

Active Discord Subscribers:

@badprincess Evie Grant
@bassicrhythm Nate Stern
@brentmann Brent Manning
@emheddles Emma Howard
@frenchkissesry Riley French
@geminirising Peyton Neely
@goodnightsky Sofia Young
@gustagusta Jackson Skye
@hannahbanana Hannah Smith (the one in band, not the one who plays soccer)
@heyitsaubrey Aubrey Barnes
@highasakyle Kyle Hannigan
@kash_money Akash Sandhu
@ktcakes888 Kaitlyn Courtland
@lululemonaide Layla Lewis
@meeksmaster Allan Meeks
@mememeup Ethan Courtland
@moonovermatter Scarlett Hughes
@nononycky Nick Topornycky
@pawsandclaws Olivia Howard
@safireswiftly Alyssa Hobbes
@skyediva Skyler Matthews
@spinn_doctor Alex Spinnaker
@stopandfriske Will Friske

Key Organizations and Groups:

The Sharks. Woodward High School's swim team and prevailing obsession.

The Granger Club Team. A storied club team, founded by Jay Steeler and newly helmed by one of his protégés, Coach Jack Vernon. One of the best club teams in the Midwest, if not the country.

Minnows. The school's fresh bait. Typically a title awarded via consensus to the school's hottest freshmen girls.

The Echelon. The beautiful ones. The chosen few. The popular crowd.

Student Leadership Department. Enemy of freedom, champion of academic excellence and perverse school behavioral codes. Arbiter of after-school clubs and student rights. In bed with Administration.

Student Council Mafia. The pathologically cheerful student enforcement arm of the Student Leadership Department. Also, the cheerleader type.

The Strut Girls. Bailey Lawrence, Savannah Savage, and Mia Thompson. Goddesses among mortals. Star members of the Woodward High School Dance Team. Sworn enemies of the Student Council Mafia and the cheerleaders writ large.

Balladeers. The highlight of the Winters Dance. A group of male swimmers who each volunteer to auction off a single slow dance every year.

Important Figures to the Original Nina Faraday Investigation:

Woody Topornycky. Alien enthusiast, alcoholic, and the last person to see Nina Faraday alive.

Tommy Swift. Star swimmer, Coach Steeler's protégé, and Nina's on-again, off-again boyfriend.

Jack Vernon. Tommy Swift's friend, teammate, and possible coconspirator. Later, the controversial coach appointed to the Granger Club Team.

Jay Steeler. Former Olympian and fabled architect of the Granger Club Team and the Woodward High School swim program. Coach Steeler would have undoubtedly protected his swimmers at all costs.

"The pizza guy." The critical eyewitness who placed Tommy Swift at Coach Steeler's house during the hours that Nina Faraday went missing.

Sheriff Cox. The longtime sheriff in charge of the initial investigation, related to Jay Steeler through his sister-in-law, Ann Steeler-Cox. Subsequently accused by Lydia Faraday of facilitating a cover-up.

Prologue

WE

We were athletes and anarchists, band geeks and gamers, virgins and sluts.

But mostly virgins.

We were dyslexic, and desperate for someone to notice us. We came from a constellation of small towns in the lower left corner of southwest Indiana, all tipped into the gravitational pull of the Woodward Central School District. We came from farms out past the Lincoln Walmart and condos near the College of Southern-Indiana at Housataunick. We came from the McMansions of Granger North, with Byron Park and the golf course, and the trailers of Granger South, with a Waffle House, an IHOP, and a pizzeria rumored to include a dime bag of weed when you ordered a veggie slice with extra green.

We were Christians, mostly. The Sandhus were Sikhs; the Kornsteins were Jewish; Olivia Howard claimed she was Wiccan. We were aspiring politicians and future farmers, violin players and JROTC cadets. We owned guns. We protested guns. We followed each other on Instagram. We wanted more followers on TikTok.

We dreamed of trending someday, for something, going viral for a spontaneous act of courage or for rocketing CHEETOS out of our noses at the doctor's office. We envied Jack Hamlin's older brother, Paul, who had 1.4 million subscribers on YouTube—even before the whole stampede debacle.

We could have told him bulls have no sense of humor, especially during breeding season.

We were hicks. We were pathologically shy. We didn't want to be famous. We wanted to *influence*. To matter, to be special, to stand out. We wanted to be accepted.

We didn't believe in *cliques*. We'd left cliques behind in middle school. But we stuck with our own kind. We believed in friend groups. Common interests. Extracurriculars. Sports. Clubs. Finding your people. To hell with all the rest of them.

We were different. We were ordinary.

We were the roughly thirty-six members of the private Discord server *WoodwardSchoolBored*, and before anything ever happened to Lucy, Lucy Vale happened to us.

PART 1

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WE

None of us know what happened to Lucy Vale. But all of us agree that by the time she set fire to the school mascot in front of Admin, it was too late to do anything about it.

At the time, we weren't thinking about Lucy; we were thinking about dying, and how we really didn't feel like doing it on a random Tuesday in March of our junior year. Shunted into closets, barricaded in our classrooms, sweltering inside the boiler room, we all imagined we were getting stormed by some psycho with a semiautomatic. We heard the fire trucks approach with the shrill of their alarms. We strained to hear gunshots. We speculated about the most likely culprit. Wyeth Boone. Allan Meeks. Lee Mailer. It's always the quiet ones you can't trust.

We texted our parents. There's something happening at Woodward. We're locked inside the art closet. I'm so scared. Are they saying anything on the news?? I think the cops are here. Pray for us. We reunited on Discord and complained about the smell in the art closet. Someone had farted, for sure.

We googled Woodward High School. We had shit service in the boiler room.

We realized we had to shit. We prayed that we wouldn't crap our pants in a closet crammed with peers.

Then the loudspeaker spat out a burst of static, and Principal Hammill cleared his throat across the entire campus. “Sorry, kids,” he said. We’ll never forget that. *Sorry, kids*. “Looks like someone lit a fire in a recycling bin. We’re still clearing the grounds. Back to you as soon as possible.”

About sixty seconds later, he was back, this time sounding slightly annoyed. “To clarify, there is no active or inactive shooter. This has nothing to do with a gun. Like I said, it appears someone lit a fire in a recycling bin. Unfortunately we need to wait for the police before we can lift lockdown, so please stay where you are until I give the word.”

It wasn’t until we were funneled into the parking lot for a school-wide head count that we got a glimpse of the recycling bin, now a blackened deformity with a volcanic residue of char around it. A dozen firefighters and cops milled around the world’s most pathetic crime scene. We figured it was an accident, or a hack to avoid class.

We were dying to know who did it.

There was a brief panic when we found out that Connor Williams and Hannah Smith—the one in band, not the one who played soccer—hadn’t made it with the rest of the woodwinds into the parking lot. Mr. Cower, the band teacher, was practically molten with panic. He shoved through the crowd like one of us might secretly be concealing Connor and Hannah in our backpacks. We tossed around the idea that these two were the culprits because it was so absurd; they were both the type who actually got sad on weekends when they didn’t have any homework to do.

The mystery was short lived anyway. A hastily organized search party of theater geeks and brass hounds homed in on the sound booth, which was locked from the inside. A few minutes later, Connor and Hannah emerged, clearly in a conflagration of embarrassment, and it was pretty obvious to all of us what had happened. We started firing messages back and forth while waiting to return to our classes.

@geminirising: Anyone catching serious walk of shame vibes?

@mememeup: You mean walk of FAME

@badprincess: Is @hannahbanana's sweater on inside out??

It was, actually.

@safireswiftly: omg

@safireswiftly: were Connor and @hannahbanana *hooking up*?

They were.

We found out later that Connor and Hannah were in the bathroom when the alarm triggered. Connor, who'd been in love with her forever, had been desperate to make sure Hannah was safe. It was kind of heroic actually, especially since we had all assumed there was an active shooter on campus at that point. They had bolted to the sound booth, the closest secure space. We heard from Allan Meeks, who'd heard the story from Connor, that they were holding hands in the dark, and one thing led to another. We heard from Willa Barrens, who'd heard from Hannah, that the *one thing* that had led there was Hannah's crashing realization that she did not want to die a virgin.

It was unbelievable. Connor Williams was getting laid, and most of us couldn't even get a hickey.

For a few days, we tossed theories back and forth while the school launched yet another investigation, its second in six weeks. But it didn't occur to us that Lucy Vale's absence the day of the fire might be connected, because by then her absence wasn't special or significant. We weren't even sure that she was planning to finish out the school year. She'd been absent since the Investigative Committee had wrapped its findings about the night of Ryan Hawthorne's New Year's Eve party. Most of us figured she had already dropped out. We didn't know how she *could* come back. Her reputation was permanently destroyed. We figured she would be too ashamed.

We never, ever, ever dreamed that she would be *angry*. It wouldn't have occurred to us in a million years that she would drive to school, sneak into Aquatics, and steal Sean the Shark from storage. That she would take the time to wheel a recycling bin up to Administration, keeping her hoodie pulled low and a sweatshirt zipped over her chin so she was practically unrecognizable.

We didn't believe it at first, even after we heard that the sheriff was looking for her and Administration had leaked security footage from the Aquatics Center lobby to the local news.

Back then we'd worshipped Lucy, envied her, exalted and then hated her. We'd constructed her in pieces. We'd finally solved her like a puzzle. We knew by then that Lucy was a pathological liar, just like her mother. Some of us thought Lucy was an expert manipulator, a covert narcissist, a con artist, or all three. Some of us thought she was just cracked. Damaged, desperate, and suffering from major daddy issues.

But she wasn't *batshit*. And she had no reason—no reason—to be angry at *us*. It didn't make any sense.

Lucy Vale? we all kept saying. *Our Lucy Vale?*

Because even then, after everything that had happened, we still thought Lucy Vale belonged to us.

Then she torched our mascot, and we realized we were wrong.

Excerpted from What Happened to Lucy Vale: A Novel by Lauren Oliver. © 2025 Published by Skyscape, September 1, 2025. All Rights Reserved.