The Studio

Written by

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INT. ROOM

LAURA

I moved here in October 2005. And that was my first apartment in the city. I'd just gone through a bad break-up, and some...yeah, some bad things, and needed a change of scenery. Yeah. From Camrose to here. It's, um, definitely a change of scenery. Everything was suddenly... bigger. Faster. Higher. (laughs) The city was Superman, and I'd just moved from Clark Kent. (more laughing) Yeah. I saw an ad for a room in a two-bedroom apartment. It was on the third floor of this beautiful, old red brick building. The girl...her parents owned the apartment and let her rent it out. But she was never home because she had this boyfriend on the other side of town and she stayed there mostly, so it was like having my own place in the city. It had this brick-iron fireplace that I think used to work but was covered up in concrete so it was just for show now. The apartment had these large windows that didn't keep the heat in that well so I had to buy a small space heater. And during my first winter there I put the heater by the fireplace so it felt kind of real. Well, in my head it did. I've always been good at tricking myself into believing things that aren't there. I think that's why Gordie and I lasted longer than we should have. It's like...you start making excuses for him. "Oh, he's just overworked, or... his boss really puts a lot of pressure on him." When the truth is much more complicated than any of that, you still make these reasons for him, because that's what makes sense. And then when it all comes crumbling down, you realize your whole world, your life, was this illusion and you can't blame anyone for it but yourself, because you're the one who built it. I'm the one who built it. A world of lies.

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LAURA (cont'd)
After the move here, I'd sometimes wake up in the middle of the night from some bad dream...and I'd be crying. It was like I could still feel Gordie with me. Laying next to me. Sometimes I swear I could smell his aftershave after a shower. As if he'd moved here with me. That's when I realized I starting over is more than just physically moving to a new place. It's a mental relocation too. *That* part took me a while to realize. (laughs) Another thing I wasn't prepared for: how lonely it would get. I'd text friends back home on weekends saying I'm busy, out with friends, but really I was just laying in bed watching movies on my laptop wondering why I moved to the other side of the country just to keep lying to myself. But then I thought, I'm not lying to myself. I'm lying to others. So, it's not like it was. I was changing for the better. And now...I know I was still lying to myself.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL
From QRX you're listening to The Big Loop. I'm Michael Kim. Today's episode: The Studio. We begin with Part One.

INT. ROOM

LAURA
There was this building across the street that had, like, this mixed bag of businesses running out of it. There was a print shop and coffee shop at street level. On the second floor was an office with a bunch of cubicles. I have no idea what it was but there was one guy who worked there for about a month and his back was to the window and I could see him playing video games all day.
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LAURA (cont'd)
So I'm guessing it was really boring work, like maybe a call center or something like that because he wore a headset. Any time someone came by his cubicle he switched screens and pretended to work. Yeah. He lasted a month, tops.

LAURA (cont'd)
Next to that office was this huge dance studio. It was directly across the street from my apartment and one floor down so I had the best seat in the house. Especially at night, if I turned out my bedroom lights and they had their lights on, I could see everything in the front half of the studio. And they were really high level dancers. And...you know...HOT. Like, every single person who walked in there had these ripped, hard bodies. So, you have these beautiful people there who are these amazing dancers...so...it's not a place for someone like me to drop by to learn how to two-step. Like, where I grew up, dancers wore cowboy boots and it always happened in a community center or school gym.

Laughs.

LAURA (cont'd)
You should have seen how good they were. They could have been on America's Best Dance Crew. They were that good. I wish I could have heard what they were dancing to, but it was a bunch of different styles. Mostly what looked like hip hop in the late afternoons. And at night they had these students that did, like, really acrobatic, interpretive dance stuff. I don't know exactly the genre of dance but it was very...muscular. Powerful. There were a bunch of teachers there. But the main guy was this tall, black man. He was so muscular. The way he did these amazing leaps...it was like he was suspended in air. Or that time slowed down for him.

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LAURA (cont'd)
This one time he did this thing where he was demonstrating a sequence, and he was crouched down. His back was to me, but I could see every muscle in his back moving. And his right arm was stretched out to the side, reaching for something, and his fingers just kept...twitching. It's like his fingers were dancing separate from his body. It was beyond any kind of dance I'd ever seen. I'd watch him every night if I was home from work. At times, it left me breathless.

LAURA (cont'd)
I'd never dated a black man before. I didn't even meet a black person until senior high when our class took a field trip to Calgary. So, I went from *that* world, to *this*, creeping on the most beautiful man I'd ever seen. And there was this woman I just hated. Because after the first few evening classes, I'd see her kind of hang around after and flirt with him. She had this long, black hair, olive skin. Really pretty. But not at his level. I'm not saying I thought I had a chance but, you know, she obviously thought she did. At least I'm realistic about my chances. She had, like, maybe a five percent chance. Maybe three!

LAURA (cont'd)
I think it was maybe the second week I was there after moving in. I'd been watching the dance classes. And I remember it was a Friday because I came home late from work, and I always worked late Fridays. It was pretty late, and all I wanted was to shower and order in a pizza or something. And I was in my room and noticed the dance studio lights were still on. Not all the lights, but half of them. It was usually dark at this time. And I saw the teacher there. He looked like he was by himself.

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LAURA (cont'd)
His back was to me, and I'd figured out by now that there must have been mirrors on the opposite side of the room, from the way I'd see dancers doing moves over and over again while looking that way. He was practicing this move with his foot where he kind of springs up on it and balances, like a weird version of that thing you see ballerinas do. But it looked painful. And he kept losing his balance. I watched him for a while. And then another person walked in. It was another dancer I'd seen in his classes occasionally. A student. A very handsome Asian man. He looked a bit younger than the teacher. I thought they must be friends the way they were laughing when he arrived. And the teacher showed his student the move he'd been practicing. And the student tried it and he lost his balance. And the teacher caught him by the arm. And then...they kissed.

LAURA (cont'd)
And I thought, Yeah. That girl with the black hair? She has, like, zero chance. (laughs) I probably should have turned away at that point but... I'd never seen that before. In movies, that's one thing. But to see two men kissing the way they did. And they were so...beautiful. These perfect human specimens. And that the fact, to me, they were completely inaccessible, you know? Like, not just that they were gay and physically way out of my league, but their whole world. That specific world. It was like...you ever see Close Encounters of The Third Kind? At the end when the aliens show up and everyone's like got their mouths open because they don't really know what they're looking at but they're in awe and wonder and only know it's beautiful? I may be overstating it, but that was me staring at them. This perfect world of...physical perfection, and movement, and dance. And, yeah, maybe I should have turned away.

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LAURA (cont'd)
Because by staring, by invading their privacy, I might have turned this beautiful moment into something like a zoo. Or an aquarium. Like, *I* find it beautiful, but by my need to observe them, I've kind of trapped them behind this glass cage. Cuz really, it was only so moving because they thought they weren't being watched. By looking, I was changing it. I know that. Well, I know it now.

LAURA (cont'd)
I remember one night in the middle of the week. It was raining. And I was on my third glass of wine. And I had my lights off as usual. My computer was playing music on some jazz playlist. And the teacher had finished classes or was between classes. That, I don't remember, but for a few minutes, he was just standing at the window staring out at the rain and the road. And maybe with the music and the sound of the raindrops on my window, and the look on his face, the way he just stared. It was like we were sharing a moment. Like, this moment where everything on our street, in our lives, was wet and cold and...lonely. But he had one thing that I didn't: yearning. You could see it in the way he danced. The way he moved his body during his classes. It separated him from everyone else. I've never paid attention to dancing. Ever. But I guess after watching him night after night, I got used to seeing the difference between just moving your body to music and letting music flow through you to tell a story. And his was a story of yearning. Of desire. His body and mind wanting out of his body and mind... to be more than body and mind. To be more than...here. So when he was making love to his student in that studio, yes. I watched. It was wrong, I know. But... it was so beautiful. It was like they were pouring all their desires, not just physical but spiritual--all of it, was being poured into each other.
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LAURA (cont'd)
Even when they made love...they were dancing.

LAURA (cont'd)
A few weeks after that, maybe it was closer to a month and a half, I got promoted to managerial so I was working some late hours the next few months playing catch-up. I think it was a Tuesday, or Wednesday, I came home in time for dinner. I remember it was my first chance to actually eat in our dining room. I had takeout. And our table is near the window and I looked out and saw the lights on but dimmed over at the dance studio. And I saw the teacher there. He was staring out the window like that other day when it was raining. But there was something different. And that's when I noticed...he was crying. And it's weird because...when I saw him and his partner...you know, being intimate--sure, I felt voyeuristic... but this felt more...intrusive. I don't know. I turned away, and I remember my food sitting there in front of me, getting cold, and...I turned back to the studio. And... there was this other guy there. I don't remember seeing him before, but he could have been a student there. Longer blond hair tied up in a knot, about the same height as the teacher. And...he had his arms wrapped around the teacher's midsection, his chin resting on his shoulder. And I started getting...upset. Because...he had a boyfriend. Like, you already have somebody in your life. Who the hell is this Mr. Manbun? But then... but then, ah, the teacher took the guy's arm and kind of...lifted it off him. Like, really gently, but it sent a message. Like, back off. I've got a guy. And I could see this other guy was pretty upset, but you know: deal with it.

LAURA (cont'd)
I think they left the studio together pretty soon after that.
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LAURA (cont'd)
So later on that same night, I was in my room on my laptop. And I looked over at the dance studio. The teacher shuts off the lights whenever it's closed. But it's not completely dark because the neon lights from our side of the street light up studio. At least a little bit. And I saw something moving. And at first, I thought it might have been someone breaking into the office next to the big space. But the person moved into the studio. And he slowly ended up standing where the teacher likes to stare out the window. It was the student. His boyfriend. Or lover. Whatever their arrangement was. The Asian guy. And he was staring out the window just the way his teacher had been. And my bedroom lights are usually off when I'm in bed so I closed my laptop so that the glare of the screen wouldn't light up my face in the dark. He must have stood there...I don't know...five minutes? And I'm watching him. It looked like he might have caught the teacher maybe cheating on him or something? He looked upset...or sad. And I remember thinking, there's nothing to be sad about. He didn't cheat on you. I saw it. Or maybe he was and then changed his mind when he felt guilty about it. Who knows? But it was obvious that he knew something was up.

LAURA (cont'd)
So, he's standing there for quite a while. And then, all of a sudden, he turns his head up, and LOOKS RIGHT AT ME. It was...it scared the living daylights out of me. Because my building is sandwiched between these office building and other apartments that give off a ton of light. And my apartment was dark, so my window must have just been this dark reflection of whatever was outside. But somehow, he knew I was sitting there looking at him. And, yeah, he wasn't looking at my neighbors next to me, or the floor above or below. It was me.
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LAURA (cont'd)
So I lay down real quick and kind of hid from him. I think I lay there for a few minutes. And I poked my head up to see if he was still there. And he was gone.

LAURA (cont'd)
So...the jig was up. I've been caught. Outed. I kept my blinds drawn closed for a week after that. Then, we had this huge blackout that took out power for about ten thousand people. I was looking out my bedroom window because it was so strange seeing all these busy buildings suddenly go dark. Even the street lights were out. And there was all this honking because people get stupid during power outages and forget to use the four-way stop procedure at intersections. So there's no lights in my part of the city but there's more noise, so the city looks completely dead, but sounds alive. And angry as hell. And maybe it was out of habit, or just... I couldn't stop myself...but I kind of crouched down and looked over at the dance studio. And of course there's nothing going on that I can see because of the blackout. At first. But then...you know how if you stare into a dark space for a while, your eyes start to play tricks on you? Like, you start to see shapes in the darkness? That's what happened. I started seeing something move. A person. Dancing, with his arms out, in this lazy, swaying dance, the way you see tall grass in a field bending back and forth in a breeze. So I figure it's the teacher practicing and just messing around until they fix whatever's going on with the power grid. But then...he moves closer to the window, and I still can't make out who it is, but he starts to...float. I could see the bottoms of his legs. And his feet. And he's going higher.
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LAURA (cont'd)
I can't see his head any more because of the angle of the windows, but from where I'm sitting, his feet are now about four or five feet off the ground. And then I see him float out of sight to the back of the studio. And, believe me, I was confused as hell. I had no clue what I'd just seen or if I'd really seen it. And then the power returned.

LAURA (cont'd)
All the lights on my street came back on. But the studio was still dark. And it was empty. Which meant no one had been there. It was closed. So, obviously, I'd imagined the whole thing. Or my eyes were playing tricks on me in the darkness because my brain was used to seeing people dance over there. Or maybe I was feeling subconsciously guilty about spying on them. Or a combination of all of those factors. I don't know.

LAURA (cont'd)
A few days later I was at the dining table trying to work out some numbers for work, and I happened to glance over at the studio. A class was finishing up. I could see some students milling around the entrance to the building on the sidewalk. It's always all smiles and hugs down there. And in the studio I see the teacher and that other guy again, Mister Manbun. And this time, the student is yelling at the teacher. I see him moving his arms all over the place like people do when trying to make a point. And then he leaves in a huff. A minute later I see him down on the sidewalk pushing past all the students blocking the lobby door. He was obviously upset, probably at having his advances shoved back in his face. And I look back at the studio, and the teacher's now in his office. All the lights in there are off except this one desk lamp. And he's looking at something in his hands. It was small so maybe a photograph? Or notes?
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LAURA (cont'd)
I couldn't make it out. But right then, back in the studio next door, I see his lover. The Asian student. And he's facing the office door, which is closed, but not going in. And I see him thinking about knocking on the door, his hand's just raised like a fist by his head. And it's like taking forever for him to decide. And then finally, he knocks. But...that's when I heard a knock on my door.

LAURA (cont'd)
I must have jumped right out of my chair because I don't remember what happened the next few seconds. But I look at my door, and then back to the studio, and the student's gone. He's no longer standing outside the office door. And there's three knocks on my door again. And it's not loud. More like a feint tapping, like this--

Loud tapping with fingers, not knocking.

LAURA (cont'd)
It was just loud enough for me to hear it. And I remember thinking, "God, Laura. Get a grip." It's probably just one of my neighbors. So I go to the door and peep through the viewer. And--someone is standing with his back to me. A man with black hair. It was really creepy. Like, who stands at someone's door like that? So I called out, "Who is it?" And slowly, his head starts to turn towards me, like over his shoulder. And I see him in profile. And I see an Asian man standing there. It's the dance student. I'd never seen him close up so it took me a second to recognize him, but he was wearing the same clothes. And I'm thinking, "Well, I'm caught. He figured out where my apartment was and now wants to ream me out for being a peeping Tom all these months. So I...ready myself, take a deep breath, I have no idea how I'm going to apologize or what I'm going to say...I unlatch the door, and I open it. And...he's gone. No one's there.
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LAURA (cont'd)
It's like he was never there to begin with. And I'm a the end of a kind of longish hallway. There's no way he could have ran all the way to the elevator or stairwell in that time.

LAURA (cont'd)
A few days went by and I was up to my ears in work. It was late. I'm at my dining table. Maybe around eleven or midnight. And it was raining heavily.

Cue rain sounds.

LAURA (cont'd)
And I notice the street lights start flickering. So my attention's drawn outside. I'd been staring at my computer for hours without a break, so I thought my eyes might be playing a trick on me, but I looked over at the studio, and its lights were turning off and on in, like, five second intervals. The street lights were just flickering for a moment and they were working normally now. But the studio lights kept doing that off and on thing. And I could see the teacher standing there, staring out into the night and the rain. And the lights are going off, and on. And then at one moment, the lights go on, and I see his student behind him. The Asian guy. And the studio goes black. And the lights come on again and the student is still standing behind the teacher, but closer. And the lights go off. And they turn back on, and the student is now directly behind the teacher. And I'm thinking, What the hell's going on? It didn't look like a dance, but it didn't look like he was sneaking up on him as a prank. Like, I'm sure if it was bright enough for me to see him, the teacher would have seen his student's reflection in the window. And the lights go off again. And when they turn back on, the student's gone. And the teacher turns to look behind him, and goes back to staring out the window. As if no one had been there just a second ago.

LAURA (cont'd)
And now the street lights start flickering again. Real fast. And then the lamps across the street go black. But there's still lights in the studio. And then, the street lights turn back on. And standing there at the entrance to the building is the student. He's standing in the rain on the sidewalk, and he's looking directly up at ME! And I'm thinking, This dancer is also a magician. And, yes, I'm sorry I eavesdropped on your intimate time with your boyfriend, but if you have such a problem with it, get some goddamn curtains. And stop trying to scare me. I'm sorry I snooped.

LAURA (cont'd)
I was woken up in the middle of the night. And I felt like I was still asleep, dreaming. I don't recall what dream I was having, but I remember this part. I couldn't breath. It's like that sleep paralysis you hear about where people wake up but can't move and have trouble breathing and all they can move are their eyes. But there was this sound. This...awful clicking noise. Like a barrel of a revolver turning slowly. And there was a bit of light streaming in through my blinds. So I can sort of see in the darkness of my room. And I'm trying to figure out where that noise is coming from while trying to wake myself up at the same time. And I look over at my closet. I usually keep it closed but it was cracked open a bit. And I start to focus on it because the sound's coming from inside. And I know I recognize that sound but can't quite place where I've heard it. And then, something's moving inside the closet. I hear my clothes rustling on the hangers. And the clicking noise is growing.

LAURA (cont'd)
And that's when I see it: the back of someone's head. A bloody head, cracked open..
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LAURA (cont'd)
It's just barely visible in the dark. But the head is slowly turning my way. And I don't want to see the face. I have a feeling I know what I'm going to see. And I'm trying my best to wake myself up because I feel like it's all too real and something bad's about to happen. But it's like being deep in the ocean and you can't breath and you're trying to swim back up but you don't know where up is. And you're running out of breath.

LAURA (cont'd)
Next thing I know, I am hearing myself scream. It was like waking up to myself screaming as if I had suddenly been placed into this body. It felt like it wasn't mine. But I can hear my own voice, coming from inside me but feeling like it's outside me. I've never felt so... removed from myself but scared for my life before. And that's when I made the decision. I need to talk to that dance teacher.

Music.

MICHAEL
When we return, the conclusion of "The Studio," after these messages from our sponsors.

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LAURA
I waited until the weekend was over. And I saw the dance classes in session. And I waited until the last one was wrapped. And I walked across the street. It was weird. Because that's when I noticed it was the first time I had ever stood on that side of the street. Directly across from my home. I'd never been across the street. Isn't that insane? I'd invested so much time involving myself in the lives of these people here, but had never actually gone *here.* To this spot. It makes me think about myself.
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LAURA (cont'd)
How I'd been trying to reach out to friends and family over the phone, texting, on social media. Never with them. Never *with* anyone. But trying to connect at a distance. It's like I needed this space between us in order for me to let my guard down and feel any connection. Or maybe it's because of what I'd gone through with Gordie. Maybe I'd grown wary or mistrustful of closeness. It's like...if you're too close to something, you can't see the whole picture. It's like standing at the bottom of a mountain. All you see is this huge hill. You don't appreciate how massive, how beautiful the whole thing is. And you can see what you have to climb ahead of you and make a rational decision to climb it or not. And I'd refused to see the signs. Or I purposely made myself blind to it all.

LAURA (cont'd)
So, here I was, standing in front of the building I'd been obsessed with all these months. And I suddenly get this panic attack. Because I'm closing that distance that made me comfortable. That buffer. So...I left.

LAURA (cont'd)
It took me two more days to try again. I was standing on the sidewalk in front of the building again when the students let out. And I walked in and went up to the second floor. The studio doors were this really nice light glossy wood. And it had this small circular window in it. So I looked in and there was the teacher closing down for the night. So I walked in.

LAURA (cont'd)
It was...really awkward. He wasn't as tall as he'd looked from across the street. Maybe five-ten, five-eleven, but he looked six-two or three before. But he looked tired. Or... annoyed maybe?
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LAURA (cont'd)
Later, I thought about it and replayed the whole thing in my head. And he was sad. That's what it was. I just didn't see it at the time because...I don't know, when you first meet someone, you have these categories that you fit people into. Like, oh, he seems kind, funny, smart, aggressive, douchey. You know. The normal categories. You never meet someone and go, He's such a sad person. At least I don't. But he was beautiful, in a way that... You ever meet someone and instantly think, "Wow, what a gorgeous human being." And there's no sense of desire or wanting him in you, because that person is so out of reach it doesn't even enter your head. And it's not because he's gay? Because I probably would have thought that if I didn't know. So, there's this beautiful stranger standing in front of me and he's right away giving off this sense that I'm bothering him, or invading his space already. And I'm there to tell him I've been watching his life through my apartment window? (chuckle) No. No way. I chickened out. I think I told him...I think I said something about living across the street and having always wanted to join his dance class. Like, these words were just spilling out of me. I shouldn't have told him where I lived because now he'd look for me and recognize me on the street if he saw me. Like, I'd just outed myself. Partly. So he takes me to a table with all these brochures on it. Gives me one. And he hands me this sheet with all the class schedules on it. And he points to the beginners class with the price. And I think he noticed my reaction when I saw how much it was, though it was really me thinking, Laura, what in the world are you getting yourself into? So he says I can come to three classes for free just to try out. He was so nice about it. And his name was Jason. So...I scheduled myself into one of his beginner classes the next week.

LAURA (cont'd)
Here's the thing: I am in no way a dancer. You ever see that episode of Seinfeld where Elaine does this crazy dance and she thinks she's a good dancer? Yeah, I'm as bad as that but I have no illusions about where my talents lay. And it's not on a dance floor. But you know something: it was actually really good. I sucked, but the whole experience of letting yourself move without being self-conscious about what you look like or what people think. That was really important to me. In my neighbourhood, the one I grew up in, everyone's nose was into everyone else's business. And I suppose that's good to a point. Having your neighbors look out for you and being there to help you out when you need is. That's a good thing. But you're always aware of being watched. Living your life in a small town is kind of like growing up in an aquarium. And you get used to it, that constant feeling that you're never alone. But the thing is, you're always lonely. Does that make sense? It's like in a city but kind of reversed with the same result. No one's watching you. Because no one cares. And you're lonely because of that. In a small town, everyone cares, or at least pretends to, and it's a different kind of loneliness. It's like a fish in an aquarium is probably used to having these huge faces always in their business, but it's probably really, really lonely because there's no other fish there to talk to.

LAURA (cont'd)
There's something about a city. You forget there's children here. Like, I see them here and there, and of course there's families everywhere, but you don't get a sense of childhood here. There's no kids playing in the streets. There's kids at the mall, but not playing hockey in the streets or hanging out at parks without adult supervision.
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LAURA (cont'd)
It must do something to them. To the way they think about life, about growing up. About...freedom.

MICHAEL
Do you feel free?

LAURA
I feel trapped. I feel trapped...in this life. In *a* life. That I have to do certain things every day just to eat and have a place to sleep every night. I guess that's partly what drew me to watching the studio every night. The people there didn't seem to care. The way they moved...it's like...it was like they were in complete possession of their own bodies. Of themselves. And in the teacher, and his student...they moved within each other and without each other but in complete control while at the same time...giving in and giving up their control. To each other. And it makes me think...it makes me think...maybe that's my problem. I need control. I never give it up. I never gave it up to Gordie. Though I let him have most of the say in almost everything, it was my way of controlling our relationship and moving it at the pace I wanted. In the way I wanted. I didn't know it at the time, but I'm seeing it now. These patterns. It's always the same dance. I let them lead, but at my pace. I want to move the way they do at the studio. I want to live the way they seem to live. With complete control of themselves, but with complete abandon to others. I don't know if that's possible. Or even healthy. But I wanted to try.

LAURA (cont'd)
In my second free class, we were wrapping up and there's Mister Manbun--his name was Brennan--he came in and I saw him waiting to talk to Jason. And I could see the Jason talking with students and he sees Brennan waiting for him by the entrance. And Jason looks annoyed.
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LAURA (cont'd)
And that's when I notice the other student--that Asian guy. He was standing in the office next door. Just...staring at me. And I'm totally, completely flustered. So I run out of the class and go home.

LAURA (cont'd)
About thirty minutes later, I'm showered and about to settle in for the night, and I take a peek out of my bedroom blinds. And I see Jason and Brennan...holding each other...in the dance studio. They're in, like, this really intimate embrace. Almost like they're dancing, but they're not. Definitely not. And I notice something moving in the next room. The office. And... there's the other boyfriend, the student, in the office just next door. And he's staring into the studio, at Jason and Brennan. And I'm thinking, Oh my god. Shit's about to go down. A moment later, the other student starts walking towards the studio. And I can see the office door is open so he's got a direct view of them making out. And as he crosses the door...he disappears. He's...just gone. I don't know what happened to him.

LAURA (cont'd)
And that's when I decide, enough's enough. Forget freedom. I'm going to take control and help this guy out. He probably has no idea he's being manipulated by Brennan, because that's what it clearly looked like to me. So I pull on my sweatpants and a top and grab my keys and open my front door, and...on the opposite side of the hallway, standing by the elevator--there's the student. He's just...staring at me. And he doesn't look happy.

LAURA (cont'd)
I scream. And I shut my door. I don't know why. Probably because...how the hell did he get up there so quickly. And I suddenly feel really, really... dumb.

(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
He probably wants to talk to me about my...viewing habits. So I look through my peephole, and...there's his face! Right up close to my door. It's as if he's trying to stare through my peephole into my apartment. Now I'm mad, because, you know...invasion of privacy. Ironic, I know. But that's what I felt. So, I swing the door open, and...he's gone. Just like last time. And I'm thinking, Is there like...ninja training over at that dance school? Like, maybe it's not on the schedule.

LAURA (cont'd)
So, I close the door, and when I turn around, I hear something in my living room. The building's really old, and there's spots where the floors creak, and it's creaking. Someone's in my living room.

LAURA (cont'd)
I walk down the hallway, and I look, and there he is. Standing in my living room. The student. And...I'm a bit scared, but angry at the same time. Like, it's one thing to be a peeping Tom through wide open windows where anyone across the street can see you. But it's another to just walk into someone's home. Right? So, I'm worked up now, and I say something about calling the police if he doesn't leave. And he's staring directly at me. And it's...unnerving. Like, really unnerving. And not so much because a stranger is suddenly standing in my living room, but because...he's not saying anything. He's just...it's the *way* he's staring. It's like he doesn't blink. And the first thing that strikes me about him is that...he's really, really sad. That's what I see. Immediately. So I ask what he wants from me. I might have said some other things before that...not so calmly. And he lifts his arm...and points out my living room window. He's pointing across the street at the studio. I walk over to the window.
(MORE)

LAURA (cont'd)
They're not making out any more. Just kind of...holding each other. And I notice...Jason's crying. He's crying into Brennan's shoulder. And Brennan is kind of rubbing his back. And I look back in my living room, and he's gone. Just...again. Like he was never there. Now I'm freaked out because... that's impossible. And I have to do something.

LAURA (cont'd)
I went to my third dance class without actually going. I went at the end where I could speak with Jason. When he saw me, he kind of put his hands on his hips like he was disappointed in me, but in a kidding kind of way. And the last students were leaving, and Brennan was nowhere around. So I asked if I could speak with him.

Long breath.

LAURA (cont'd)
I told him what I'd been doing. I told him about the view from my room. From my apartment. And what I'd seen. How it started with the dancing. And how I'd seen him and his student. And then him and Brennan. And he's just looking at me. Not angry. Not upset. Just...listening. I remember feeling very self-conscious, and I start paying attention to *how* I'm telling him everything, because it feels like I can't leave anything out, or bend the truth, because he'll know. It was as if he could see through me and pick out the bits of truth for himself. It was very difficult.

LAURA (cont'd)
And he asked, "When did you see Andrew here?" Turns out, Andrew was the student, the guy showing up in my apartment. I didn't tell him that part because...it's just a weird thing to tell somebody. But I did tell him I saw him here, in the office, the other day when Brennan was with him.
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LAURA (cont'd)
And Jason starts walking away from me, towards the window. And he looks up at my apartment. And he says, "You saw Andrew? Here? From up there?" And I say, Yeah. I did. And he say, "Andrew died three months ago. I was there when he died. The cancer had worked its way to his brain. And then he was gone." And I don't know what to say, because I know what I saw, but at the same time, not sure any more of anything. And right when I thought Jason was going to kick me out of the studio for being a crazy lady trying to screw with his life, he sits down on the floor, and starts...crying. Just...weeping. And...I don't know what to do. So, I start crying too. And now we're both just bawling. And I bend down to hold him, and he's holding me, and we can hardly breath. And then, and then he says, "I miss him so much. There are times I can't move." And that's when I tell him. I said, "You know, don’t ask me how I know this. But I have a very, very strong feeling…that if Andrew were still around, if he were standing right here…he’d want you to be happy. To be free. And he'd want me to tell you that." And I realize, that's why I was there. Why I was sent there. By Andrew. Or...whatever.

LAURA (cont'd)
Now, it gets kind of awkward, because we're now both a mess of tears and snot...and we hardly know each other but shared this really intimate moment. And I apologize and he lets me know it's alright...and I'm about to leave, and he says, "I have a confession. I’ve seen you looking here. I’ve nodded at you a few times but you didn’t see me. But your boyfriend always nodded back.” I was confused. What boyfriend? My roommate's a girl and she’s never home. She's always at her boyfriend's place. And Jason says he’s got brown hair. Longish brown hair.

LAURA (cont'd)
And I feel my knees buckle. And all I know is I need air. He thinks I'm about to be sick but I apologize and run out of the studio, down the stairs and into the street. And I look up into my apartment, and I suddenly know what's there. That feeling I get every night I'm there.

LAURA (cont'd)
I go to my apartment. I sit in the living room. And I feel him there. In the room with me. (Starts to cry.) I never let him go. I could feel him still with me. I never dealt with the guilt of breaking up with him and what that led to. What he did to himself. But he was sick, and I...I didn’t know about that kind of thing back then. It’s like…I grew up in this world where you’re told everything is up to you, and it’s either your gain, or your fault. But your life, it's in your hands. That whole pull yourself up by your bootstraps thing. So, when I left him…I guess…it was just another layer of pain upon layer of pain for him. So when I moved here to get away from it all...I think I brought him here with me. But it wasn't him. It was my guilt. It had nothing to do with him. And I think he knew that. And that's why he was here. The same reason Andrew was here. They want to say... that life has to move forward. It has to. If you want to live fully.

LAURA (cont'd)
I spoke to Gordie the rest of that night. I told him everything I should have told him. That it wasn't his fault. That I didn't understand what he was going through. All of it. And then...I danced. In the middle of the living room. I danced all night. Trying to hold him in my arms, my thoughts, my heart.

LAURA (cont'd)
And then the sun came up. And I never saw him again. Andrew too.
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LAURA (cont'd)
It was like all these ghosts suddenly disappeared from my life. And I was finally...and I was finally free.

INT. STUDIO

MICHAEL
The Big Loop is written and produced by Paul Bae. Mixed and engineered by Steve Jin. Today's episode stars the incredibly gifted TARA PRATT. You can follow her on Twitter and Instagram. Tell her how much you enjoyed her performance. We'll put the links up on our website at THEBIGLOOPPODCAST DOT COM, where you will also find all the music from today's episode. Including this beautiful song that you're hearing by HUSH FOREVER, AKA SEBASTIAN LILJA. We encourage you to go to our website, click on his links and PURCHASE his new album, FIND THE GAP, where you can hear this song in full without my voice interrupting it. Follow us on Twitter, @ BIGLOOPPODCAST, and on Facebook. And we'd really appreciate a rating and review on Apple Podcasts. It makes it easier for others to find us. It's just a minute of your time and it would mean the world to us. Leave a note for Tara Pratt about her powerful performance. I'll make sure she sees it. And a special shoutout to Terry Miles who not only produces The Black Tapes with Paul Bae but encouraged him to do another podcast. The Big Loop is in part the result of that encouragement. So, make sure you check out Tanis and Rabbits. That is it for us here. The next episode drops in two weeks. And there's no way for you to prepare for that one. Tell your friends, tune in, peace out.