

Erin Wynn
Spaarndamseweg 656
2022 EE, Haarlem
The Netherlands

About 5,000 Words

Handwritten

by

Erin Wynn

Kami smoothed some of the morning crazy out of her blonde hair, annoyed at the sight of the pot she had left in the sink the night before. She had twenty minutes to make the kids' breakfast and pack lunches before they would bound downstairs and initiate the chaos of Monday. She rolled up her sleeves to get the pot out of the way, and as she did, a flash of black on her forearm caught her eye. She lifted her arm to her eyes to get a better look, reaching to open the curtains for more light. She could hear her gears noisily grinding as she forced her brain out of its morning autopilot against its will.

Through the haze, she saw that the black mark, about three inches long, was a name written in beautiful script on her wrist. She frowned at it. Had she drank last night? No, she hadn't. Did she write it? Why would she? They had binged Netflix the previous night and then gone to sleep, nothing out of the ordinary. She'd never sleepwalked in her life, so that wasn't it. It was written too perfectly to be some kind of practical joke from her wife, not that Holly had ever played a practical joke on Kami before. They weren't the type.

"Lucy," she said aloud.

She ran a finger over the mark, and it smeared across her skin. Before she could really process what she was doing, she had washed it away. For a second, her brain told her that she should give it more mental real estate, but in her morning fog, there were few vacancies. Whatever. She'd have to ask Holly about it later, and she went back to preparing for the day before her little monsters burst into it.

Later, after the kids went to bed, they ate dinner in front of the TV. Kami cried out, "Oh!" suddenly, pausing the show. "I woke up with this weird writing on my wrist."

"What?" Holly said, her mouth full of dinner. Her long brown hair was pulled back in its usual bun.

"Yeah, it was written right here." She pointed.

"Why did you write on your wrist?"

"I didn't," Kami said.

"Where did it come from then?"

"I don't know."

"What did it say?"

"Lucy." Kami held up her palms in question.

"Who's Lucy?"

"I have no idea."

Holly furrowed her eyebrows. "What happened to it?"

"I touched it, and it smeared, so I just washed it off."

“Strange,” said Holly.

“It was,” Kami replied. She hit play.

The next morning, Kami’s alarm went off. She rose, grabbed her glasses, phone, and hoodie, and went downstairs. She went to the sink and reached for the curtain, then thought to look at her arm. She pulled back her sleeve, and there it was again. This time, she was careful not to touch it.

It was the same name. “Lucy.”

“What the...?” Kami said aloud. She thought about waking up her wife, thought better of it, and hurried to complete the morning chores before the kids came down.

When her wife came down a little after the kids, Kami showed her the mark. It was slightly smudged now from her routine, but the black was still visible against her skin.

“What is it?” asked Holly, fighting through her own sleep to take a look. The kids were getting loud behind them despite the TV being on.

“It’s a name,” replied Kami.

“I don’t know any Lucys,” said Holly. She made her way to the coffee pot. “Can we please be quieter?” she said to the kids.

“I don’t know who it is either,” Kami replied.

“What’s that one say?” Holly said, looking at her other arm.

“What other one?” Kami raised her arm, where another word was written. “Oh, cheese and crackers!” Kami said, careful not to curse in front of the children.

Porter, age six, giggled.

Holly pointed a warning finger at him.

“It says, ‘Stonewell’. Is that a last name, you think?”

Holly sat at the table with her coffee. “Are you taking the kids or am I?”

“Holly!” Kami said. “There’s a mystery woman’s name written on my wrist for the second day in a row.”

“It’s very strange,” said Holly. “Why did you do that?”

“I didn’t do it!”

“Then who did?”

Kami wrinkled her nose. “Did you?”

“I did not,” Holly said, taking a sip of her coffee. “Hot.”

“It’s creepy, I think. Don’t you?”

“It is weird,” Holly replied. “What are you going to do with it?”

Suddenly, Kami felt an overwhelming sense of repulsion at the marks. Someone or something had touched her to write it, right? She quickly went to the sink and washed them off. It took a bit more scrubbing than yesterday. “I don’t know. Who would I even talk to about it? The police? A psychic? A priest?”

Holly chuckled. “What would you even say?”

“I have no idea,” said Kami. She turned. “What if it’s a ghost?”

The kids' ears perked up at this. "A ghost?" said Beau, age five.

"There's no such thing as ghosts," Holly said.

"What's the explanation then?" asked Kami, feeling slightly crazy.

"I don't know, babe," said Holly, taking another drink of her coffee. "If it comes back tomorrow, then maybe we'll, I don't know, go talk to a priest."

Kami pulled into a parking space at the grocery store after dropping the kids off at school. She pulled out her phone and Googled 'Lucy Stonewell'. There was a Lucy Stone, a Stonewell restaurant, a dog named Stonewel, but no results for Lucy Stonewell. She put her phone back into her pocket and finished her shopping.

The next morning, Kami awoke before her alarm and made her way downstairs, nearly forgetting her glasses. She went to the kitchen and opened the curtains. There it was. The black script. Lucy on her left arm and Stonewell on her right. Angry, she took to washing them off. She did not have time for this. She tried smudging them with her thumb, but they were more stubborn than before. She took some soap to them. Her skin was slightly pinkened, but the words eventually faded until they were gone. She stared out of the window.

Kami was not the type to overreact to much of anything. She rarely got sick. She had stayed home with the kids until they went off to school, starting her own consulting business to keep her mind occupied and supplement their income. She had a few steady customers, but she wasn't overly stressed. She had come to find a wholesome balance to her routine. She was happy with Holly. She loved her kids. She was a completely ordinary, unremarkable Ohio woman. She had never heard voices. She had never chatted with ghosts. She wasn't even religious. The last thing she wanted was whatever this was.

She ran the water until it was cold and then put some on her face. She sighed, started some toast for the kids, and then went to the bathroom. After using the toilet, she stood in front of the mirror. She held out her arms where the markings had been. What if there was another this morning? The thought suffocated her in a mix of fear, fury, and curiosity. She pulled off her hoodie. There, written on the inside of her bicep, was another black mark.

Kami closed her eyes, drawing a deep breath, trying not to scream. She turned her arm to read it. "Sixth." She pulled out her phone and took a picture of it. She would have to do the same tomorrow morning for the others. "I am now expecting this to continue," she said aloud as she scrubbed it away.

The next morning, before her alarm, Kami stood in front of the bathroom sink. 'Lucy' and 'Stonewell' were still there on either wrist. 'Sixth' on the inside of her left bicep and now '10:47 PM' on the right. She took a picture of them all. It took her nearly eight minutes to scrub them all off, this time with the kitchen sponge. Her skin was raw when she was finished.

"What do I do, Holly?" Kami asked, throwing the kids' lunches into their bags.

Holly was looking at her phone, Kami's phone in front of her. "Nothing comes up when I Google it," she said.

"I tried that already."

"Well, 10:47 PM is definitely a time."

"Of course," said Kami.

"Maybe the sixth is the date?"

"What's today?"

Holly looked at her phone. "October... fourth."

"So, in two days?"

"What's in two days?" asked Holly.

"I don't know!" Kami nearly shouted. She leaned back against the counter. "Do I just sit around and wait to find out?"

"I have no idea," said Holly. She stood and walked over to Kami, placing her hands on her shoulders. "Maybe you should go see that priest?" She smiled slightly.

"This isn't funny, Holly!" Kami said. She shrugged Holly's hands off.

"I'm sorry, Kam. I don't know what to do."

"I'm starting to freak out."

"It's freaky!"

Kami stared into her wife's eyes. "I have a meeting at eleven today."

"Do you need to cancel?"

"I'm not sick. I don't feel any different. There's just some angry spirit writing creepy messages on my body while I sleep!"

"How do you know it's angry?" Holly wrapped her arms around Kami's waist, pulling her close

"How do I know it's not?"

“Can you tell your angry spirit to stop before it gets any closer to the beltline?” She bit her smile, tickling Kami’s hips.

“Stop!” Kami shouted, moving away from her. “This is serious, Holly!”

“Okay, okay,” said Holly, holding up her hands in surrender. “If it happens again, we’ll go talk to... somebody.”

“Somebody?”

“I don’t know who!” Holly said, going back to her coffee. “You’re out of arm space. Maybe the angry spirit will stop writing new stuff at least.”

Kami couldn’t sleep. After tossing and turning for a while, she got up and went downstairs. In the bathroom, she checked her body. Nothing new had been written. She sighed. Good. Maybe this was all just a fluke. Maybe she had been sleepwalking or something. She returned to the couch and turned on the TV. She didn’t feel like she would be able to fall asleep anytime soon. The room was dark and silent except for the flashing of the reality show.

Her eyes shot open. She looked at her phone. It was 5:15 AM. She raced to the bathroom and flipped on the light. She ripped off her hoodie, and there were the words, like yesterday, but she didn’t see anything new. She sighed. Maybe Holly was right, and she’d run out of arm space, and the spirit had stopped with anything new. At least there was that. She paused, swallowed, and pulled her T-shirt off, letting it fall to the floor. There. Written just under her left collarbone was the word, ‘Screaming’.

An involuntary shiver fell over her whole body. She took a long, angry breath and took a picture of the new edition. She set about scrubbing them away. This time, after the fifteen

minutes with the sponge, the words were faded, but still there. Her skin hissed angrily at her. She threw the sponge into the sink.

She sat at the table with a cup of coffee and tried unsuccessfully to Google the results again in every combination she could think of. She typed, “What to do if mysterious black writing appears on your skin overnight.” The first answer from AI suggested that it was likely something that had come into contact with her skin and that she should wash it with soapy water. *Not helpful*, she thought. The question that followed was whether getting ink on their skin could lead to skin poisoning. They got worse from there.

Kami set down her phone and rubbed her eyes.

“It now says, ‘Screaming.’ Are you happy?”

Holly paused on the stairs, looking horribly confused. “Excuse me?” she said finally.

“On my collarbone,” she moved her shirt to show it. “It says, ‘Screaming.’ It says, ‘Lucy Stonewell, Sixth, 10:47 PM,’ and now ‘Screaming.’”

“That’s creepy,” she said, moving the rest of the way down the stairs.

“Holly!”

“Coffee, babe, coffee.”

“Holly!”

“Kami!”

“They won’t wash off all the way either. Look!”

Holly turned, carafe in hand. “Did you scrub it?”

“Do you see how raw it is? I took off several layers of skin!”

“What’s with the ‘Screaming’? Who’s screaming, do you think?”

“I don’t know! Probably me, right?”

Holly tried to blink the sleep from her eyes. “I was doing some more Googling last night and ended up down several rabbit holes, but I don’t think any of them were useful.” Holly sat at the table with her coffee.

“Holly.” Kami sat in the chair next to her. “I’m scared.”

“Maybe you should talk to the police.”

“What are they going to do about it?”

“I don’t know,” said Holly. “Maybe there are other reports of creepy writing appearing on people’s skin.”

“I think if multiple people had creepy writing appearing on them in the middle of the night, it would probably make the news.”

“Maybe they’re all just waiting for the results as well.” Holly sipped her coffee.

“Then, going to the police still does nothing, Holly.”

“Kami,” Holly said, putting her hand on hers. “I don’t know what else to do.”

Later, Kami leaned against the kitchen counter, feeling like a complete idiot.

“Butler County Sheriff’s Department.”

“Hi, yeah, um... My name is Kami Walker, and I have a weird situation happening.”

“Okay, Kami. What’s going on?”

She hesitated. “Writing appears on my arms and such each morning.”

“Can you say that again?” said the man on the line.

“A few mornings ago, some writing appeared on my wrist, and then the other, and then my arms, and on my collarbone. It reappears every morning. Now it is getting harder and harder to wash off.”

There was a pause. “Are you saying that you’re writing on your arms?”

“It’s not me writing it.”

“Is someone playing a prank on you?”

“Nope.”

“What’s it say?”

“Lucy Stonewell, Sixth, 10:47 PM, and Screaming.”

There was another long pause. “I’m not sure what you’d like the police to do about that.”

Kami sighed. “I’m not sure either.”

More dead air. “Do you need assistance with mental health, ma’am?”

“Maybe,” Kami said angrily before she remembered who she was speaking to. “No, no. I don’t think so.”

“I can give you the number to the Immediate Crisis Support line.”

“No, that won’t be necessary.”

“Okay,” he said with finality. “Is there anything else I can do for you?”

“No,” she said.

“Okay. Have a nice day.”

The line went dead.

Kami paced in the living room that evening. She felt like she was losing her mind. She had to stay awake. It was just after midnight. Officially, the sixth of October. If what was being written was a date, today was the day. Maybe she was supposed to go somewhere or do something, possibly for this Lucy lady. Maybe Lucy was dead and communicating beyond the grave, or Lucy ran a secret satanic cult, and Kami was being called to be sacrificed.

She definitely felt like screaming, that was for sure. But what if... What if it wasn't an action of screaming? What if it were a place? If she had a name, a date, and a time, why wouldn't Screaming fit into that sequence? If Lynchburg, Blue Ball, and Broken Sword were all places in Ohio, why couldn't Screaming be as well?

She sat down on the couch with her coffee and pulled out her phone. She typed, ‘Screaming Ohio’ into the search bar. Several amusement parks showed up. Lovely. She was meant to ride a roller coaster with some chick named Lucy. There was a man famous for a screaming meme from Ohio. *Bet that's it*, she thought sarcastically. A 1978 punk band was called Screaming Urge, which sounded a lot like a call to the toilet.

She paused over an article from a website called “Spooky World.” She clicked it. *“There are many ghost stories associated with the Screaming Bridge. According to local stories, a*

woman threw her baby off the bridge, killing it. If one drives over it slowly, one can hear a woman and a baby crying.”

“Well,” said Kami out loud. “I hate that.”

She scrolled down and read. *“The bridge, named the Maud Hughes Road Bridge, crosses over the railroad tracks in Liberty Township, Ohio.”*

She knew that bridge. She drove over it every day to take her kids to school. A numbness fell over her whole body. She looked up at the ceiling, trying to think rational thoughts, but none came.

Another article mentioned the mother and child story, noting that it was a common folklore associated with many haunted bridges around the country. This one also stated that it was very dangerous for “ghost hunters” to try to walk on this bridge due to the sharp turns on either side. Kami knew that to be true. She shuddered at the thought of seeking out spirits. No, thank you.

She drew a deep breath, feeling exhaustion creep over her. She stood up, stretched, and went to the bathroom. She pulled up her sleeves, and there were the words bright as ever. She felt a scream rise in her throat, but she dared not release it. She pulled at her collar. On one collarbone was ‘Screaming,’ and now, on the other, written in the same beautiful script, ‘Dove.’ She stared in the mirror at all the words, crisp against the white of her skin.

Kami raced upstairs, flipping on the light in her bedroom. “Holly!”

Holly grumbled and pulled her blanket up higher.

“Holly!”

Holly's eyes flashed open. "What is it? A kid? What's wrong?"

"It's back. The writing is back. There are more words."

"Kami..." Holly complained.

"Holly! This is serious."

"Let me see," she said angrily, sitting up.

Kami showed her the new writing on her other collarbone.

"Dove," Holly read. "What does that mean?"

"I do not know!" cried Kami.

"Shhhh," hushed Holly. "You'll wake the kids."

"I am freaking out!" said Kami. "I was reading about the Maud Hughes Bridge. It's called the Screaming Bridge."

"Screaming Bridge?"

"It's some haunted ghost story. It's right down the road!"

"I know where the bridge is. I'm just saying, what..."

"Screaming!" Kami said, pulling at her shirt.

Holly rubbed her eyes and looked at the time on her phone. "Baby..."

"Holly, what am I supposed to do? Today is the sixth, 10:47 PM, at the Screaming Bridge. What am I supposed to do?"

“I don’t know,” said Holly with desperation in her voice. “I know that you should definitely not go there tonight, though.”

Kami fidgeted anxiously. “It would be 10:47 PM, like later.”

“Kami,” said Holly. “You’re not thinking of going, are you?”

“It crossed my mind!”

“You know that’s how the horror movie plays out, right? You’re the biggest scaredy cat in the world! You jump during *The Lion King*.”

“What else am I supposed to do?” Kami cried. At the hurt in Holly’s face, she lowered her tone. “How could I not go?” She sat on the bed beside Holly.

“It’s really easy,” Holly said. “You just... don’t.”

“Then what? Just be haunted forever? Be tattooed forever? Look,” she said, rubbing the ink. “It’s like... permanent now.”

Holly ran her finger over it. She rubbed harder.

“Holly!”

“Kami,” said Holly, taking her hands in hers. “There’s nothing you can do about it tonight, okay? Let’s get some sleep, and tomorrow, we will come up with a plan.”

“Promise?”

“I promise.”

Kami awoke to the sunlight creeping through the crack in the blackout curtains. She'd taken several melatonin in the middle of the night as a last-ditch effort for sleep, and she was fighting for it to release its grip. She sat up slowly and heard the kids squealing downstairs.

"I'm sorry I slept so late," she said, kissing the kids on their heads before making her way to the coffee pot.

"No big deal," Holly said. She looked tired, too.

Kami pushed up her sleeves and stared at the black marks. She grabbed a coffee while the kids played happily with their stuffed animals on the couch.

"You okay?" asked Holly.

"No," Kami said honestly. "No, I'm not."

Holly was quiet. What was there to say?

"I'm going to go tonight," Kami said. "I have to try to figure out what's going on."

"I will see if someone will watch the kids, and I'll go with you."

"I don't think that's necessary. It's probably absolutely nothing."

Holly looked at her solidly. "You think I'm going to let you just wander off into the horror movie by yourself? Absolutely not."

"Maybe we should have the police come with us," said Holly.

Kami rolled her eyes and gave her a look.

"Right." Holly squeezed Kami's hand.

Later that evening, keeping the details of their outing from their eighteen-year-old babysitter, they left and went for pizza. Neither had much to say. They fingered their slices and left half the pie. After a while, they sat staring at their phones, waiting for 10:47 PM to roll around. At 10:15, they paid their tab and drove fifteen minutes down to the bridge.

Maud Hughes was a mildly busy road by day, but at night, not so much. The new subdivisions in the area had quadrupled the population, but many of these farm roads remained. The old forest growth along the road turned it into a long green tunnel. The asphalt was narrow and cracked. The lines were faded, the corners sharp, and stop signs appeared out of nowhere, half covered by hanging branches. The full moon made yellowed cornfields a sudden, jarring sight appearing between the trees, and the occasional accompanying farmhouse seemed to look on with eyes of ill intent.

They passed over the bridge slowly, and then Holly turned around and crossed it again. There was not enough space to pull off on the side of the road. The closest place to park the car was a private driveway a short distance away from the bridge. Holly pulled into the grass just ahead of the no trespassing signs and cut off the engine. It was 10:40. They sat in silence for a full minute.

“Well,” Holly said, unbuckling her seatbelt.

“I think I should walk over it alone.”

“Are you crazy?”

Kami looked out of her window. “I don’t know. I just have this feeling...”

“Not a chance!” cried Holly.

Kami leaned over and gave her a look. "I'm going to figure out what's going on. I am going to bring up your number and have my finger ready on the button. You stay here and make sure the car doesn't get towed. I will be back at 10:50."

Holly frowned at her.

"10:50," Kami repeated. She kissed Holly and opened the door.

Out in the breeze, Kami thought about instantaneously rescinding the confidence she had feigned in the car. The bridge was hidden from her view by the blind bend leading into it. There was no sidewalk, of course. There weren't any sidewalks or streetlights on any of these old farm roads, and no one dared to walk them. The two-foot shoulder on the left was all she had.

The bridge appeared around the corner. It wasn't an old bridge; it was probably replaced sometime in the 90s. It didn't look any different than any other bridge in the area; it wasn't even decorative. It served its purpose with 40 feet of concrete and steel. Standing before it, though, away from the safety of the car, it looked bigger, longer, and much more eerie. She hadn't realized that the bridge went over a pair of train tracks until she'd read the articles. There they lay stretched in the moonlight, spanning in either direction like stitches cutting through the solid flesh of the treeline some twenty-five feet below. She wasn't a fan of heights. She took a shaky breath and made her way on the left side of the road towards the center, a hand on top of the concrete barrier wall just in case.

A car came barreling around the corner and swerved in surprise across the double yellow as Kami appeared in their headlights. This is too dangerous, she thought. She looked at her phone. 10:46. This was so stupid. She cautiously looked back down over the wall. Nothing was happening. She hadn't figured out the last clue. She had failed at whatever this was. She turned

back the way she came, calling out, “Sorry, Lucy!” as she spun on her heel to head back to the car.

“What?” came a voice to her right.

Kami gasped and might have fallen off the bridge had the barrier not been there. She looked to see a young woman walking towards her with blonde hair so light that it was nearly white in the moonlight. She was seventeen, maybe.

Kami swallowed hard. “Lucy. I said... Lucy.”

The girl gave her a puzzled look. “I’m Lucy.” Her eyes were red and her mascara smudged.

Kami felt faint. “Lucy Stonewell?”

The girl looked at her with an even crazier look. “Yes.”

Kami felt her heart and stomach drop to her feet. “Are you a ghost?” she asked.

Lucy furrowed her brow. “No...”

“Satanist?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“Dead of any kind?”

“No!” Lucy looked at Kami as if she were insane.

Kami stared at her. She looked alive.

“How do you know my name?” Lucy asked.

“I...” Kami tried to figure out how to tell this young girl her story without sounding like she was actually a crazy person. “I got a message... that I should meet Lucy Stonewell here at 10:47 PM.”

“From who?”

“I... I don’t know,” Kami said honestly. She suddenly felt exhausted, and all she wanted was to leave.

The young girl stared at her for a very long time. The world was silent. Somewhere out in the distance, an owl called in the night.

“Dove,” Kami blurted out suddenly.

The young woman looked like she’d been struck in the face. “What did you say?”

Kami shrugged. “Dove?” she said again, more as a question than anything else.

“I’m officially creeped out,” said Lucy.

“Join the club,” Kami replied.

“My mom has called me ‘Little Dove’ since I was a kid.”

“It was... part of the message.”

“We buried my mom today,” said Lucy. Her lip trembled, and tears welled in her eyes. She turned her face away. “She was hit by a drunk driver on this road six days ago.”

Her own motherly instinct caused Kami to want to scold the girl for walking down here alone for that very reason, but she didn’t; this wasn’t the time. Instead, she held out her arm

where ‘Lucy’ was written for the girl to see, then her other arm, and then her collar where ‘Dove’ was written, keeping ‘Screaming’ to herself.

Lucy gasped, her hands reaching, but not touching. “That’s... That’s her handwriting.” Tears streamed down her face freely now.

Kami swallowed the lump in her throat, and she thought of her own kids. What would she want a woman, a mother, to say to them if the roles were reversed?

“Maybe she sent me here,” Kami said softly.

“I...,” Lucy started and then stopped. “I went for a walk. I don’t even know how I ended up here. My mom was my best friend. I guess... I didn’t want to...” She didn’t finish the statement. She sniffled, fighting to maintain control.

Kami cleared her throat. “I can’t imagine what you’re going through, but... um... I’m thinking that your mom may have sent me to make sure that you get back home safely.”

Lucy started to sob.

Kami drew a deep breath and held out her arms. Lucy fell into them and sobbed into Kami’s right shoulder, right over where it said, ‘Dove.’ Kami’s own tears were falling as well. She closed her eyes and let the girl cry.

The piercing sound of a car horn shot Kami’s eyes open. The headlights blinded her, and her heart stopped.

“Kami!”

Without thinking, she wrapped herself around Lucy, pushing her against the barrier as the car came screaming around the turn. It didn't slow down as it continued to lie on its horn. Kami turned to watch it go and saw Holly standing at the edge of the bridge, clutching her chest in fear.

Kami's own heart thudded hard in her chest. "Come on," she said quickly to Lucy. "My car's right over here. Let's get you home."

As they got closer, Holly threw up her hands, giving Kami a questioning look. Kami shook her head and slid into the passenger seat after helping Lucy into the back. She put her hand on Holly's to stop her inevitable inquiry.

"Where to?" asked Kami.

Lucy gave an address.

At her door, Kami wrapped Lucy in her mother's words one last time. She held her as close to them as possible for as long as she needed, until Lucy's sobs started to slow. Kami felt a chill run over her body, the goosebumps rippling the surface of her skin. The two women stared at each other wordlessly, wiping their eyes. Kami offered a slight smile, and the corner of Lucy's mouth twitched as well before she went into the house.

After she got back in the car, Holly said, "What just happened?"

"I don't think I believe it myself," Kami said.

She pulled up the sleeve of her shirt, and the writing was gone.