

In Bakersfield, California in 1991, two boys stumbled upon a grisly discovery, the murdered body of a young woman.

In the Shadows is the new podcast from Wondery Plus and Casefar Presents, which follows the ensuing 32-year ordeal to uncover those responsible for the crime and bring them to justice.

During the investigation of In the Shadows, several individuals revealed shocking information previously unknown to authorities.

Ultimately, this new insight turned everything on its head.

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Theresa Marsden was incredibly close to her first-born daughter, 20-year-old Renee.

The two were more like best friends and they told each other everything.

Theresa had separated from Renee's biological father when Renee was just two years old, affording the mother and daughter a close bond.

When Theresa eventually remarried a man named Mark and had 3 more children, Renee was delighted.

Nurturing and kind-hearted, she loved being an older sister and adored her family.

She considered Mark to be her real father as he raised her and was always there for her.

Renee's life motto was, family comes first, and everything else comes after.

One Mother's Day, Renee presented Theresa with an unexpected surprise, a tattoo in her honour.

Written down the side of Renee's rib cage were the words, life is beautiful because of you.

When Renee arrived home early from work on the afternoon of Monday, August 5, 2013, Theresa could immediately sense that something was wrong.

Renee was typically happy and bubbly with a bright infectious smile.

But as she walked through the Marsden's living room at their home in Sydney's northwestern suburb of Glenhaven, she was visibly deflated.

Theresa asked Renee if everything was okay.

Renee assured her mother that she was fine, before disappearing upstairs to her bedroom.

Although Theresa instinctively knew that something was going on, she gave her daughter space.

She trusted that Renee would talk to her when she was ready.

Then, Theresa's phone beeped.

It was a text message from Renee's boyfriend, Brayden Spatieri.

It read,

Sort your daughter out, threatening to kill herself.

Renee Marsden was introduced to Brayden Spatieri in late November 2011 through her close friend,

Camilla Zidane.

Camilla and Brayden had dated in the past, but Camilla felt that Renee and Brayden were a more fitting match and she was more than happy to set them up.

Camilla gave Renee Brayden's phone number and the two began exchanging text messages. Renee was immediately intrigued by Brayden.

The 24-year-old came from a wealthy family and had attended one of Sydney's most prominent private schools.

One of three children, he was already in the process of taking over his father's successful construction business, which specialized in high-rise buildings.

Brayden took pride in his appearance, which was evident in his muscular physique and clean-cut dark hair.

A photo Camilla had of her and Brayden together captured his warm smile as Camilla rested her head on his shoulder.

Like Renee, Brayden also had clear goals for his life that revolved around marriage and starting a family.

There was just one problem.

Not long before Brayden and Renee began texting, Brayden had been involved in a motorcycle accident that resulted in the death of his best friend.

He'd been anxiously awaiting a court date and when the day came, he was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to two years in Gulburn Prison, located two hours south of Sydney.

Renee was devastated that the two didn't get the chance to meet before Brayden's conviction, but he reassured her that the time would go fast.

He'd be out before her 21st birthday and they could see how things panned out then.

In the meantime, their relationship didn't have to come to a standstill.

With his lawyer's help, Brayden managed to sneak a mobile phone into his cell.

He couldn't risk speaking on it in case anyone overheard him, but he could continue messaging Renee in secret via text and on social media.

As for their first real-life meeting, that would have to wait.

Brayden had broken a deal in which he agreed to forego visitation rights in exchange for a reduced sentence.

Renee and Brayden kept in close contact and their feelings towards one another continued to grow.

They messaged each other daily and it wasn't long before their friendship turned into a romance.

When Renee told her mother about Brayden, Theresa was taken aback.

Renee had only recently come out of a serious relationship with her boyfriend Angus and Theresa wondered if it was too soon to enter into something else.

She was also concerned about Brayden being in jail, but she kept those opinions to herself.

The last thing she wanted was to drive a wedge between herself and her daughter.

Renee could be a hopeless romantic, but she was also smart and Theresa trusted her judgment.

At the end of the day, she just wanted Renee to be happy.

Other friends and family members also questioned whether the relationship was a good idea, but by December, Renee was completely smitten.

While she understood the criticism, it was difficult for her not to take it to heart.

Brayden reached out to Theresa directly to reassure her of his good intentions.

She wrote,

Renee is upset because everyone keeps telling her the obvious that I'm in jail and it will never work.

She is everything to me and the last thing I want is to hold her down.

She chose to go through this with me and after everything that happened she became my best friend.

I have fallen for her and she tells me she feels the same.

Theresa, I'm a good guy, I would never disrespect her, cheat or lie to her.

She is everything to me and I could make her more than happy.

Renee and Brayden began discussing their life together on the outside.

Their feelings towards one another were intense and they didn't hold back with expressing how they felt.

Brayden sent Renee flowers, cards and gifts and just three months after they began texting,

Renee visited a tattoo parlor with her friend Camilla.

Solidifying her love for Brayden with a permanent tribute, she had the name B. Spatieri inked into the right side of her chest.

On New Year's Eve of 2011, Renee was looking forward to a night out clubbing.

She wore a red dress for the occasion and snapped a quick photo to send to Brayden.

Rather than complimenting her, he said the dress was too revealing and warned that she'd better not cheat on him.

Throughout the evening he bombarded Renee with the jealous text messages.

After this, another side of Brayden started to emerge.

In early April 2012, Renee's mother Teresa was scrolling through Facebook when she came across a post made by Renee's ex-boyfriend, Angus.

Teresa had always been fond of Angus, so she liked the post.

Brayden had access to Renee's Facebook account and when he saw the engagement from Teresa, he was furious.

He hated that she was still communicating with Renee's ex and contacted Renee to express how much this hurt him.

He then sent Teresa an abusive text message accusing her of being an unfit mother.

Teresa was appalled, not only by the accusation, but by the fact that Renee had given Brayden her Facebook password.

Shortly after, Brayden underwent surgery which required several weeks of recovery.

He wasn't able to use his phone during that time, but his lawyer contacted Renee to let her know that the operation had been a success.

By May, Teresa could no longer bite her tongue.

She told Renee she found Brayden to be rude and arrogant and didn't think theirs was a healthy relationship.

Renee valued her mother's opinion and agreed to end the romantic relationship while still supporting Brayden as a friend.

In August 2012, Brayden applied for parole and succeeded.

Renee was relieved that the two would finally be able to meet in person, but the feeling

was short-lived.

Shortly after Brayden's release, he got into an altercation with his father who filed assault charges against him.

Brayden was back behind bars almost as quickly as he'd been let out, and Renee was absolutely crushed.

Teresa was becoming increasingly concerned about the impact that Brayden's incarceration was having on her daughter.

Privately, she thought Renee deserved better.

Teresa reached out to Brayden and requested that he cease contact with Renee, at least until he was a free man.

Brayden reluctantly agreed.

He told Renee to move on for the time being, but reassured her that his feelings hadn't changed, and they could start things up again when he was on the outside.

Renee tried to move on, but the lack of contact with Brayden left a void in her life.

She was also going through a stressful situation at work, and it all became too much.

Renee took an overdose of medication, and while she didn't intend to harm herself, the dose made her sick.

For several days she was nauseous and couldn't keep any food down.

She eventually went to the emergency room where she told the attending doctor that she regretted the overdose.

She was happy to be alive and had no lingering feelings of self-harm.

With no damage done, she was discharged that same day.

This signalled a turning point for Renee.

She started dating a co-worker named Ian, who was 12 years her senior.

Despite the age gap, Renee's parents were thrilled.

Ian was a decent man who treated Renee well and made her happy.

But the pair's relationship wasn't without complications.

When Brayden found out about Ian, he raged.

He managed to get Ian's contact details and sent him a message that warned,

Stay the fuck away from Renee.

In October 2012, Renee attended an awards ceremony for work.

Dolled up in a new dress, she took a photo of herself in her hotel room and posted it on social media.

Shortly after, she received a message from Brayden.

He had seen the post and made the astute observation that Ian's shoes were visible in the photo.

This enraged Brayden, who began accusing Renee of cheating on him.

Renee's relationship with Ian continued to progress, but she resumed regular contact with Brayden.

Ian knew that the two were still in touch, and although he wasn't happy about it, he seemingly accepted it.

In December, Renee and Ian were attending a Christmas function for work, after which they intended to go to the casino.

Ian's phone vibrated.

It was a text message from Brayden.

You better be careful, it read, I'll be at the casino tonight, watching you.

By January 2013, Renee and Ian were engaged, but Renee still maintained contact with Brayden. It had become a big problem in her and Ian's relationship, with Brayden continuing to send threatening messages to Ian warning him to stay away.

Brayden made it very clear to Ian that he also intended to marry Renee.

Eventually, Ian had enough.

In March, he gave Renee an ultimatum, it was either him or Brayden.

Renee agonized over the decision, but eventually made up her mind.

She chose Brayden.

It was a rocky transition as the two worked to rebuild their relationship, and serious cracks began to form.

One day they were loving and supportive of one another, and the next they were arguing. Brayden told Renee he wasn't sure if he still wanted to take over his father's construction business, which she thought was a mistake.

In turn, he accused her of being greedy and only caring about money.

He also pressed her about her relationship with Ian, which he viewed as infidelity, and this deeply frustrated Renee.

Whenever they fought, it was usually resolved by Renee apologizing and pacifying Brayden's concerns.

But there was one thing that Renee couldn't move past.

By mid-April 2013, the two had been in an on and off relationship for one and a half years, and she still had no tangible peace of Brayden.

There had been gifts and a small number of cropped selfies showing Brayden's muscular torso, but she wanted something of his she could hold.

Brayden had previously told Renee that all of his personal belongings were locked up in a storage unit, so she began asking if she could get hold of the key.

When Brayden rejected the request, Renee was floored.

She reminded Brayden of everything that she'd done for him, and asked that he make the same effort.

In a series of text messages, Renee wrote,

I asked you for one simple thing, a key.

Not money, not to escape jail.

Nothing but a key.

Brayden, I have nothing of you.

Absolutely nothing.

I can't even get a photo of you anymore.

It's hard for me, Brayden, okay?

It's killing me.

In regards to visiting the storage unit, she wrote,

I don't need anyone with me.

I want to go by myself, just to touch something you have, or see.

It would mean more than the world to me, just that once, to go.

Still, Brayden said no.

When Renee persisted, he accused her of being a quote, materialistic bitch, and threatened

to sell everything in the storage unit just so she would shut up about it.

Adding to the tension was Renee's ongoing request to visit Brayden's lawyer.

Brayden had been having trouble with his phone, so Renee wanted to give him a new one.

Given that she wasn't allowed to visit him in jail, she hoped Brayden's lawyer could bring it to him on her behalf.

Renee was also considering studying forensic science at Sydney University, but before she made any concrete plans, she wanted to know more about Brayden's possible relay state.

Brayden said this wasn't possible, as he didn't know where his lawyer worked from.

Renee found this hard to believe.

She knew that Brayden had attended multiple meetings with his lawyer, so she questioned it.

Brayden responded,

Who the fuck are you to question what my meetings are about and fucking who with?

This was the last straw for Renee.

She told Brayden she'd had enough.

He quickly backtracked, texting her an apology that read,

I love you Renee, you changed my life from day one.

I know there has been hard times, fucked times and mean times.

I adore you and you're so beautiful in every way.

I miss you, I love you so much Renee, without fail, every day.

Renee said she was done with the relationship unless Brayden changed his behaviour and agreed to her simple requests.

Brayden explained he just wasn't ready to face what was in the storage unit.

He pleaded for Renee to have faith in him and to stop questioning him, the same way he'd agreed to stop questioning her about Ian.

They had to learn to believe in one another.

Justifying his behaviour, Brayden texted,

I fucking love you more than you know, that's why I get so angry when you question me.

Renee eventually softened and by late May 2013, their relationship reached a peak.

They talked about marriage and their plans for a honeymoon in Greece.

Brayden texted Renee,

We will have the best wedding baby, I'll make you happy, I'll do whatever you want just for you.

I want you to be mine forever and be mine for the rest of my life.

I want to be your husband and you be my wife.

I adore you.

But the hire was short lived.

Renee had recently started a new job as a receptionist for a logistics company and Brayden was jealous about the time she was spending with her new co-workers.

A few days after discussing their wedding plans, Brayden asked Renee what she'd been up to and she said she hadn't left the house.

Brayden knew this was a lie.

He admitted he'd installed tracking software on Renee's phone and could see that she'd gone to the gym.

He said he could no longer trust her, the relationship was over.
The only way he'd consider forgiving Renee was if she stopped socialising with her work colleagues.
Renee apologized profusely, but the argument continued for days until she eventually told Brayden she no longer wanted to marry him.
She'd only reconsider if he agreed to make a list of eight changes she'd identified as problematic.
Brayden agreed, as long as Renee promised to remain loyal and agreed not to spend time alone with her male colleagues.
By mid-June, their relationship was back on track.
Brayden's parole date was looming and the pair were optimistic about the future.
Brayden told Renee,
You're the best thing that ever happened to me.
Renee responded,
No baby, we're the best thing that has ever happened to each other.
We define true love.
We haven't met, we haven't held each other, we haven't done anything together, yet we love each other more than anything.
We have a family and we have our life planned.
In the lead up to Brayden's parole, he informed Renee that he wouldn't have access to his phone for a whole month.
Being out of contact was hard for Renee, but she used it as a period of reflection.
On July 22, she wrote a letter to Brayden she hoped to give to him later on.
It read in part,
This time away has made me realise we argue over stupid things too often and it's pointless.
I love you beyond words and I'll never let you go.
I can't be without you.
Baby, you're my rock, my hero, my everything, and I'll love and cherish you all the days of our lives together.
I can't wait to be your wife and to give you the happiness you deserve.
Even though Renee wasn't sure when Brayden would have access to his phone again, she texted him every day in the hopes of receiving a reply.
By the morning of Monday, August 5, 2013, over a month had passed with no word from him.
The silence was starting to take a toll on Renee.
She told her work colleague Joseph what was going on and the two arranged to have lunch together later that day.
Just before midday, Renee finally received a text from Brayden.
They began messaging back and forth, but they weren't the warm affectionate messages Renee had been expecting.
She emailed Joseph saying she was upset because Brayden was being blunt.
The couple continued texting until Renee's lunch break rolled around at 1pm.
As she and Joseph began walking to a nearby coffee shop, Renee received another message.
Her hands began to shake and she started to cry.

She showed the phone to Joseph.

The message was from Brayden and read, I think I need a break and so do you.

Renee and Joseph continued on to the coffee shop, but Renee was beside herself.

She sent Brayden a bunch of messages, but he didn't reply.

Renee was too upset to return to work.

She went home where her mother Teresa instantly noticed that something was wrong.

Renee assured her mother she was fine before retreating to her room.

Teresa then received the text from Brayden saying that her daughter was threatening suicide.

Teresa responded, Please explain to me why a young woman would want to kill herself, to which Brayden said, Ask her yourself.

She explained to me why you never got her help last time.

Have you ever thought you have neglected her when she clearly needs help?

Teresa went straight up to Renee's bedroom and showed her the messages from Brayden.

She asked whether she should be concerned.

Renee responded, Don't be stupid mum, I've finally found out what he's all about.

You don't have to worry about him anymore mum.

It's over.

Case file will be back shortly.

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Teresa left her daughter alone but went back to check on her shortly after.

Renee was getting changed into black tights, a black jumper and black ballet flats.

She applied some fresh makeup and pulled her long hair back into a bun.

Renee said she was going out to dinner with some work friends in the eastern suburbs but wouldn't be out long.

Re assured that Renee was feeling better, Teresa left home to take two of her younger children to swimming lessons.

While she was there, her phone beeped at 5.49pm.

It was a message from Renee.

I love you so much, it said.

I'm sorry for everything and the pain I will now cause you, but I'll be okay.

I'll still be here.

When you need to talk to me, just call my name and I'll be there.

You're the most amazing person and mother ever and my very best friend.

I wasn't happy and I need you to understand that it's okay.

Don't let this ruin everything else you need to take care of.

I need you to be strong for me.

I love you, mama.

I always will and I'll be waiting when you come.

Teresa wasn't entirely sure what to make of her daughter's text message.

It wasn't out of character for Renee to send her affectionate texts, but this one was significantly different.

Teresa called Renee's phone multiple times, but there was no answer.

She went and showed the text to a friend who suggested that she called the police.

Officers arrived at the Marston's house at 7.50pm and were immediately concerned for Renee's welfare.

They put an alert out for Renee's car, a Red Mazda 2, and started patrolling the streets on the lookout for the 20-year-old.

Meanwhile, Teresa texted Renee's friend, Camilla Zidane, and asked if she'd heard from Renee.

The two friends had recently had a falling out, but Teresa knew they usually patched things up.

Camilla responded, she messaged me a while ago, is everything okay?

Camilla later said she'd received a message from Renee just minutes before Teresa had.

In it, Renee said that she loved Camilla and was sorry.

Given that they weren't speaking, Camilla assumed the text was in relation to their falling out.

She offered to come over and help Teresa look for Renee.

They drove around to various locations where Camilla thought her friend might be, including a nearby McDonald's.

It then occurred to Camilla that Renee might have gone to Brayden's sister's house.

Camilla directed them to a residence in Glenhaven, but when they drove by, Renee's car was nowhere

to be seen.

The police contacted Renee's mobile phone provider, who informed them that her phone had been switched off just before 6pm in the vicinity of Vorkluse, a Sydney suburb 40km east of the Marsden's home.

This location raised immediate red flags for police.

Vorkluse was the gateway to the Gap, a high ocean cliff top on the South Head Peninsula. Due to its views over the Tasman Sea, the area was a popular tourist destination.

But it was also a notorious suicide spot.

Measures had been put in place to deter those considering ending their own lives, including an in-wood leaning concave barrier, security cameras, and phone booths providing access to 24-7 crisis counselling.

Regardless, some reports estimated that up to 50 people killed themselves at the Gap each year by taking the 100m leap into the sea and rocks below.

Police headed towards the area and at 8.45pm they found Renee's car parked roughly 150m from the steps at the Gap.

Her wallet was inside, along with an old iPhone she'd stopped using two months prior, a Valentine's Day card from Brayden and a small collage made up of the very few photos that Brayden had sent Renee.

Written in the condensation on the car windows were the words, I love you Brayden.

Renee's parents were notified and they rushed to the scene in a panic.

Renee's car was usually filled with personal items like clothes and makeup, but it struck them as odd that it was now completely empty.

As police conducted both land and air searches, Teresa and her husband Mark walked the coastal cliffs and surrounding paths and parklands, shouting Renee's name before the search was called off due to darkness.

It resumed the following morning.

Being neatly near an old gun turret in a reserve known as Jacob's Ladder, Teresa found Renee's

black ballet flats.

Another air search was conducted while the water police scoured the surrounding sea and three police divers searched the rocky sea floor.

Still, there was no sign of Renee.

Police made the tragic conclusion that Renee had taken her own life.

The waters were clear with a visibility of around 100 metres, leading them to determine that Renee's body would be recovered within three days.

Teresa refused to believe that her daughter had suicided, it simply didn't make sense.

Just two days earlier, Renee had a ball celebrating her cousin's 21st birthday, and she was looking forward to her own 21st in a couple months' time.

She was excited about studying and was making plans to move into the city.

If she really had taken her own life, something must have happened to trigger such an out-of-character decision.

Teresa was convinced that Braden's spittiri held the answer, but despite her efforts, she couldn't get in touch with him.

Two days after Renee's disappearance, Teresa sent Braden several texts asking if he knew where Renee was and demanding answers.

There was no reply.

Renee's friend, Camilla Zitdan, urged Teresa not to blame Braden, saying that he was hurting as well.

When Teresa asked how she could possibly know this, Camilla explained that on the night Renee went missing, Braden had called her from a private number.

He was worried about Renee, but didn't want to speak to anyone because he knew he'd get the blame.

According to Camilla, Renee had expressed suicidal thoughts in the past, but had promised she'd never act on them.

Camilla told Teresa, It didn't have anything to do with Braden.

I think Renee was just an upset person.

She always felt like everyone was against her.

Police were interested in the role Braden's spittiri might have played in Renee's disappearance.

They gathered phone records and CCTV footage to help piece together Renee's last movements and her final interactions with Braden.

Renee's primary mobile phone was never recovered, therefore the content of the messages couldn't be ascertained.

Police attempted to extract the messages from the old iPhone found in Renee's car, but it was protected by a passcode which they couldn't unlock.

Based on the available records, it was ascertained that on the day that Renee died, she and Braden had exchanged 91 text messages.

After Renee assured her mother that she'd ended things with Braden for good, she continued sending him messages.

Braden didn't reply.

Renee then drove towards the gap, arriving at around 5.20pm.

There was still no response from Braden.

She texted him again before walking around the area and sitting on a brick wall near the old gun turret.

She sent Braden five more messages and at 5.46pm he finally replied.

Renee sent Braden three more texts, each of which was met with silence.

She then sent a text to her friend, Camilla Zidane.

It was followed by the goodbye message to her mother, before Renee removed her shoes and climbed to the nearby fence.

As she glanced over the rocky cliff edge, she received a text from Braden.

Renee replied straight away.

Two minutes later, she threw her phone over the cliff before disappearing from view.

By the time Braden wrote back at 5.55pm, Renee was already gone.

A phone call Renee had made at 2.44pm was also significant.

It appeared that shortly after receiving the text message from Braden saying that they needed to take a break, Renee had called a goblin prison.

What transpired on that 92nd phone call was unknown, but it was possible she'd learnt what the police had come to know for themselves.

But there was no inmate at goblin prison named to Braden Spittiri.

Renee Marsden and Camilla Zidane had been best friends since year 9 of high school.

During the early stages of their friendship, the Marsden's noticed considerable changes in Renee's behaviour.

Renee had always been outspoken and outgoing, but the more time she spent with Camilla, the more withdrawn she became.

Camilla didn't like Renee's boyfriend at the time, so Renee broke up with him.

She started smoking cigarettes and ditching school, with her grades suffering as a result.

Renee had always been incredibly close to her cousin Stephanie, who felt that Camilla tried to tear them apart.

Renee once confided in Stephanie that Camilla was being violent towards her, sometimes pushing her and punching her hard enough to cause bruises.

Stephanie had no reason to doubt this as she'd noticed the controlling behaviour for herself.

She'd once been with Renee when Camilla had tried to call her 16 times in a 50 minute period.

Renee advised Renee to stop seeing Camilla, but the friendship continued.

In 2008, Renee made another confession to Stephanie.

Camilla had tried to kiss her several times.

She would alternate between trying to seduce Renee and being violent towards her.

Although Renee considered herself heterosexual, the two eventually experimented physically.

Renee made it clear that nothing would ever eventuate given that she was straight.

But Camilla's feelings were significantly stronger than Renee's.

In one email to Renee, Camilla wrote,

I swear to god kid, you're going nowhere.

Do you understand?

You abuse me, I'll laugh.

You kill me, I'll be your ghost.

You hate me, I'll still love you.

Run away, chase you, hide, I'll hunt you down.

Only I'll loan you.

You got no way to escape, babe, because only I'm in love with you.

Only I'll loan you, and only I'll have you forever.

Stephanie told Renee's mother what was going on.

Teresa went through Renee's room and found several love letters from Camilla.

She confronted Renee who admitted to everything and said she was afraid of Camilla.

Renee's parents organized meetings with the girls' school and Camilla's parents in a bid to end the friendship, but the two girls continued seeing each other regardless.

Camilla even provided Renee with a mobile phone she could use to contact her on exclusively.

In 2009, Renee was sick of the way Camilla treated her.

She attempted to distance herself by leaving school to study hairdressing.

Shortly after, Camilla enrolled in the same course.

Renee confided in Stephanie that one day, Camilla had chased her down the hall and pulled her hair.

She said she was scared, but didn't know what to do.

It was in 2010 that Renee began a relationship with a young man named Angus and tried to put even more space between herself and Camilla.

However, Camilla would show up at Renee's workplace uninvited, and Teresa noticed her lurking around outside of the Marsden's home.

She had a habit of showing up at the same place as Renee and calling it a coincidence.

One day, Renee and Teresa were at the library when Camilla appeared out of nowhere and said,

◆As long as you refuse to answer my phone calls, I will continue to follow you.◆

Renee ultimately dropped out of her hairdressing course to avoid Camilla.

She organized a meeting with both of their mothers to let Camilla know she was done with their friendship for good.

Camilla became so upset that she physically tried to prevent Renee from leaving, forcing Teresa to intervene.

After this, Camilla continued to contact Renee.

Renee mostly ignored her until August 2011 when she eventually caved in and the two resumed their friendship.

Things didn't improve.

One night, Renee received 54 missed calls from Camilla.

In a text, Renee wrote, ◆I'm sorry, but that's possessive.

If you can't see that, then there is something terribly wrong with you.◆

Undeterred, Camilla continued to make snide remarks about Angus and complained that Renee always treated her second best.

Renee constantly tried to appease Camilla, but it wasn't enough.

At the start of September, Camilla told Renee to make a choice between her and Angus.

Renee responded that there would always be another person, if not Angus, then someone else.

Two months later, Braden Spittiri entered the picture.

Given that Camilla and Braden were close friends, Camilla was privileged to an insider◆s view of the couple◆s relationship.

When Braden would display jealousy, Camilla would warn Renee not to cheat on him. She was their biggest supporter and always encouraged Renee to remain loyal to Braden and to work through any of their rough patches. As Renee and Braden's relationship progressed, the friendship between Renee and Camilla continued on rocky grounds. Periods of closeness were followed by weeks of arguing. Renee made multiple attempts to distance herself, but Camilla always found her way back. In March 2013, Renee confided in Braden that Camilla had hit her and pulled her hair after a night out. She told him that she was done with their friendship for good. However things went sour, Braden typically tried to smooth things over, often taking Camilla's side and telling Renee to be more understanding. Other times he told Renee to break away from Camilla and find new friends. By June 2013, Renee and Camilla's relationship had become particularly volatile. Camilla was about to embark on a month-long holiday to the United States, and Renee saw this as an opportunity to put some distance between them once and for all. She sat her mother down and told her just how bad things had become. In addition to the punching and hair-pulling, Renee said she'd recently been driving when Camilla suddenly ripped the steering wheel from her hands. Renee told Theresa she'd put up with Camilla's abuse for too long, and was genuinely frightened of her. In late July, while Camilla was in the USA, Renee sent her a text message saying she was done with their friendship for good. She told Camilla not to contact her upon her return home. Renee was relieved to have cut ties, but it was a lonely time for her, given that Braden also didn't have access to his phone at this time due to his pending parole hearing. She recorded her feelings in a letter to give to Braden later. In it, she said, "I can tell you, I have finally let Camilla go for good, and I feel so much better about it now."

After discovering there was no inmate by the name of Braden Spatieri at Golben Prison, police investigating Renee's disappearance made further inquiries with correctional services, as well as the high school Braden claimed to have attended. There was no record of him anywhere. Either Braden Spatieri had been lying to Renee all along, or he didn't exist at all. These ex-boyfriend Angus had been devastated when Renee abruptly entered their relationship in late 2011. Curious to know more about her new boyfriend, he had looked up at Braden's Facebook profile and noticed that he listed many of the same hobbies and interests as Camilla. Angus reached out to Braden, and the two started chatting back and forth. Many times Angus asked Braden questions about himself, his answers were vague. Angus also noticed that Braden's messages shared the same distinct spelling and grammatical errors as the ones he'd seen Camilla send to Renee. Worried that his ex was being duped, he voiced his suspicions to Renee that Braden and Camilla

were one and the same.

Renee became extremely upset at the allegation and strongly denied the possibility.

Angus wasn't the only one with doubts.

From early on in Renee and Braden's relationship, Renee's cousin Stephanie had expressed concerns

that she didn't think Braden was real.

To prove Braden's existence, Renee gave him Stephanie's phone number, and the two began texting back and forth.

Stephanie remained dubious.

Something about the whole situation didn't feel right.

Stephanie suspected that Renee was being catfished by Camilla, but she had no evidence to prove it.

The skepticism frustrated Renee.

She told a work colleague, "If I didn't think Braden was real, I wouldn't have left Ian."

These parents had ongoing concerns about Camilla's feelings towards their daughter, but they never

imagined she'd stoop so low as to create a false online persona just to maintain control over her.

Camilla's strange behavior following Renee's disappearance had them thinking otherwise.

She'd been unusually quick to jump to Braden's defense and had no issues with laying the blame for Renee's problems on her family.

When the Marsden's asked Camilla to say the last message Renee had sent her, she claimed she'd accidentally deleted it.

When Theresa told Camilla she'd given Braden's phone number to the police, Camilla panicked and demanded she ask for it back.

Although this was odd, it didn't prove anything.

The police continued trying to access Renee's old iPhone, but were unable to bypass the security code.

Desperate for answers, the Marsden's contacted Renee's mobile service provider and requested a copy of all her text records.

However, this data was only held by the company for seven days.

By the time they asked for it, it was already too late.

On August 25, 2013, three weeks after Renee's disappearance, Camilla Zidane arrived at the police station for a pre-arranged interview.

She had been asked to bring some notes about her friendship with Renee, the pair's most recent communications, and her knowledge of Braden's pitier.

Camilla presented a two-page statement as requested, but it made no mention of Braden.

All it said about her and Renee's most recent communication was that Renee's final text had read, "I'm sorry for everything.

You will always be my best friend.

I hope one day you can forgive me.

I love you."

Camilla said that she and Braden had met at a nightclub called the Brewery several years

prior, but she couldn't recall the exact date.

She gave the interviewing officer a description of Braden, but said that Renee never told her anything about their relationship.

The officer asked Camilla for Braden's phone number.

She said she didn't have it, as it was saved on her phone which was broken and currently being repaired.

As the interview wound up, the officer looked at Camilla and said, "I want you to be honest with me."

The telephone call logs that I have here in front of me suggest to me that you are Braden. Are you?

Case file will be back shortly.

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Jess also tells me that the heading tabs are really useful in organizing her news feed so there's no endless scrolling to get to the headlines.

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To our friends in the Northern Hemisphere, this time of year means you might be getting stuck into some spring cleaning.

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Case file composer Andrew ordered some rugs and throws from Article to brighten up his home.

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When Camilla was confronted with the suggestion that she was really Braden Spittieri, she replied, "No, I know that a lot of people think I am.

Everyone is against me.

I wish I was where Renee is now, wherever she is.

I just want to have the peace she is feeling now."

On September 23, almost one month after her first interview, police arrived at Camilla's home armed with a search warrant.

They seized three phones but couldn't find the SIM card associated with Braden Spittieri's phone number.

In a rubbish bin, they found a letter written from Renee to Braden, but it had been torn to shreds.

They also found a letter that Renee had written to Camilla in March 2013, in which she thanked Camilla for introducing her to Braden.

Renee wrote, "You don't understand, babe, how much it truly means to me.

If it wasn't because of you, I wouldn't have met the one person that means more than the world itself to me.

I'll do anything I can to make sure I can give you what I found, and make sure that person is your all.

It's my life mission to see you happy, and my life won't fully be complete until I see the day you have everything you have ever dreamt of."

As the officers were leaving Camilla's bedroom, one of them turned to her and asked if there was anything she'd like to talk about.

Camilla paused.

She then admitted, "I was sending the text messages to Renee before I left for America. Renee asked me to.

She wanted me to pretend that I was Braden."

The officer asked why, to which Camilla responded, "I don't know.

I just did it because she wanted me to.

I didn't do anything else."

She then asked, "What's going to happen to me?"

The officer replied, "At this stage, Camilla, we are just interested in finding out what has happened to Renee."

The police attempted to download the contents of the three phones seized from Camilla, but they didn't reveal much.

Camilla had already deleted a majority of the communication between herself and Renee, including the final messages sent between them on Monday, August 5.

However, she did have the photo of herself and Braden saved on one of the devices, the sole photo that Renee had of Braden's face.

Camilla eventually admitted that she didn't know the man in the photo.

It had just been taken at random in a nightclub.

After three months of unsuccessfully trying to crack into Renee's old iPhone, the police returned it to the Marsden family.

As reported by Channel 9's Australian Crime Stories, Renee's 13-year-old brother Luke had a friend who thought they could crack into the phone.

All they needed to do was purchase an app for \$100.

The Marsdens immediately handed over their credit card details, and within 10 minutes, they were in.

Suddenly, they had access to countless messages.

Over the three-month period from April to June 2013 alone, 11,000 text messages had been sent between Renee and Braden and Renee and Camilla.

However, the texts were all scrambled.

Renee's father, Mark, began the long and arduous task of slowly unscrambling each and every one and then attempting to piece them together.

As Mark entered the dates and messages into a computer document, he noticed that a pattern started to emerge.

At no point did Camilla and Braden both converse with Renee at the same time.

Renee would engage with one of them before texting with the other, but the conversations never overlapped.

This was consistent with another detail that had been raised.

In early 2012, Braden had been out of communication with Renee while he underwent surgery.

This just so happened to align with the time while Camilla was away on holiday.

Likewise, Camilla's most recent trip to the United States had coincided with the month that Braden went off-grid as he told Renee he awaited his parole hearing.

Theresa Marsden struggled to accept the fact that her daughter was really gone.

Given that Renee's body was never discovered, Theresa continued to hold on to hope that she hadn't really killed herself, but had moved away to escape the threats from Camilla.

Theresa distributed missing person posters all the way up the New South Wales coastline and into Queensland, hoping that Renee would pick up the phone or walk through the door.

Even though the police began preparing a report for the coroner, Theresa still couldn't comprehend it.

She told the Daily Mail,

It's different if you see a body, but there's too much evidence to suggest she's alive.

There's no evidence to suspect she's not here.

In 2019, six years after Renee Marsden's disappearance, advances in technology finally made it possible for law enforcement to have full access to the contents of Renee and Braden's text messages.

With the full nature of their relationship clear at last, there was no doubt that Camilla's idea had been behind the Braden's Batiri persona all along.

At one point, Braden had even encouraged Renee to have sex with Camilla as a way to get some

of her anger out, a suggestion which Renee met with a firm no.

The act of assuming a fake online identity in order to target a specific victim is known as catfishing.

Catfishing itself isn't considered a criminal offence in Australia unless it's done for the purpose of an illegal act, such as fraud, financial gain, stalking, or the grooming of underage persons.

Even though Camilla's idea was clearly Braden's Batiri, she hadn't used the fake account for any of these punishable offences.

Therefore, there was nothing that New South Wales police could charge her with.

A criminal lawyer told a current affair, "Unfortunately, catfishing in most circumstances is probably best defined as a crime of the heart."

Although Theresa eventually accepted that Renee had passed away, she needed answers.

She requested that a coronial inquest be conducted to determine the true role that Camilla's actions played in Renee's suicide.

The final messages sent between them remained a mystery, and the Marsden's wanted to know if Renee had found out about Braden's true identity before deciding to end her own life.

It was a long, drawn-out process, but Camilla's idea eventually struck a deal that ensured she wouldn't face prosecution if she appeared at an inquest.

This meant that anything she said in court couldn't be used against her for future charges.

As the inquest commenced in February 2020, the Marsden family held high hopes that they'd finally get answers to the questions that had been plaguing them for the past seven years.

After now 27-year-old Camilla's idea had since moved on with her life, getting married and starting a family.

Given that she'd been granted immunity, the Marsden's hoped that at the very least, she would tell the truth about the final conversations between Renee and Braden.

If nothing else, they felt they deserved that closure.

Having evidence over two days, Camilla denied any of the obsessive behavior she'd been accused of.

She denied ever following Renee, lurking outside of her house, or calling her excessively.

When presented with some of the intense texts and emails she had sent over the course of their friendship, Camilla reasoned that she had simply loved and cared about Renee.

Camilla admitted to playing the role of Braden's pateri, but explained it was because she and Renee were having a romantic relationship.

They thought their families wouldn't approve, so they created the character of Braden as a cover-up.

According to Camilla, Renee had played an equal part in the charade, helping to set up a Braden's phone and SIM card so the two could communicate in secret.

Renee had chosen the photo they used of Braden, cropping Camilla out of it and then sending it to herself as part of the ruse.

The coroner presented Camilla with numerous pieces of evidence retrieved from Renee's old iPhone that challenged her claims.

If Renee was in on the act, why had she called Gulban Prison and written to the Greek consulate

asking if a convicted criminal could obtain a holiday visa?

Why would she fight with Braden about wanting to speak to his lawyer and visit the storage unit if she knew such things didn't exist?

Why would she have booked an appointment with a wedding photographer and sent Braden photographs

of brides and grooms if she knew such a wedding could never go ahead?

Renee had sent Braden sexual images of herself and then gotten upset when he refused to reciprocate.

She had also written numerous messages that contradicted Camilla's claims.

One text read, "Do you ever wonder how strange it is that we have never met, but we have this inseparable love for each other?"

Braden, you will never get it because you're a male, but to a girl, finding that perfect someone is everything.

Camilla's explanation for all of this was that Renee had simply been in character.

The counsel assisting the coroner told Camilla, "You are saying that today, but it does not make sense.

You wanted Renee to yourself and creating Braden was the perfect opportunity because it meant you could have her all to yourself."

Back in August 2013, just days after Camilla returned from the United States, she participated in a soccer match.

Renee typically attended Camilla's soccer games, and Camilla would get upset if she didn't pay attention.

On this occasion, Renee told her mother she would never go to another game because she didn't want to see Camilla.

The coroner concluded that Camilla likely interpreted Renee's absence as proof that she was serious about ending their friendship.

With her pride hurt, the next day she, quote, "Exacted her ultimate revenge by having Braden break Renee's heart."

Another Braden-Renee relationship ended as it had started.

At Camilla's will.

Camilla appeared completely unaffected, as she told the court she had no recollection of what was said in those final text messages between Braden and Renee.

The only thing she remembered was that Renee was talking about her lack of purpose in life.

Camilla claimed she had no idea that Renee had driven to the gap on August 5, 2013, nor that she was serious about threatening to kill herself.

The inquest ran for four days, and it took four months for the coroner to sift through the abundance of evidence before reaching their conclusion.

The findings were handed down on May 20, 2020.

The coroner described Camilla's idea as disingenuous at best, and called her evidence "nothing but a pack of lies."

From the evidence, it was clear to the coroner that Camilla wanted Renee all to herself.

She created the persona of Braden to manipulate and control Renee, and to free herself of the jealousy she felt whenever Renee was in a relationship with a man.

As for whether or not Renee discovered that Braden was really Camilla, the coroner concluded,

◆I am of the view that Renee likely did not learn of this.

Camilla did not tell her because she is unable to admit to having engaged in such a pollen conduct involving such an extreme betrayal of trust of her friend.◆

These communications indicate Renee was very much of the view that Braden was not only real, but certainly not Camilla.

In most Australian jurisdictions, it is a criminal offence to encourage someone to take their own life.

Although Camilla knew that Renee would be devastated by the break-up with Braden, the coroner concluded that by destroying the evidence of what was said between them that day, there was no basis to prove that Camilla had incited Renee◆s suicide.

The coroner accepted it was likely true that Camilla didn◆t know that Renee had driven to the gap on the evening of August 5, 2013, or that she was serious about the suicide threats.

Phone records confirmed that Camilla had been casually texting back and forth with other friends at the same time she was interacting with Renee as Braden, and was therefore distracted and quote ◆untouched◆ by Renee◆s distress.

Although the coroner stopped short of blaming Camilla for inciting Renee◆s suicide, they did accept that Camilla had quote ◆caused the hurt and heartbreak that led Renee to take her own life.◆

The New South Wales domestic violence death review team had recently released a report that suggested widening the scope of state laws to cover non-violent types of domestic harm.

The coroner recommended that the domestic violence team consider Renee◆s case in order to help progress their report.

By doing so, it was possible that new coercive control laws could be implemented that would apply to individuals who engaged in similar conduct to Camilla◆s idea.

This would essentially make catfishing a punishable offence similar to intimidation and stalking.

The coroner noted that Camilla showed no warmth or regard to the Marsden family, and that she wasn◆t concerned about anything except furthering her own fiction.

Camilla displayed a deplorable lack of kindness to Renee◆s family by the lies she told, seeking to cast blame upon them for Renee◆s unhappiness.

◆I can only hope that this inquest has given them some degree of comfort, that Renee◆s experience is documented and understood.◆

Renee had her entire life to look forward to, and it ended all too soon in unnecessary emotional turmoil and trauma.

I offer Renee◆s family and friends my sincere condolences.

The Marsden family were crushed by Camilla◆s ongoing lies.

As Renee◆s cousin Stephanie later told Australian crime stories, they couldn◆t comprehend why Camilla couldn◆t have at least met them halfway.

Quote, ◆Even if she didn◆t want to tell us everything, she could have at least told us 50 or 60 percent of what really happened in the end.◆

Outside court, Theresa Marsden told reporters, ◆To some extent, going through the inquiry and going through the findings today is just as bad as when we first heard about Renee going missing.◆

◆Renee hasn◆t died in vain, I◆ll make sure of that.

We can't allow this to happen to any other kid.

We have to protect other victims.

In 2017, a law was passed in Australia that made it illegal for an adult to use a carriage service to engage with minors for the purpose of sexual activity.

As covered in episode 91 of Casefile, it was named Carly's Law after Adelaide teenager Carly Ryan was murdered by a 50-year-old man who catfished her online, pretending to be an 18-year-old.

Inspired by this, the Marsden family began campaigning to make catfishing a criminal offence when it is done with the intention of causing pain and suffering.

The coroner's report supported the consideration of such a law.

Noting, If Renee discovered that her relationship with Brayden was but a fiction and she took her own life as a consequence, the community might consider that catfishing is an act which should be prohibited.

Even if Renee did not discover that Camilla had committed the deception and was simply heartbroken because Brayden had ended the relationship, she has taken her life about a person who does not exist.

That consequence is of such gravity that the community would expect to be sanctioned.

Dubbing the offence Renee's law, Theresa started an online petition on change.org calling for catfishers to be held legally accountable for their actions.

The petition states, Renee had a beautiful heart that radiated love to anyone who knew her.

Ultimately, her amazing personal qualities left her vulnerable to someone with malicious intent.

Renee was lured into a trap set by someone who knew her best, and she's not alone.

With social media dominating people's lives today, we find many others in similar situations.

We will not let Renee leave us in vain.

And people need to know they are protected by the law from the cruelty of catfishers.

In the lead-up to the inquest, 31-year-old carpenter Cameron had been going about his day when a friend sent him a link to a news story about Renee's case.

Cameron froze when he saw the image of Camilla's eye-dan with the man she told Renee was Brayden

Spatieri.

Cameron had never met Camilla or Renee before and had no recollection of the photo ever being taken.

Judging by how young he looked, he assumed it was a promotional image taken at a nightclub when he was in his early 20s.

Realising his image had been used to help catfish a young woman, Cameron felt sick.

He didn't want to leave the house, fearful that someone would recognise him and wrongfully think he was involved with Renee's death.

The anxiety plagued him, and he eventually reached out to the Mastons via Facebook.

As Teresa told SBS's insight, she was reluctant to meet with Cameron at first.

Although she felt sorry for him, she just couldn't separate his face from her family's beauty.

After meeting, however, they formed a bond.

Cameron is now close with the Mastons, and they continue to stay in touch.

The photo taken at the nightclub is the only photo of Cameron used in the catfishing ruse.

Where the cropped selfies of Brayden's torso and muscles sent to Renee came from is unknown.

A secondary victim to Camilla's actions, Cameron supports the Mastons endeavors to make catfishing illegal.

He told a current affair, "It's daunting.

I'm shocked in a way because I've now got an image put out there that's an image no one wants to be associated with."

As of 2023, the Mastons are still fighting to have Renee's law considered by politicians.

A link to the petition can be found in the show notes of this episode.

Following the inquest, Renee's cousin Stephanie voiced her opinion in a Facebook post.

She spoke of Renee's kindness, generosity, and the ongoing support she provided to those around her.

Beautiful inside and out, Stephanie believed it was these traits that made Renee susceptible to such malicious crimes.

She wrote, "In today's society, with the dominance of social media, we find many people in similar situations as Renee.

It's not a lack of intelligence or being gullible that make you a victim of catfishing, particularly when you are as accepting and loving as our dear Renee.

Unfortunately, it's good people that get taken advantage of."

Renee was an individual who deserved to live a full life and not be robbed of such simple pleasures and freedom.

Her only guilt would be that she loved too easily and lived life with her heart on her sleeve.

On a chilly night in 1991, a group of teenagers gathered in their usual hangout, a barren stretch of desert next to a busy highway near Bakersfield, California.

A dismal spot littered with trash and shell casings. By nightfall, it turned into a sort of lovers lane where high school kids drank and smoked.

When two boys left their group and headed into the darkness, they came upon a horrific scene, the body of a young woman murdered just hours before.

She had no enemies besides girls at school, teenage stuff, not any kind of trouble that somebody would murder her.

This 1991 murder made news headlines for years as it shocked and divided a quiet working-class community.

Of course, I knew about Maria's case. Everyone in Bakersfield knows about Maria's case.

People were just, they were glued to their TV sets. They'd read the paper every day.

There was a lot of speculation in Wasco that maybe he was not the all-around athlete that people thought he might be.

When he lied about being her boyfriend, I felt like he had something to do with it.

Justice took its course in a twisted and controversial case that captivated many.

But what if the real killer were yet to be discovered?

Because he warned me that he told me that I would tell the detective that he was here when he wasn't really here.

If you asked the sheriff's department and if you asked the prosecutor's office, they

would say, yeah, we solved it. It's just unfortunate how things ended up.

In this series, we will hear brand new clues, interview people that have never spoken publicly before, and discover family secrets that shed light on who may have killed Maria Rodriguez and why.

I kind of want all of our families, hidden secrets, and all of the dark past. I want it to come out to light.

I'm Octavia McHenry for Case File Presents, and this is In the Shadows, the story of Maria Rodriguez.