

RUNAROUND POND

Mr. Calvin Costa

I figured the police would come looking for me when that girl disappeared. I shouldn't say "that girl"--her name is Emily Gustafson. Her parents rent the same place on Runaround Pond every summer, the red house that looks like a giant letter A. This year, though, her father didn't come up. I wondered why. I notice things like that. He should have come up to be with his family.

I've lived my whole life—all twenty-two years—on this pond. Daddy couldn't afford a house so him and me and my older sister lived in a trailer on a dirt road across from the water. My momma died when I was little. I don't remember her at all.

I know why the police will want to talk to me: Two years ago, they suspected I killed my sister, Crystal. I didn't, but they suspected I did. Why do people always judge other people? It's okay to think the best of somebody until they prove you wrong. But just about everybody around here thinks the worst of me.

My sister had short blonde hair and green eyes and her cheeks turned as red as holly berries when she laughed. She dyed a bright streak of pink in the middle of her hair. That's how she got the nickname "Pinkie." She loved the name. She used to dot the "I's" with tiny teardrops. I miss her.

At one point, even my daddy thought I might have killed her. “Tell me where you hid her body, Cal,” he said. “Or I’ll beat it out of you.” He hurt me good, even changed the shape of my nose, but I didn’t know nothing so I couldn’t tell him nothing. He was always hitting Crystal and me. I’m different from most people so I probably deserved to be whupped, but not my sister. She was sweet. It made me angry when Daddy punched her. Boys should never hit girls.

A few months after Crystal disappeared, Daddy decided he didn’t want to live with me no more, and moved to Maine without me. He let me stay in the trailer. I never heard from him again. And I’ll tell you this: I don’t miss him at all, not one bit. I especially don’t miss him punching me in the face, his army dog tags jangling around his neck every time he swung. He said Iraq made him the way he was, but I think it was the alcohol.

I like living by myself. I can watch as much anime as I want, stuff like *Lupin III* and *Mr. Osomatsu*. I’m really good at fixing small engines—lawn mowers, snow blowers, outboards. It pays the bills. I don’t get many visitors—just the folks dropping off their machines and picking them up after I fix them. Except now, like I said, the police will probably pay me a visit to ask me about Emily Gustafson.

Mrs. Linda Gustafson

We've vacationed at Runaround Pond for seven straight summers. We love New Hampshire and we love this pond: sipping coffee on the shore and watching the morning mist burn off, enjoying the sun set over Greenbush Mountain. There is an organic smell to the water that brings up memories of our past summers here.

My husband didn't come up this year—I should say soon to be ex-husband. I found out that S.O.B. was cheating on me. Rob spent a lot of time on the road wining and dining and signing up clients. Seems a female client was looking for good service as well as good products from Rob—and he generously supplied both.

The divorce has been brutal and it's been especially tough on Emily. I had hoped that coming up to the pond would provide her with some stability, some routine, but I was wrong. She said she missed racing her father out to the raft. We got into a terrible fight today when she told me that she thought joint custody would be best. After what that slime ball did? I told her over my dead body. He was never around for Emily when she was growing up—and the fact that he was cheating on us didn't seem to bother her. There was no way I was ever going to agree to joint custody.

Anyway, Emily stormed off. A few hours passed, and when she didn't return, I walked the neighborhood looking for her, calling out her name. I asked the neighbors if they had seen her. Do you know how desperate that makes a mother feel? Once it turned dark, I really started to panic and called the Harmony police.

Chief Connor arrived within ten minutes and he has been helping me through this since.

Harmony Police Chief Timothy Connor

At approximately 2100 hours, one of my officers received a phone call from Mrs. Linda Gustafson who reported her daughter missing. He called me and I proceeded directly to the cottage to interview the mother. She told me that around 1600 hours she and Emily had a fight and the girl had taken off.

I asked for a photo of Emily. The girl left her iPhone behind—there's no reception in this neck of the woods. The mother cycled through a series of pictures on the phone from Emily's birthday party three months earlier.

We have a powerful signal back at the station. I kept the phone so I could transmit photos and a radio alert when I got back: sixteen year old female, five feet-five inches, one hundred and forty pounds, shoulder length black hair, hazel eyes. No scars, tattoos, or distinguishing marks. Wearing purple Nike sneakers, blue jeans, a black Taylor Swift tee, and a purple hoodie.

I spent the next three hours walking through the woods and along the shore with my flashlight, shouting Emily's name. Nothing. Still, I didn't want to think the worst.

Harmony is my town, okay? It's a quiet town. Not much happens here. My two deputies and I usually spend our time calming down the Uncle Ralphs after they've threatened the Aunt Ednas, or locking up the local yahoos throwing punches in Mucker's Grille, or returning lost dogs to their owners. That sort of thing.

My first thought was to file this as a "juvenile" Missing Person Case. I was pretty sure we were dealing with a runaway, and not an abduction. Emily's safety zone was small. How far could she get? She had no phone, no credit cards, and just the clothes on her back. I suppose she could have gone out to Route 7 and hitched a ride, but she didn't strike me as reckless given how her mother had described her.

No, at the time, I believed we were dealing with a girl who was nearby and hiding just to punish her mother. That is, until I found the purple hoodie half-submerged by the shore. When I saw the blood on it, my heart sank like a concrete block.

I returned to the cottage and Mrs. Gustafson confirmed the sweatshirt was Emily's. She became distraught. I told her I would return at first light with a bunch of volunteers and a couple of dogs to conduct what we call a "systematic search."

I also told her I believed Emily was probably asleep under a tree and we'd find her in the morning. What I didn't tell her was that I was also calling in a dive team, and listing her as an "endangered" missing person because she could be in harm's way. I

had no idea what was going on. Abduction? Suicide? Either way, the situation looked to be serious.

Mr. Rudy Constantine

Nothing exciting ever happens here in Harmony, so I got pretty pumped up when the chief called to tell me he was assembling a search party and wanted me to be part of it. Here was a chance for me to get involved in some police work. I joined him and a dozen or so other guys at the designated field site—a gouged-out gravel pit about a quarter mile from the pond and, more important, away from the house that the missing girl's mom was in.

Not long into the search, one of my neighbors suggested that maybe Cal Costa had taken the girl. I'm sure the police had the same thought. About two years ago Crystal Costa—her nickname is "Pinkie" cuz of the streak in her hair-- vanished. The police found her clothes next to the pond. They suspected her brother Cal, but they never found her body, and could never prove anything.

Cal Costa's father, Joe, was a big cuss. Collected all kinds of junk on his property. Heavy drinker. Stayed inside the trailer most of the time. After Pinkie went missing, he apparently decided he didn't want to live there any longer. Moved to Maine--at least that's what Cal said.

My first reaction was that it wasn't right for the dad to leave Cal to fend for himself because, well, the kid's a bit different upstairs--if you know what I mean. You'd never know it because he's actually not bad looking: tall, thin shouldered, short black hair. But it's those eyes that spook people. He rarely makes eye contact, but when he does, it's unnerving. His eyebrows form a black V which makes his face seem darker than it really is.

But never mind that, Cal has been able to support himself—he's a whiz at fixing engines. Funny how the mind works, am I right? His trailer could catch on fire and it wouldn't occur to him to run outside, but damn, he can take any engine completely apart and reassemble it without a users manual. Fixed my outboard and snow blower as good as new.

Me and the neighbors spent the better part of the day hunting for clues in the woods around the pond. The state police were in a boat dragging the shallows with hooks, and a dive team was in the water. Another skiff had a sniff dog perched up front like a masthead. Those dogs have an incredible sense of smell. They can detect corpses beneath the water surface. Amazing! Am I right?

I had a feeling that with so many people out looking so quickly, we were going to get lucky and find something. I *was* right. Around four in the afternoon, we got the news from Sergeant Mullins: the divers found a body. Suddenly I didn't feel so lucky. In

fact, I didn't feel good at all. I wasn't sure what to do next, so I said a prayer it wasn't the body of Emily Gustafson. Or Pinkie Costa.

State Police Sergeant Thomas Mullins

Even though Runaround Pond is unusually deep, a side-sonar scan picked up an anomaly on the bottom, and my divers went down to check it out. The water is clear because the pond is spring-fed, and there's little vegetation on the bottom—light can't penetrate that far down. They found the remains in the deepest part of the pond, in about eighty feet of water.

The body had been there for some time, years likely, so we knew it wasn't Emily Gustafson. We thought it could be the Costa girl. The troubling thing is we knew we were dealing with a homicide: a length of Class 3 safety chain tethered the skeleton to a ten-horsepower Evinrude motor.

I directed the dive team to keep searching for the Gustafson girl, while I called for a recovery team to bring up the body. Once the body broke the water surface, we got our first break—a set of dog tags wrapped around the neck.

It took only two phone calls to confirm the tags belonged to Joseph Costa. That put our suspicions squarely on his son, Calvin. We were aware of the rumors that he might have killed his sister two years earlier. He had told people that his father had

relocated to Maine, which was obviously a lie because we found him under eighty feet of New Hampshire water. I wondered what else he was lying about.

Once Joe Costa's remains were on their way to the coroner's office, I proceeded directly to the Costa trailer on the hill. I couldn't wait to question the suspect. Chief Connor had told me he had stopped by the trailer earlier but the boy wasn't around. I approached the premises from the pond side, hoping to gain the element of surprise. Turns out that I was the one who was surprised: there, behind the trailer, standing next to a clothesline, were Calvin Costa and Emily Gustafson. Let me tell you, there's no better feeling for someone in law enforcement than to find a missing person alive!

Ms. Emily Gustafson

I heard my mother shouting my name yesterday, but I was so mad at her, I stayed hidden and didn't answer. I wanted to hurt her so bad. She's so controlling, so possessive. She wants sole custody of me, but I should have a say in my future and I still want to see my dad. I know his cheating on my mom was wrong, but that stuff happens. Most of my friends' parents are divorced or soon will be.

After mom and I fought, I started walking through the woods, and kept going even after dark. At one point, I couldn't see where I was going and fell into a big tangle of brambles. I cut my hand up pretty good. As I was wiping the blood on my sweatshirt,

I had an idea: why not leave the bloody hoodie by the pond? That would be sure to shake my mother up.

I threw my sweatshirt down and then hiked to the other side of the pond. I found an open shed behind a yellow trailer and stayed there all night. Next morning, the guy who lives in the trailer came out and found me. At first, I was scared, but then he called me by my name. He told me his name was Cal. He said he knew I vacationed on the pond every summer. He said I was pretty. Nobody's ever told me that before. He asked me if I wanted some tea. He said he knew I liked it because he would see me dunking a tea bag by the shore on cool mornings. So I went inside the trailer and he made us some tea.

He told me that people misjudge him, that kids at school had always been mean to him, and that his father used to regularly beat both him and his sister. He said his sister Pinkie ran away, his dad moved to Maine, and he lived by himself.

I felt bad for him. We were both trying to shake off bad family experiences. I told him that my parents were getting divorced. We talked for a long time. I got the sense he was really listening. He showed me his comic books and we watched some anime DVDs. He made me a bologna sandwich and then told me I would eventually have to go back to my mother. I told him I wasn't ready to go back, that I liked being with him, which made him smile. He doesn't smile a lot and his eyes get weird when he

looks at you. He said I could stay another day, that he liked having me around because I reminded him of his sister.

Later that morning, we saw the police chief's car pull into the driveway, so we hid in the woods. The chief looked around the yard, peeked in the windows. We figured we were safe when he got back in his police car and drove off.

That afternoon, Cal showed me a cool thing: he half-filled several squirt guns with different color paint, added some water to them, and then sprayed the paint onto a white sheet he had draped across the clothesline. He made these awesome designs. I loved making all those weird patterns. In fact, that's what we were doing when I spotted a man with a big bushy mustache walking up the hill towards us from the pond. When I saw his State Police jacket, I knew we were in trouble. Cal rushed over to me, grabbed my hand, and yanked me into the trailer.

We waited inside for an hour and nothing happened. No knocks on the door. I eventually peeked out the window and saw a bunch of men in vests and helmets holding big guns hiding behind trees. I admit I was scared, mostly because I had no idea what was going to happen next.

State Police SWAT Team Leader Steven Hardy

By 1730 hours, we had the trailer perimeter secured, and we knew Emily Gustafson and Calvin Costa were inside the home. Sergeant Mullins told us that he observed

the boy drag the girl into the trailer after he spotted them, so we assumed the worst: we had a hostage situation.

I've done my fair share of hostage negotiations. We minimized all background distractions—road noise, radio chatter, other people speaking. I was prepared to keep my voice firm, treat the hostage-taker with respect, keep my speech slow and calm, and look to build rapport.

I grabbed the bullhorn: "This is State Police Trooper Steven Hardy," I said. "I'm here to listen to you and make sure everybody is safe. Mr. Costa—Cal—would you please let Emily come outside."

I'll tell you, my body heaved a sigh of relief when that door opened, and she stepped out. I directed her to walk slowly towards me.

"He didn't do anything to me," the girl said. "Please don't hurt him."

"You're doing great, Cal," I said. "Now, would you please slowly open the front door with your left hand, and keep your right hand on your head? When you step outside, put your left hand on your head. Then I'd like you to kneel on the ground."

"You're going to shoot me," he yelled through the window.

I said: "We have no intention of harming you. We recovered a body from the pond. We believe it's your father. We'd like to talk to you about what might have happened."

"I didn't kill him," he said.

I reassured him that we were not accusing him of anything, that we just wanted to talk.

A few moments later, the door opened and he stepped out with his hands on his head. He yelled: "Emily, don't let them hurt me."

I directed him to kneel. He did. But when two of my men began walking towards him, he panicked, and screamed: "Why are they still pointing their rifles at me?" Then he reached into his pocket and pulled out the gun.

"Drop the weapon," I shouted at him. The boy froze.

I yelled a second time to drop the weapon. Then a third time.

Instead of dropping the gun, though, he stood and raised it and my men immediately opened fire. It wasn't until I stood next to the young man's body that I realized the gun wasn't real. It looked real—like a black German Luger—but then I saw the pink

trigger and the green paint coming out of the nozzle. I mean, what were we supposed to do? What were we supposed to think? The crazy kid came at us with a squirt gun!

Ms. Crystal Costa

I notice you're looking at the streak in my hair. Yeah, I'm Pinkie. I know you're the reporter who wrote the newspaper articles about my brother Cal. That's why I decided to contact you. This is all off the record, right? You can't use any of this. Agreed? Okay.

I was shocked that the police killed my brother. How senseless! I mean, he was harmless, you understand? First, people thought he might have killed me. Obviously, he didn't, because I'm here talking to you. Then people thought he might have killed Emily Gustafson. Obviously, he didn't; she's back with her parents, although she's gonna be messed up for a while after watching my brother get blown away like that. People still think he killed our daddy. Well, it's time to set the record straight—at least with you.

The truth is, one day I got fed up with daddy's beatings and ran away. I never told Cal what I was up to. I dropped some of my clothes by the shore of the pond so folks would think I went swimming and drowned. Then I raced over to Route 7 and stuck out my thumb. Within ten minutes, I was sitting in the cab of a semi headed to Maine.

I hooked up with some kids my own age who were living in—I guess you'd call it a commune. We made money picking for the growers: strawberries in June, corn in August, apples and cranberries in the fall. One of the kids I met was named Danny. We fell in love. It's Danny's baby I'm carrying right now.

A few months later, once I was sure the police had stopped looking for me, I returned to Runaround Pond with Danny. We waited until midnight before heading to my daddy's trailer. I figured he'd be dead drunk by then. He was. That swill pot was sprawled across the couch. He was snoring as loud as a chainsaw, and the room reeked of booze and butts.

Just as I was about to whack my daddy's skull with the tire iron a third time, Cal appeared in his bedroom doorway. I hugged him, told him to go back to bed, to forget he saw me or Danny, that we were making sure Daddy never hurt him again, and that if anybody asked where Daddy was, to tell them he moved to Maine. Daddy rarely left the house, so I figured folks would think nothing of it when they didn't see him around any more—and they sure didn't.

Danny and me brought Daddy down to the pond and put him in a skiff. I wrapped a chain around his leg and tied him to a rusted outboard motor that Cal hadn't gotten around to fixing. I rowed the boat to the middle of the pond.

Would you believe my daddy woke up? How sweet was that? I squeezed his cheeks together and made him look me in the eyes.

“Remember me, Daddy?” I asked. I’ll never forget his frightened eyes bugging out like white marbles.

“You’re a bad man,” I told him. “You’ll never beat me or Cal again. Are you ready to meet your Maker?” He lunged for me, but I jumped back and laughed in his face.

“But first,” I said, “We need to wash away your sins.” I stood on the seat and rocked the boat until it capsized. While I floated back to shore clinging to the skiff, Daddy and the outboard dropped to the darkest depths of that pond. I ducked my head under the surface a couple of times hoping to hear his screams traveling through the water. Didn’t hear anything, though. Too bad.

Look, I loved my little brother. I realize most people in Harmony believe he killed Daddy, and they suspect he killed me. But I knew the police would never find any evidence that he killed anybody, so I was sure he wouldn’t go to jail. I know I could set the record straight right now on both scores and clear his name, but frankly, that won’t bring Cal back, and it certainly wouldn’t be in the best interests of my child’s future. No, I think it’s best to just let things be. Whether it’s a boy or a girl, I’m gonna name my baby after my brother. I think that’s about the best thing I can do right now. Don’t you?