

## Laura

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the telephone in my New York apartment rang. I was still so drunk with sleep, having fought the humidity of a hot summer day that lingered throughout the night. I stretched over and grabbed the receiver of the phone, which was sitting on the nightstand beside my bed.

"Hello," I said, in a husky, horrible tone of voice, as if the humidity had seeped some kind of intoxicant in my body.

"Hey Delaney, what's up?" The female voice on the other end asked.

"Laura?" I said, and I paused to clear my groggy voice.

"Yes! What's up?" Laura asked once again.

"I'm fine," I said, as I forced myself into a sitting position on my bed. I was so happy to hear from Laura, since I had not heard from her in quite a while.

"How's New York?" she continued.

"Oohh, hot and miserable! How's DC?"

"Well." she paused for a minute, "It's okay," she completed, and right away I sensed solitude in her voice.

"Just, okay?" was my question to Laura.

"Yeah." she said, without any elaboration. Then, I had to force a conversation out of her. For someone who was quite a chatterbox, there was just no way that Laura could convince me that everything was just, okay. The truth was, she was miserable, heartbroken, and torn apart, and it took very little for me to identify it. I had only known Laura six months prior to her phone call that morning, a very sweet girl. She possessed an illuminating personality, a great demeanor, and was very articulate. When I first met Laura, her professionalism-as a young, corporate, marketing director-was so brilliant. She was so well spoken and very convincing with her mellow voice. And, when she spoke she used her hands to express herself. When she shook my hand and walked away, her svelte body was so well poised, like a ballerina-shoulders straight, chin upright-and her long, black hair flowed mid-way down her back.

I knew very little about Laura prior to the morning she called me in New York, but I sure as hell knew enough to know that something was wrong. I smelled a rat, it was lurking in the closet and there was nothing she could have said to me that would have altered my perception. It was serious. So serious that for Laura, she had failed to acknowledge it. She covered the pain with pride and foolishly wept within her soul. She needed a friend, someone to talk to, someone who would listen. And so, there I was, Forty-second Street, Port Authority, 5:15 in the evening, standing in line at the Trailways counter, purchasing a one-way ticket to Washington, DC. I wasn't sure if my presence would be appreciated, or how supportive of a friend I could be. I knew I would have to be a whole new and different friend to her. Someone who would try to make her overcome the neglect one feels when someone else takes your life, without respect, chews it up and spits it out like a piece

of gum they've been chewing for a long time. I felt like one of Charlie's Angels with an unexpected mission, which I was willing to undertake. When I arrived in Washington, DC that evening at 11:30, I walked through Union Station searchingly, trying to remember where the parking lot was located. Giant Corinthian columns, terrazzo-tiled flooring, it was an old train station that was contemporarily reconstructed consisting of shops, stores, restaurants, and lounges. Finally, upon finding the parking lot, I walked through the double doors, where I saw Laura from a distance in her blue Mercedes Benz, parked and awaiting my arrival. The second she saw me she got out of the vehicle. "Delaney!" she shouted from the distance, and as I approached her she held her arms outstretched, then, embraced me so tightly I definitely felt her welcome. Laura looked thin. It was very obvious that she had lost an enormous amount of weight. I guess her feelings of distress had caused her body to surrender to the confusion that her heart and soul were undoubtedly undergoing. She had succumbed to her own despair and distress and it was showing on every ounce of her body. "Hey, girl," was my response, and when I was finally able to detach myself from her tight embrace, I asked, "So what's up?" "Look at you. You gained weight," Laura said. "A lot of weight. What have you been doing in New York, girl?" "Protein, darling," I replied, with a smirk on my face. "What?" Laura asked, with a quizzical look on her face, and at the same time laughing. "Protein," I repeated, and I started to laugh. "What the hell are you talking about?" Laura asked me, laughing. "Girl, you're crazy," she continued, and we both laughed as we got into Laura's Benz. It was 12:30 a.m. and Laura and I were sitting-up in the basement of her newly purchased, Eastern Market, Washington, DC home. She had closed on a town house a few weeks before, and was having some minor repairs done on the house before she was fully able to move in. A scorching summer had caused temperatures to skyrocket to about 107 degrees, which made the basement the coolest place in Laura's house that night. It was also where she kept a few items of clothing, toiletries, and snacks, before she moved her furniture and other items in completely. Laura sipped on a cup of coffee while sitting directly in front of me on some blankets we'd folded into cushions for seats. As I looked at Laura, I saw her desperate attempt to seem happy, and how much she really appreciated my presence. But as hard as she tried to suppress her pain, it seemed like the entire ordeal was much too difficult, and was obviously quite a painful remembrance, lurking on her mind.

*Laura taken from: Stranger Than Fiction (a collection of Short Fiction)  
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