to the tab on Anne Straton.

Brooke learned that Anne Straton had lived in Brooke’s house alone during the 1940s. Her mother and her brother had lived a few miles away in the nearby town, Starkfield. Supposedly, Anne went missing in late 1944. Brooke realized that was about the same time the letter she found in the attic was dated.

Brooke typed in the name “Harry Marshall” next. It got no accurate hits, but when Brooke went to the pictures, she saw a young man and woman together. Brooke quickly switched back to her tab on Anne Straton and went to her pictures. The same face, Anne Straton, was staring back at her as the one next to a man, Harry Marshall.

Hoping to find out more, Brooke typed in the key words, “Anne Straton disappear 1944”. That brought her to a website, completely dedicated to finding more about Anne, and where she had gone so many years ago. The website, called *annestraton.org*, had the updated facts on everything to do with the case. Brooke quickly learned that Anne had gone missing late August, 1944. The last time she was at her house, with other people, was during the surprise twenty-first birthday party of hers, which her brother and mom threw for her. That must have been the party she was talking about in the letter. The day after she was spotted with a young man, the website said, but no one was sure who it was. Brooke knew better, though. It was Harry. The next day, after the date of the picture, Anne went missing -- two days after she turned twenty-one.

Brooke decided to go back upstairs to the attic to take a look at the letter again; now she saw it in a new light. She also hoped to find something else that could lead her to more answers. As she went up the old stairs leading to the attic, an uneasy feeling settled on Brooke. What if something bad happened? And in Brooke’s own house? Should she really be getting into this? But Brooke pushed that feeling away as quickly as it had come. Brooke was a persistent, stubborn person. Once she started something, she had to come out with something gained.

As she walked back to the spot where she found the letter, she stumbled over something. As she painfully got to her knees after falling down, Brooke noticed a loose board in the wooden

floor. Curious, she pried it up a bit more, causing a cloud of dust to engulf her. Coughing, Brooke worked her way through the dust until her fingers hit something. She pulled the mystery object up. It was a tightly bound book with a thick buckle across the front and a keyhole. It looked like a diary! Excitedly, Brooke tried to open the diary, but even after more than sixty years in the floorboards, the lock wouldn't budge. She needed the key. Written very lightly on the cover was, *Property of Anne Straton*. Brooke nearly yelled with joy. She guessed this diary held more information about Anne's life than any website could tell her.

Just then she heard a door slam. Brooke's parents were home. Getting up quickly, Brooke almost forgot to grab the diary and the letter, which she wanted to show her parents.

"Moooooom! Daaaad?!" Brooke yelled, while running as fast as she could down the steep stairs without tripping.

"What?" her mom yelled back. "Stop that yelling and just come talk to us. We're in the kitchen."

When Brooke stepped into the kitchen, her parents stopped what they were doing and looked at her. "Yes?" her mom started.

"Right. Do you guys know anything about a girl named Anne Straton? I guess she lived in this house in the 1940s and I found some of her stuff in the attic. I--" Brooke got cut off.

"Slow down!" her dad exclaimed. "Tell us one thing at a time."

Slower, Brooke tried again. "Well, today I was really bored," she paused and looked at her parents, "so I decided to go exploring. You know, look around a little, get to know the house."

Brooke told her parents what she had found. When she was finished her mom said, "Well, maybe this house was actually her brother and mom's."

"But I know it's not, because the return address had Anne's name on it. Still, though, after I read the letter, I knew the girl's name sounded familiar, so I decided to do some research on it. Then I found out that this was her house back in the '40s. So why would this letter still be here?" Brooke answered back.

"Maybe she decided not to send it. Brooke, this is from over sixty years ago. You shouldn't care."

"I just have this feeling. . . like that I know I could find out more from pursuing this."

Her parents only sighed. Deciding she should bring the attention back to her, Brooke said, "But then when I was going back upstairs to look at the letter again, I found this dairy," holding

it up, “and it’s Anne’s. I think this could tell me a lot about her. But I just need to find its key. Anne went missing, and I really believe I might know what happened. There deserves to be an answer after all these years.” Brooke finished confidently.

Next, Brooke decided to look up Anne’s brother Louis, whom the letter was addressed to. She wondered if he was still alive, and if he was, if he had any answers. *Louis Straton* generated links to a few websites, all about Anne, though. But Brooke did find out he was still living and currently lived in the same house in Starkfield that he lived in when Anne disappeared. The address was 1746 Cuyler Street. Brooke wanted to pay him a visit. She could tell this visit would be important, but her parents wouldn’t understand. Brooke decided that the next day she would tell them she was going into town, just about ten minutes away on foot. Instead, though, she caught a bus to its stop in Starkfield and walked the rest of the way to Louis’ house.

Brooke woke up early the next morning, dressed, and headed downstairs. Her parents were already in the basement, their lab at home. She quickly went down, told them her plans, and to herself, mentally checked if she had the bus schedule, bus fare, and the letter and diary.

The bus was very crowded, and had the end of summer heat trapped in it. Brooke took a seat in the front, close to the driver. She couldn’t risk missing her stop. When she got to Cuyler Street, it looked as if no work had been done on the house since the ‘40s. There were vines creeping up the outside wall, the paint was chipping, and the weeds needed trimming. She walked up the steps and realized there wasn’t even a doorbell-- only a knocker shaped like a lion attached to the paint chipped door. The knock echoed for a minute, until the door swung open. Out peeked a frazzled looking man, probably in his 80s, Brooke guessed. “Eh, you’re not Anne,” he huffed.

Brooke smiled a little. “I know. My name is Brooke. I actually live in Anne’s old house.”

“Why do you know so much about my sister?” the man grumbled.

Brooke explained everything that had happened in the past two days that had to do with Anne. Louis turned out to be a great listener. “What’s that you’re holding, then?” Louis asked, gesturing to the diary and paper in her hand.

“Well, as I said, I live in her old house. When I was looking through the attic, I found this,” Brooke said, holding up the letter. “It’s a letter addressed to you and your mom, and it’s from two days before she disappeared.”

Louis grabbed the letter from Brooke's hands. Then he said, "Ah, come in, won't you?" Once inside, he led Brooke to a room in the back of the house. Normally, if a strange old man was leading Brooke to the back of his house, she'd be nervous, but she felt like she was meant to be with him right there, that it was fate that they were coming together for this case. When they arrived in the room, Louis took a seat by the door and started reading the letter while Brooke looked around. She couldn't help herself and said, "Whoa!" The walls were covered with newspaper clippings and articles dating back to 1944, the year Anne disappeared. "What is all this stuff?" Brooke asked, wide-eyed.

"Everything to do with Anne. I've been determined to find out everything I can about when she went missing." He had now finished reading the letter. "I keep thinking, was there some way I could've stopped what happened? This has been my entire life," Louis finished with a sigh.

Brooke nodded, fascinated. She then noticed something hanging from the corkboard behind Louis. It was a key tied to a string. "What's that?" Brooke asked, pointing to the key. "A key. It belonged to Anne. After she was gone, we went back to her house to see if we could pick up any clues that might lead us to her. Of course, that was over fifty years ago. I remember seeing the key in her room, and I grabbed it, wanting to keep a piece of her close to me. She always wrote in that diary of hers. Anne was a great writer," he trailed off.

"A diary. What did it look like?" Brooke asked, trying to ease into telling him she had it.

Louis scrunched up his face as if trying to remember. Finally he said, "Big, thick, black book. Couldn't even tell it was a girl's diary from one quick look at it. And it had something like a belt wrapped tightly around it."

Brooke took the diary out from behind her. "Is this it?" she asked anxiously.

"Wha- yes! It is. Where did you get that?" Louis said.

"In my attic, around the place where I found the letter on the floor, except this one I found in the floor," Brooke replied.

"But why would her diary still be in the attic? She always wrote in it," asked Louis.

"I don't know. . .," Brooke trailed off.

They decided to try and open the diary. The key was a perfect fit! As they read the diary, full of Anne's bubbly handwriting, Brooke and Louis noticed a recurring theme in the entries. Anne was often talking about her boredom with life, how desperate she was for an adventure.

When they got to the last few entries before she stopped writing, Brooke and Louis realized a change in Anne's writing. The handwriting seemed more cramped and not as carefree. As if she was writing in short amounts of time.

On August 10, of 1944, Anne first mentioned Harry Marshall. She said he was a very charming man who she met at a party. She talked about how they seemed to bond right away, and they talked and danced the entire night. Anne called him "too good to be true." Each subsequent entry said they spent time together, and then on the 14<sup>th</sup>, she ended up bringing him to her surprise twenty-first birthday party that her mom and brother threw. But something strange happened during her party. Louis, Anne said, said he didn't want Harry there. He said he threw this party and wanted him gone. Louis sighed at this, startling Brooke.

Anne wrote that she asked Harry to make himself distant at the party so it would appear as if he had left. Instead, though, Harry said he didn't want to cause any more trouble and left the party on his own. Later that night, Anne said she confronted Louis about his behavior towards Harry, but he just waved her off.

The next day, Anne continued writing, starting a new entry. She talked about how she talked to Harry, and he said he didn't mind what had happened. However, Anne wouldn't take that for an answer. *She's like me in that way*, Brooke thought, and smiled to herself.

Anne continued that she said she was going to break it off with Harry unless they started talking more. Harry's behavior, she wrote, changed at this. Next, Harry said, in a more sincere tone that it really was nothing, and that he was just tired the night before at the party. He said to make it up to her he was going to take her around the world in his plane. He was waiting until her birthday, but he thought now was a more appropriate time. Anne wrote about how excited she was, and happy that Harry remembered her say on the first night they met that it was her dream to go around the world. Harry said they could leave later that day.

*August 16, 1944*

*Dear Diary,*

*Today is our first full day away from home! Harry says that we're flying over the Atlantic Ocean. I still can't believe it!*

Anne must have stopped writing, Brooke and Louis concluded, because when the writing started again, it was in a different-colored ink.

The entry continued-

*He just hit me. Harry just slapped me across the face, and now I am hiding in the small airplane closet writing this. I'm not even positive what I did, but whatever it was, it was my fault he hurt me. I probably deserved it; Harry is such a nice man... All of a sudden his mood changed, it's not the first time; this time was just the most serious. He was just ordering me around, saying everything in a really controlling manner, and I didn't like it. I said "no" to one of his demands, and I think that's what set him off. He's calling for me now, his voice seems calmer.*

*Until next time, Anne.*

The diary stopped there.

It was all coming together. Brooke quickly jumped from the chair she was sitting in and started pacing.

Brooke started ticking off the dates in her head. August 14 was the day of the party, August 15 was when the letter was written, so also when Harry and Anne left the house, August 16, was the first full day away from home, and the last time Anne wrote in her diary. August 16 was also the first official day she went missing because nobody got the letter telling that they were leaving.

After Brooke told Louis this, he began to stare blankly into space.

Next he said, "I just don't get why Harry would do that to her. She wasn't the one who deserved it."

"Are you saying someone else deserved what Anne got?" Brooke asked, clearly confused.

Louis told Brooke about how Harry and he knew each other in high school, and they ended up creating a large rivalry with each other. They never looked at each other the same way again.

"So then do you think that whatever Harry ended up doing to Anne was because of you?"

"Has always been in the back of my mind. Say, when you found the diary and the letter, were they close by each other?"

"A little. I mean, one was in the floorboards while one was just on the floor. Why?" I replied.

"I have this idea. Maybe somebody put them both in the attic. Maybe, after whatever Harry did to Anne, he came back and hid the letter, which he said he'd send, but never did. By

doing that, nobody would ever even know they were together. It certainly worked for the time being too. I thought Anne had just run off.”

“That would work! But why would one be under the floorboards, better hidden, and one in plain sight?” Then Brooke remembered something else. “Our roof was getting worked on, so maybe the letter was somehow in the ceiling, and all of the pressure from the job pushed the letter out and onto the floor.”

“But why would he come all the way back to the house to just hide the letters? Anne said they were flying over the Atlantic Ocean already!”

“I don’t know... That would probably seem the least suspicious. He was probably planning to come home right away already, if he wanted to kill Anne all along. Think, if someone found the letter somehow in another country, they would know something was up and someone deliberately put it there. Especially if he or she heard that Anne went missing and Harry was the last person with her. But if someone just found it in the house, it would seem like she just forgot to send the letter, so it ended up in the attic.”

“I just can’t stop thinking, though, that this is all my fault. Harry could’ve been planning all along to get back at me somehow, and Anne seemed like the easiest way,” Louis sighed.

“Harry must have had other problems, or else he wouldn’t have gone that far for revenge. It’s not your fault,” Brooke said adamantly.

Brooke suddenly got another idea. She sprang up from where she had sat back down and asked, “Do you have a computer anywhere?”

Louis hesitated for a moment, then said, “Computer? Ah, yes, follow me.”

Louis walked Brooke into a room across the hall and pointed to a very outdated computer. Brooke was surprised it still worked. She typed in *annestraton.org*, and once at the then familiar website, went to their help tab. There, you could submit any information you knew about the case, which was very limited.

Brooke smiled while typing in “Harry Marshall.” She couldn’t wait for the rest of the world to learn what they now knew. The disappearance that for over fifty years people had thought was just another runaway case was actually much more. By submitting Harry’s name, she would allow what everyone, especially Louis, had wanted for so long. Closure.