



# FLIP FLOP

The two sides of Adnan Syed's story

**Serial**

From the creators of This American Life

Hosted by Sarah Koenig



Sarah Koenig's voice is crucial to your journey through the story

Adnan also talks about his feelings and thoughts on the topic from his point of view.

Find out what each character has to say about Adnan through these conversations and quotes.

You will find conversations between Sarah and the different characters or Adnan himself that either portray Adnan as this "golden child", or provide arguments that support his innocence on the upper half section of the book.

All the contents of this book is taken from the Serial Podcast of This American Life, hosted by Sarah Koenig. In this murder mystery, the main characters are **Adnan Syed**, the victim's ex-boyfriend who was convicted of murder and in prison, **Hae Min Lee**, the victim, **Jay**, Adnan's friend who pleaded guilty for being the accomplice, and **Sarah**, the host. Most of the content is from episodes 1 and 11 specifically. The whole set up of this book is based upon the idea that the same information, when skewed by people's different perspectives and

preconceptions, can be brought into totally different lights. Adnan Syed's character is portrayed very differently by all the voices in the story, and he himself made a point in the Podcast about how information can be all true but very misleading. In hopes of creating a tactile interaction for readers to experience how the same incidents can be construed in completely opposite ways, there are two narrative lines in the book that you can navigate alternately by flipping the book upside down as you read through it.

Now flip the book over.

Everything that is previously upside becomes readable. These are arguments and quotes supporting the notion of Adnan being a psychopath and guilty of murdering Hae.

# set up

For the last year, I've spent every working day trying to figure out where a high school kid was for an hour after school one day in 1999 — or if you want to get technical about it, and apparently I do, where a high school kid was for 21 minutes after school one day in 1999. Almost 15 years ago, on **January 13, 1999**, a girl named **Hae Min Lee** disappeared. She was a senior at Woodlawn High School in Baltimore County in Maryland. She was Korean. Right after school she was supposed to pick up her little cousin from kindergarten and drop her home. But she did not show up.

About a month later, on February 9, Hae's body was found in a big park in Baltimore, really a rambling forest. A maintenance guy who said he'd stopped to take a leak on his way to work discovered her there. The cause of death was manual strangulation, meaning

someone did it with their hands. A couple weeks after that, so six weeks after she first went missing, Hae's ex-boyfriend, a guy named **Adnan Syed**, was arrested for her murder. He's been in prison ever since.

# synopsis



# prologue

Last spring, Adnan sent me a letter about... something, I can't even remember exactly what. But it included these two graphs that he'd drawn out in pencil. With no explanation. There was just a Post-it attached to the back of one of the papers that said: "Could you please hold these 2 pages until we next speak? Thank you."

This was curious. It crossed my mind that Adnan might be off his rocker in some way. Or, more excitingly, that these graphs were code for some top-secret information too dangerous for him to send in a letter. But no. These graphs were a riddle that I would fail to solve when we next spoke, a couple of days later.

**Adnan**

Now, so would you prefer, as a consumer, would you rather purchase at a store where prices are consistent or items from a store where the prices fluctuate?

**Sarah**

I would prefer consistency.

**Adnan**

That makes sense. Especially in today's economy. So if you had to choose, which store would you say has more consistent prices?

**Sarah**

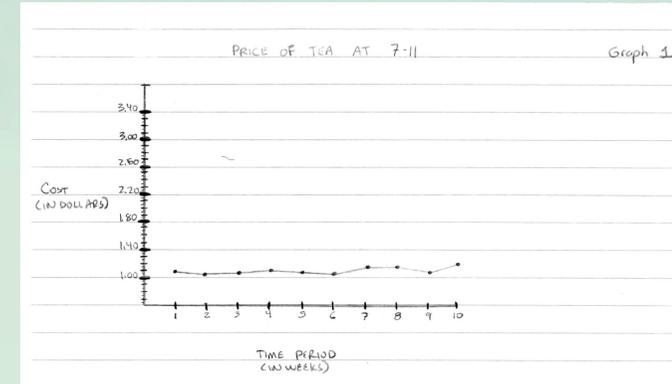
7-11 is definitely more consistent.

**Adnan**

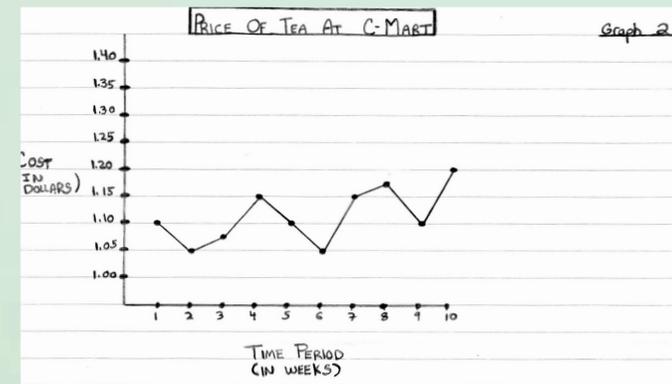
As compared to...?

**Sarah**

As compared to C-Mart, which is going way up and down.



Tea graph 1: price of tea at 7-11 over 10 weeks



Tea graph 2: price of tea at C-Mart over 10 weeks

Look again, Adnan said. Right. Their prices are exactly the same. It's just that the graph of C-Mart prices is zoomed way in — the y-axis is in much smaller cost increments — so it looks like dramatic fluctuations are happening. And he made the pencil lines much darker and more striking in the C-Mart graph, so it looks more sinister.



This was Adnan's point: See how easy it is to look at the **same information**, but, depending on how it's presented, come to two **different conclusions** about what it means? The 7-11 graph is the **"innocent"** graph. The C-Mart graph is the **"guilty"** graph. But they contain the same information.

Adnan says he's thought about this a lot in relation to his own case, and he's always been baffled by it; how some people (the jurors) sat through the trial and heard one thing, and others (his family, his lawyers, his friends) sat through it and **heard the opposite**.

By the time I'm done with this story, I'm hoping I'll have plotted my own tea graph — without undue spin from C-Mart, or 7-11.

### Adnan

I read a book about a prosecutor who said it's not always about innocent or guilty, it's about who can persuade the jury. And they're not being dishonest — nothing about that graph is dishonest — but it's kind of misleading. It's darker, it's zoomed in, the heading is underlined. **Everything about it is misleading, but it's true information.**

When I first came [to prison], I was naïve to the law, to prison life, to a lot of things," he said. "Now that I'm older, I see guys naïve to the law coming in. I use this graph to illustrate it. Probably people here say, 'Oh my god, Syed showed you that damn graph, didn't he?' And I'm like, 'No it proves a point!' It proves a good point. So I'm kinda infamous for those graphs.

## 01. overview

### Sarah

You don't think that I know you at all?

### Adnan

I mean for you to say that I'm a great person, a nice person I've only talked to you on the phone a few times.

## 02. [superficial] charm

For two months now I've been grappling with rumors about Adnan. People telling me, "there are things you don't know about Adnan, things you need to know to understand who you're dealing with." All these rumors are coming from people Adnan knew growing up in the mosque community. But likely there are a great many things I don't know about Adnan and some of the things I was hearing were giving me pause.

## 03. stealing episode

Which brings me to the only rumor I heard that at least partly checked out. It was this: Adnan stole money from the mosque. Donation money. Two people told me they saw him do it. One person told me he'd seen it several times.

## 04. psychopathy

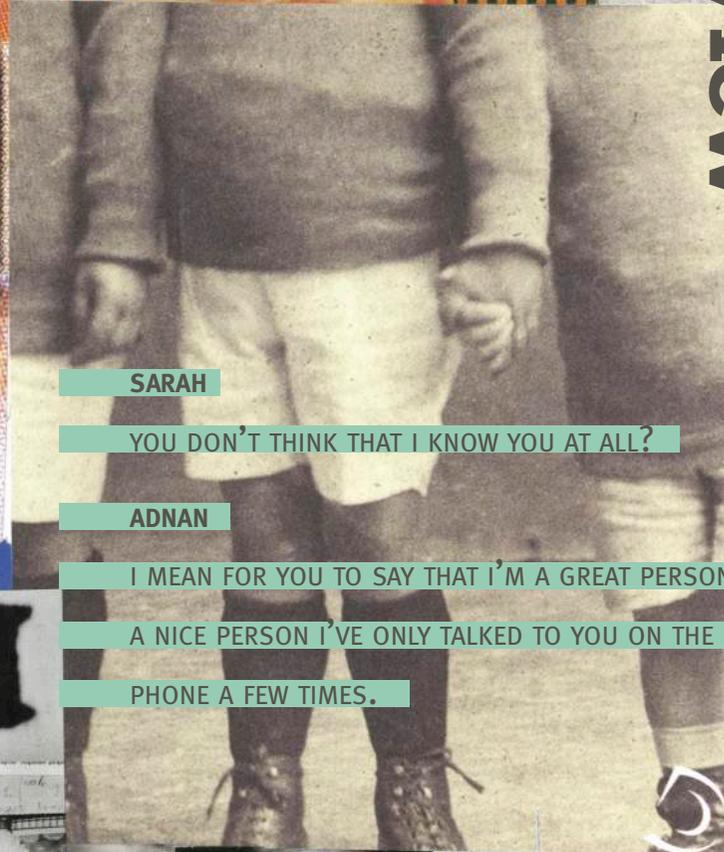
### Deirdre Enright

I think the odds of you like, getting the charming sociopath, you're just not that lucky.

part 1:

golden child  
psycho

# 01. overview



SARAH

YOU DON'T THINK THAT I KNOW YOU AT ALL?

ADNAN

I MEAN FOR YOU TO SAY THAT I'M A GREAT PERSON,  
A NICE PERSON I'VE ONLY TALKED TO YOU ON THE  
PHONE A FEW TIMES.

mirror.

look into the same



**Rabia**

He was like the community's golden child.

**Sarah**

Oh, really? Talk more about that.

**Rabia**

He was an honor roll student, volunteer EMT. He was on the football team. He was a star runner on the track team. He was the homecoming king. He led prayers at the mosque. Everybody knew Adnan to be somebody who was going to do something really big.

Saad and Rabia told me about Adnan Syed, their friend – not just a good kid, but an especially good kid — smart, kind, goofy, handsome. So that when he was arrested, so many people who know him were stunned.

*smart, kind, goofy, handsome*



He was like the community's golden child

The state's case against Adnan went like this. He and Hae had been going out since junior prom. But Adnan wasn't supposed to be dating at all. Adnan was born in the US, but his parents are from Pakistan. And they're conservative Muslims – no drinking, no smoking, no girls, all that. But even though Adnan, Saad and their buddies were Muslims, they were also healthy American teenagers who were going to do what teenagers do, so long as they didn't get caught. So Adnan had to keep his relationship with Hae a secret.

look at what a liar he is, how duplicitous. He plays the good Muslim son at home and at the mosque, but look what he was up to.

*he put everything on the line — his family, his relationships at the mosque — to run around with this girl.*

**Saad**  
His family didn't know that he actually drank, he smoked, he was having sex. So the prosecution had painted Adnan as a totally bipolar or maniacal dual personality.  
**Sarah**  
This was proof of bad character, someone who could be a murderer.

But what I took away from the visit was, somebody is lying here. Maybe Adnan really is innocent.

But what if he isn't?  
 What if he did do it, and he's got all these good people thinking he didn't?

So just on motive alone, Saad and Rabia found the whole thing ridiculous. As for physical evidence, there was none — nothing. Apart from some fingerprints in Hae's car, which Adnan had been in many times, there was nothing linking him to the crime — no DNA, no fibers, no hairs, no matching soil from the bottom of his boots.

***But Saad says, if Adnan is guilty of anything, it's of being a normal kid with immigrant parents.***

***That would mean Adnan wasn't just a killer, but a master liar and manipulator, a psychopath.***

state's case against Adnan. In the picture Jay drew, it's cold. He's not describing a crime of passion here. Jay in advance he was going to do it. He did it. They buried her. Jay tells the cops that Adnan says to him, "all the other motherfuckers, referring to like hoods and thugs and stuff, think they're hardcore. But he just killed a person with his bare hands." If Adnan said that, does that mean the fifteen years since has been this very, very long con? That he's calculating enough to only pretend to be the normal sounding person that he is with me on the phone? Jay's story wasn't just the foundation of the state's case against Adnan. It was the

from Adnan's phone. So those are the key points. Adnan told Jay in advance he was going to do it. He did it. They buried her. Jay tells the cops that Adnan says to him, "all the other motherfuckers, referring to like hoods and thugs and stuff, think they're hardcore. But he just killed a person with his bare hands." If Adnan said that, does that mean the fifteen years since has been this very, very long con? That he's calculating enough to only pretend to be the normal sounding person that he is with me on the phone? Jay's story wasn't just the foundation of the state's case against Adnan. It was the

Instead, what they had on Adnan was one guy's story, a guy named Jay. Jay was a friend of Adnan's. They'd been in school together since middle school. The story Jay told police had problems, because it kept changing from telling to telling. But they were able to bolster the main plot points using cell records

# 02. [superficial] charm

FOR TWO MONTHS NOW I'VE BEEN GRAPPLING WITH RUMORS ABOUT ADNAN. PEOPLE TELLING ME, "THERE'S STUFF YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT ADNAN, STUFF YOU NEED TO KNOW TO UNDERSTAND WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH." ALL THESE RUMORS ARE COMING FROM PEOPLE ADNAN KNEW GROWING UP IN THE MOSQUE COMMUNITY. BUT LIKELY THERE ARE A GREAT MANY THINGS I DON'T KNOW ABOUT ADNAN AND SOME OF THE THINGS I WAS HEARING WERE GIVING ME PAUSE.



Ali and others told me their community is judgmental. Right and wrong is drummed into you early and often. Adults judge kids' behaviors, which then gets reflected back onto their parents. Adnan's story had always been an urban legend to us kids growing up in the Muslim community. Clouded in mystery and used as a cautionary tale."

A bunch of people I talked to told me they feel guilty towards Adnan, that they let him down. Because they led him astray, or didn't protect him, or didn't

mentor him, or didn't show up enough at trial, or didn't visit him in jail. Even the ones who are on the fence about his innocence said, "please tell Adnan I love him," or "please tell him I'm sorry." I often say back, "you should tell him yourself. You can write to him you know." Then sometimes comes a pause. The reason Ali agreed to go on tape was that he wanted me to know this about Adnan.

Adnan was the kind of kid who would stand up when your parents came into the room, Ali said. At parties or events, he'd be the first one to ask, "how can I help you, Aunty? Do you need help setting up those tables, Uncle?"

**Ali**

I remember, especially in middle school and elementary—more into middle school — that when we would get picked for sports, Adnan was very athletic, tall, good-looking, kind of like the jock role, and I was more a chubby, short, kind of the nerdy kind of role, so he never made me feel that he always made sure that I got picked for the team. If other kids made fun of me on my athletic performance, or I couldn't shoot, or I couldn't kick the ball, or they would start poking fun, he would always have my back and kind of tell them to stop it or kind of watch out for me like an older brother. I'll never forget that.

he used his charm  
and his smarts to  
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weasel out of things  
when he got caught



Normally I probably wouldn't pursue rumors that on their face aren't connected to the crime at hand. But in this case, I decided it was worthwhile because of where these rumors come from. I think these rumors are coming from a feeling that a handful of people have. I've heard this from about four people, people who knew Adnan growing up. That Adnan was capable of committing this crime. I think they believe that they saw things in his personality that they think that I am not seeing. Namely, that he's duplicitous. The term "psychopath" gets thrown in sometimes. People told me he used his charm and his smarts to deflect suspicion or weasel out of things when he got caught. Pretty much what the judge said to him at his sentencing.

**Atif**

I've never even seen him in a fight, I've never even seen him mad at anybody.

**Sarah**

This is Atif Iqbal who knew Adnan from the mosque.

**Atif**

[Laughs] Exactly. Pretty funny it was me and him. Somebody told me that he said something about me and some other person or something and I went up there to confront him and he said "hey man, I don't know what you heard, I didn't say anything like that." I said, "man, if you ever say anything like—" I was getting all riled up and he just came and kissed me on my cheeks and that defused me completely.

Case in point, I heard from many people that Adnan was the opposite of violent. That he was someone who would take the heat of tense situations.

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**Sarah**

[Laughs] Wait, I missed that. He kissed you on your cheeks?

**Atif**

He kissed me on my cheek and it completely defused me. I couldn't even be angry anymore. So that's why I couldn't even fathom the thought of him going out and killing somebody, I mean that's just so, I don't even know how to say it, it's just so out of his personality.

# it's just so out of his personality

So for Atif, that kiss on the cheek is a tell. It's the real Adnan.

**Anonymous Male #1**  
Taking tension out of the situation. He was the icebreaker and I knew that whatever was coming out of his mouth half of the time, it was just sweet talk or to take the heat away and half or majority of it was a lie.



But for that other guy who said that Adnan stole and thinks that Adnan might be guilty of the crime he's in prison for, that same peace-maker quality was something he brought up to me as evidence that Adnan was full of shit.

Here's the curious thing though. The same people who tell me they think Adnan was capable of killing Hae, or that stealing from the mosque was a great evil, or that Adnan was a pathological liar, they also tell me that Adnan was a great guy.

**Anonymous Male #1**

I mean he was such a good guy.

**Sarah**

This is the same anonymous person who thought Adnan had taken many thousands from the donation boxes.

**Anonymous Male #1**

He was so smart and he was so friendly and so many positive things.

**Sarah**

And that doesn't feel fake to you, like that part feels real too, is that what you're saying?

**Anonymous Male #1**

Genuinely he was good and he had that good side and he was helpful and he was caring and all that—

**Sarah**

You think a person can sort of contain both those things inside their personality?

**Anonymous Male #1**

I think it's very easy (muffled). I think if you corner anybody into a corner, they'll explode. Different people explode for different reasons.

# 03. stealing episode



everything I'm not. It's my weakness and my strengths, my self-confidence and-esteem, my past, present, and most definitely my future. [redacted] is where I'm going. [redacted] has been.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO THE ONLY RUMOR I HEARD THAT  
AT LEAST PARTLY CHECKED OUT. IT WAS THIS: ADNAN  
STOLE MONEY FROM THE MOSQUE. DONATION MONEY.  
TWO PEOPLE TOLD ME THEY SAW HIM DO IT. ONE  
PERSON TOLD ME HE'D SEEN IT SEVERAL TIMES.



This guy estimated that Adnan had stolen many thousands of dollars over time. Tens of thousands, maybe a hundred thousand dollars. This sounded fantastical to me, so I checked with Maqbool Patel. He was President of the Islamic Society

of Baltimore at the time. He said he'd never heard of Adnan taking donation money, but if Adnan did take money, there was no way it was a big amount. That money was used to pay the bills, he said. If they were even 100 dollars short on any given week, they'd have noticed. So sure, maybe 20 bucks or 40 bucks here or there, but not hundreds. Thousands, out of the question.

***There was no way it was a big amount. Thousands, out of the question.***

Adnan says it's true. He did take donation money. When I first asked him about it, he was unhappy. I've asked him so many, frankly, insulting things, so many nosy and inappropriate questions and he's never given me pushback. But this was the last straw.

Because he was looked upon like the golden child, and his dad was very religious, and he would go out on missionary work and so on. So his family was looked at very good, religious family. He was collecting money, or you know, the donation boxes that would go around on Friday after prayer, he was in charge basically, of getting all the boxes together and counting all the money and totaling it all up. He was pocketing thousands of dollars every week. Nobody questioned, you know, good little muslim kid stealing from the mosque. I mean, are you serious? You couldn't even imagine.

**Anonymous Male #1**

What does it have to do with the case? I've never claimed that I'm innocent of killing Hae because I was a perfect, or even a good person. So why talk about this? Why the double standard? Why weren't you going into everyone else's closet and pulling out skeletons that made them look bad? I've endured other stuff in your reporting that I didn't think was fair to me. You go from my savior to my executioner on a flip-flop, like Mitt Romney. I mean, and it's a very uncomfortable thing for me to talk about. **It's a very shameful thing that I did. I've never denied it.** I don't understand. I just think it's really unfair to me. You're basically publicly shaming me for something that I've never denied that I did, anyway. And it has nothing to do with the case. But you won't do it to other people though. Why do I have to keep getting called out on my stuff and it's got nothing to do with the case, but you don't do it to nobody else.

**He was pocketing thousands of dollars every week.**



**“So what?  
It certainly does  
not a murderer  
make.”**

The then President of the mosque was thoroughly unruffled by the whole thing. He obviously didn't condone it but he more or less said "So what? It certainly does not a murderer make." In the end these guys said what most of Adnan's old friends say, he didn't have it in him to kill someone. It wasn't in his DNA.



I mean when you really think about it, they didn't just say that me and Hae got into a fight, boom and this happened. They saying that I plotted and planned and kept my true intentions hidden, I mean just some real devious, cruel, like Hitler type stuff. You know what I mean? Just some real some like cruel, cruel like inhuman type stuff. I'm not saying that I was a great person or anything, but I don't think I ever displayed any tendencies like that – not everyone has the ability to do something cruel and heinous like this. It's not like they're saying it was a crime of passion. They're saying this was plotted out – it insults me to my core, man, you know what I mean?

“...something more malignant”

people and at the mosque of all places, this was a terrible thing

earned cash of hard working

This was so low. To take the hard

Adnan's telling of the stealing episode is a much more "boys will be boys" version than what I'd heard from other people who told me they saw in his actions truth came out. He says she was horrified. It was the classic "I'm not angry, I'm disappointed." More disappointed than she'd ever been in him he says. Adnan says back then, he didn't think he was hurting anyone.

Adnan says he was caught red handed by Shamim his mother. He says she found some money in his pants pocket and asked him where it came from and the told me they saw in his actions something more malignant. A couple of people I talked to from the mosque community said, "This was so low, taking the hard earned cash of hard working people and at the mosque of all places. This was a terrible thing." Other people said, "eh."

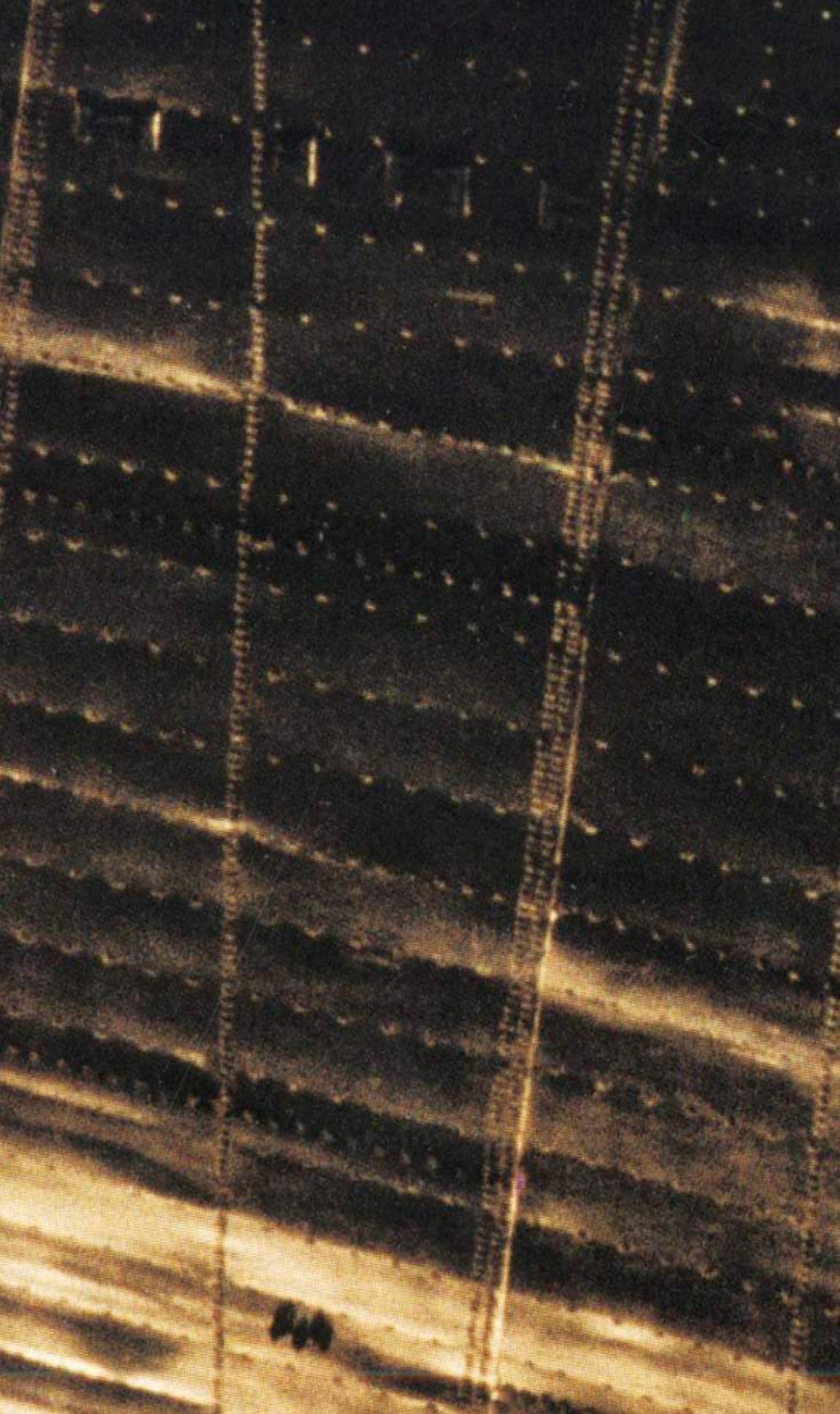
“boys will be boys”

“It wasn't in his DNA.”

**Sarah**  
What made you stop and what made you realize it was wrong?  
**Adnan**  
I wish I could say that it was some feeling of religion or something or feeling of wrong but it wasn't, I was kind of caught red handed so to speak.

During the Friday prayers, it was very wrong. It's nothing that I'm proud of, I'm very ashamed of it. I don't say that we were kids to try to put in context or eighty dollars and go to the movies, go to the mall, play in the arcade, you know eat and stuff like that." I mean it was wrong, it was very wrong. It's nothing that I'm proud of, I'm very ashamed of it. I don't say that we were kids to try to put in context or eighty dollars and go to the movies, go to the mall, play in the arcade, you know eat and stuff like that." I mean it

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To me this is the hard centre of Adnan's case. **Can you tell, really?** Can you tell if someone has a crime like this in him? I think most of us think if we know someone well, we can tell. We act as detectives all the time, gathering evidence. Certain scenes we remember or the look on someone's face or that thing he said when he got mad. And then we act as judge of character. It's just a human thing. But of course it's slippery because it's so subjective. **One person's evidence of good character is another person's evidence of questionable character.**



# 04. psychopathy



DEIRDRE ENRIGHT

I THINK THE ODDS OF YOU LIKE, GETTING THE CHARMING SOCIOPATH, YOU'RE JUST NOT THAT LUCKY.

When I first met Adnan in person, I was struck by two things. He was way bigger than I expected — barrel chested and tall. In the photos I'd seen, he was still a lanky teenager with struggling facial hair and sagging jeans. By now, he was 32. He'd spent nearly half his life in prison, becoming larger and properly bearded. And the second thing, which you can't miss about Adnan, is that he has giant brown eyes like a dairy cow. That's what prompts my most idiotic lines of inquiry. Could someone who looks like that really strangle his girlfriend? Idiotic, I know.

Here's Jane Efron, who taught Hae and Adnan English at Woodlawn.

**Of course there are some planned murders, but I'm sure this was not a planned murder. I can't buy that because that destroys everything that I feel about these kids, so I absolutely—I think it was passion, an overdose of emotion. Of love, of jealousy, resentment, all of those things. It sneaks in on you and it dominates your thinking and you can't get away from it. But that's what I'm comfortable thinking. Planned, premeditated murder? Oh my Lord, no.**

### Charles

**Most of the hundreds of killers I've evaluated are pretty ordinary people.**

This is Charles Ewing. He's a forensic psychologist and a lawyer. Obviously he can't weigh in on Adnan's psychological health, that would be ridiculous. But I went to him to find out what's a valid way to try to understand what's going on when someone kills someone else. What's the range of options here? Usually in cases where there's not a question of whether the defendant did it, more a question of why. Again, most of the people he's evaluating are pretty ordinary.

**Some are extraordinary, some serial killers, some spree killers, some really awful psychopathic individuals. But for the most part, people kill not in a premeditated way; they're not evil, they're not sociopathic, they're not psychopathic. They kill because something happens that pushes them over the edge.**

In other words, murder isn't usually, strictly speaking a planned event. A lot of people who know Adnan, they can't get their heads around that Adnan planned to kill Hae. I hear it all the time.

Here's his old Woodlawn classmate Peter Billingsley:

**The whole idea of premeditation just doesn't fit for Adnan. No, that doesn't fit at all. I know it doesn't fit, not one bit, with the person I knew.**

## Planned, premeditated murder? Oh my Lord, no.

I mean, I remember the cops telling me sometime they have murderers standing with a knife in their hands, next to the body, saying to them that they didn't do it, because your brain goes into this shock and it shuts down. I was like, "maybe that happened. Maybe it was an accident. Maybe he got mad." I mean, we get mad. Maybe he lost it for a moment and it was an accident.

Here's Adnan's friend Laura.

Is snapping a thing? Because people say that all the time, like, "maybe you snapped." Or, you know, "he snapped." **Charles** Yeah. People sometimes lose it and when they lose it, it's not always slowly risen to the point all at once. I've seen a lot of cases in which people have over a relatively short period of time, nursed feelings

of rejection or anger or hostility and they've slowly risen to the point at which the individual decides to kill somebody. Then at that point, the would-be victim says or does something

impulse to violence.

sense that we normally think of. It doesn't have to be like a sudden impulse to violence. The other thing I've considered, in my more reachy moments, is whether Adnan did, or doesn't know he did it.

that triggers it, that provokes the ultimate killing. Now the law looks at that as premeditated. I'm not sure that it really is premeditated in the



I AM AFRAID

I just sometimes wish they could look into my brain and see how I really felt about her. And no matter what else someone would say, they would see, man, this guy had no ill will toward her. Whatever the motivation is to kill someone, I had absolutely – it didn't exist in me, you know what I mean? No one can ever say why. People could say why. Oh, man, he was mad, this, that, or the other. But no one could ever come with any type of proof or anecdote or anything to ever say that I was ever mad at her, that I was ever angry with her, that I ever threatened her. That's the only thing I can really hold onto. That is like my only firm handhold in this whole thing, that no one's ever been able to prove it. No one ever has been able to provide any shred of evidence that I had anything but friendship towards her, like love and respect for her. That's at the end of the day, man. The only thing I can ever say is, man, I had no reason to kill her.



Like you kind of erase the fact that you're lying and it just becomes the truth of it for you?

**Charles**

People can go into what's called a dissociative state where they're really psychologically not where they are physically. Probably half of the people I've evaluated who have killed other human beings have some degree of amnesia for what they've done.

**Sarah**

Did you say half? Half the people?

**Charles**

Yeah

**Sarah**

Wow. Do you think there is another scenario where it starts out as a lie, a sort of cognizant lie, like, "I didn't do this, I had nothing to do with this," and then, over time, you truly believe that lie? Like you kind of erase the fact that you're lying and it just becomes the truth of it for you?

**Charles**

I think that happens. I haven't seen that happen in homicide cases, but I've certainly see it happen in ordinary life.





**Sarah**

I mean, so it really does seem like Adnan is really – functioning really well and is just fine in prison. He seems very adaptable and he’s always had a job with responsibilities and he’s not been disciplined, really ever, except for having a cell phone and doesn’t appear to have any kind of anti-social behavior. He’s got lots of friends, he’s maintained his relationships outside the prison with his family and his friends, certain friends. I mean, is that something that I should be taking into account?

**Charles**

I think so. Yeah. It certainly cuts against a theory that he’s a psychopath, or that he’s some kind of pathological person.

But on the other hand, just because you say you didn’t do it, even for decades, doesn’t mean you didn’t do it. Finally I asked Ewing, “should I be influenced by the fact that Adnan has so consistently maintained his innocence all these years?” Ewing said, in his experience, people who are wrongfully convicted always maintain their innocence, even when it hurts them, in sentencing or parole.

***This term, psychopath, gets thrown around so easily. As a kind of catch-all term for cold-hearted, and calculating killer.***

This term, psychopath, gets thrown around so easily. As a kind of catch-all term for cold-hearted, and calculating killer, if Adnan did this and if he did it the way Jay tells it, only pretend to be the normal sounding person that he is with me on the phone? A psychopath usually means a person who says to him, “all the other motherfuckers” — referring to like hoods and thugs and people’s feelings. They can read other people very well, but they don’t have genuine empathy.

# Does that mean the fifteen years since has been this very, very long con?

**Charles**

Another factor, to be sure, is what’s known in the profession as superficial charm. These are people who come across very smoothly and effectively manipulate other people and manipulate them without them knowing it very often. And the fact is, most psychopaths aren’t killers and most killers aren’t psychopaths. There’s a very limited overlap between those two spheres.



But on all the other options, it's a **toss-up**. Could Adnan initially have been in some state of amnesia and **denial** and then supplanted that with actual lying? It's possible. Could he have had simmering feelings of anger and **resentment** that then boiled over in a not-quite-by-accident way? It's possible. Could he be **truly innocent**? It's possible.



part 2:

# victim monster

## 05. forgotten story

The problem is, when you ask Adnan to go back and tell his version of what happened that day, to refute Jay's story, everything becomes a lot mushier.

## 06. on Jay's story

When he first heard Jay's story of the crime, Adnan didn't say, well, it didn't happen like that, or, I didn't mean for it to happen like that. He said, it didn't happen. None of this is true at all. He says he had nothing to do with Hae's murder, and he doesn't know who did.

## 07. more evidence

I've come across dozens of bits of evidence like this. Information that could either mean one thing, or perhaps its opposite depending on who's talking.



Yes, he hung out with Jay on the 13th, both during and after school. But he doesn't remember exactly where they went, or what they did, or what time it was. Here's what he's got.

January 13 unfolded like any other day, a normal, mostly uneventful day. He says there

are a couple of things that do stand out, though. That day was Stephanie's birthday. Stephanie was one of Adnan's best friends and also Jay's girlfriend. Adnan had gotten Stephanie a birthday present, a stuffed reindeer, which he'd given to her in second period, Miss Efron's English class.

**Deirdre Enright**

I love hearing that because somewhere along the line I've started realizing that when you have an innocent client, they are the least helpful people in the whole world, because they don't know. They don't – they have no idea.

Adnan himself is not supplying anything super useful to say "here's why I can prove I didn't do this." He has said out front, "I can't give you some clinching piece of information or evidence that's going to solve this, I wish I could but I can't. I just don't have it. Like I don't know how to prove this." coach testified that Adnan probably was there, but he can't be 100% sure because he didn't take attendance. After school is when his memories become nonspecific.

**Adnan**

And it occurred to me that day that I was going to ask her boyfriend, Jay, did he get her a gift? So sometime during the day before noon

**Sarah**

Wait, Adnan, just hold up for a second. Why did you care whether Jay got Stephanie a present? What's it to you?

**Adnan**

Well, Stephanie was a very close friend of mine, as I mentioned. And I just kind of wanted to make sure that she also got a gift from him, you know? She had mentioned to me that she was looking forward to getting a gift from him. She mentioned that she was really happy to get the gift that I gave her. So as I would with any friend, I just kind of went to check on that. I kind of had a feeling that maybe he didn't get her a gift. And I had free periods during school. So it was not abnormal for me to leave school to go do something and then come back.

It was not abnormal for me to leave school to go do something and then come back.



"I can't give you some clinching piece of information or evidence that's going to solve this, I wish I could but I can't. I just don't know how to prove this."

## maybe he's lying

Around 6:30 p.m., after Hae had gone missing, a baltimore county police officer named Scott Adcock called Adnan's cellphone. Hae's family was worried that she hadn't turned up to her cousin's school and the officer was calling around to some of her friends to see if they knew where she was.

Here's Adcock testifying at trial.

### Scott Adcock

**I spoke to Mr. Syed and he advised me that he did see the victim in school that day, and that um, he was supposed to get a ride home from the victim, but he got detained at school and she just got tired of waiting and left.**

I would— wouldn't have asked for a ride after school. I'm — I'm sure that I didn't ask her because, well immediately after school because I know she always — anyone who knows her knows she always goes to pick up her little cousin, so she's not doing anything for anyone right after school. No — no matter what. No trip to McDonalds. Not a trip to 7-Eleven. She took that very seriously.

Then, a little more than two weeks after the call with Officer Adcock, on February 1, by this time the search for Hae has ramped up, a different detective calls. Asks Adnan about the ride thing. Asks him "did you tell Officer Adcock you'd asked Hae for a ride?" According to the police report, "Adnan says this was incorrect because he drives his own car to school.

So, he reverses himself. Why would he do that? Why would he tell the first cop he's expecting a ride and then once it's clear Hae is missing change his story? Or maybe Adnan misspoke when he talked to that first cop. Or maybe he did ask Hae for a ride at some point that day, but he's forgotten. Or maybe he's lying.

**I'm not a detective but I consider this a red flag. What I don't know is, is this a teeny tiny red flag like he just got confused and so what? Or is this like a great big flapping in the breeze red flag? Like maybe he's hiding something.**

## he reverses himself

I want to say that I'm 99% sure. The reason why I can't say 100 is because – I mean, I do kind of understand that it comes across as – I don't know if it does or doesn't. But it seems like I remember things that are beneficial to me, but things that aren't beneficial to me I can't remember. It's just that I don't really know what to say beyond the fact that a lot of the day that I do remember, it's bits and pieces that comes from what other people have said that they remember, right? And it kind of jogs my memory. Yeah. I don't really know what to say. And I completely understand how that comes across. I mean, the only thing I can say is, man, it was just a normal day to me. **There was absolutely nothing abnormal about that day.**

I've wondered about that, the normalness of the day. Because wouldn't the call from Officer Adcock asking whether he's seen Hae just in and of itself make it a not normal day?

To be fair to Adnan, if this really was his reaction, then he wasn't the only one. The seriousness of Hae's disappearance didn't start sinking in with her friends for a while. School was cancelled on January 14th and 15th because of the ice storm, then the weekend came. Then Monday was Martin Luther King Day, so the kids didn't all reconvene at school until the following Tuesday. All of Hae's friends I spoke to said they initially

thought Hae had either run off someplace with her new boyfriend Don or, this was another rumor that a lot of people talked about at the time, that she'd run off to California.

Adnan knows better than anyone how unhelpful this all is, because it plays both ways. If he's innocent, right, it's any other day. Of course he doesn't remember.

***If he's innocent, right, it's any other day. Of course he doesn't remember.***

At, I mean, at the time, the only thing I really associated with that call was that man uh, you know. I definitely understand that someone could look at this and say, oh, man, he must be lying. It's so coincidental that he doesn't remember what he did this particular time. I mean, I completely understand that, and I get that. Like I said, that's the hardest thing I've dealt with for these past 15 years. There's nothing tangible I can do to remember that day. There's nothing I can do to make me remember. I've pored through the transcripts. I've looked through the telephone records. What else can I do? There's nothing I can do. So perhaps I'll never be able to explain it. And it is what it is. If someone believes me or not, you know, I have no control over it.

**If someone believes me or not, I have no control over it.**



**Sarah**  
 Something pretty unusual did happen to you that day. Which was –

**Adnan**  
 Oh like the police, the police call...

**Sarah**  
 The police call! [Calling to] say, "do you know where Hae Lee is?", right?

**Adnan**  
 Oh no, uh, I do remember that phone call and I do remember being high at the time because the craziest thing is to be high and have the police call your phone. I'll never forget that.

**Sarah**  
 I guess that's the only thing about the day that seems weird to me that you wouldn't then, that the day wouldn't then come into focus for you because you'd gotten this call from the cops and you know, you, you were high, you were young, you know, it's a scary call to get or just a jarring call to get.

**But you can also read it as, how convenient. He doesn't remember the day. So no one can fact check him, or poke holes in his story. Because he has no story.**

**“He has no story.”**

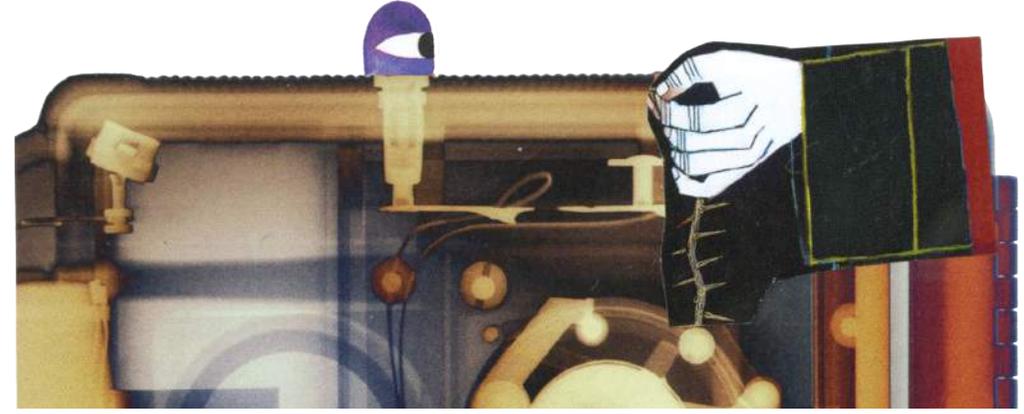
# 06 - on Jay's story

WHEN HE FIRST HEARD JAY'S STORY OF THE CRIME, ADNAN DIDN'T SAY, WELL, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN LIKE THAT, OR, I DIDN'T MEAN FOR IT TO HAPPEN LIKE THAT. HE SAID, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN. NONE OF THIS IS TRUE AT ALL. HE SAYS HE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH HAE'S MURDER, AND HE DOESN'T KNOW WHO DID.



Adnan, of course, says Jay's story isn't true, but he says he doesn't know why Jay would lie either. He says when he first heard Ritz and MacGillivray mention Jay's name in relation with his own arrest, he was just confused. Adnan says he didn't feel betrayed by Jay exactly because, again, they weren't good enough friends for betrayal. It was more a feeling of injustice.

They said something like "we know what you and Jay did" or "we talked to Jay"— and I'm like "Jay? Jay—" like I had a look of puzzlement on my face – like, like "what? What do you mean? Like what do you mean Jay?" With Jay it was more so kinda like in my mind, I was kinda like, maybe the police are putting him up to this, maybe somehow he got caught up — for a minute I thought he tried to claim the reward money and he got caught up in the situation. I don't know if there's a part of me that I don't wanna make accusations against someone else without, you know, not being sure of it because obviously it happened to me.



There's another factor I haven't mentioned, and that is, as a defense attorney's explained to me, no good can come, and in fact only harm can come, from Adnan attempting to contact or influence people on the outside who are connected to his case. That's kind of inmate behavior 101. Because let's say Cathy changed her story, suddenly

remembered something exculpatory for Adnan. Then the state found out that Adnan had been writing to Cathy, or threatening Cathy somehow, or talking smack about Cathy on a podcast. Then that could be used by the State to challenge the validity of Cathy's new information. Adnan is a

smart guy, he's been an inmate for fifteen years, he knows the deal. He also knows there's nothing he can do to change other people's minds about him.

If he were really innocent, we would hear him being madder. Why doesn't he sound more mad?

A handful of people who are listening to this story have told me one thing they think makes Adnan look guilty is madder. Why doesn't he sound more mad? the way he talks about, or rather, doesn't talk about other people involved in the

**Sarah**  
I think also what people do is they put themselves immediately in your position, and think "what would I do? How would I be feeling? How would I act if I thought someone had done me wrong and put me here? I would be screaming to the rooftops," and they're not hearing you do that.  
**Adnan**  
If someone, there's really nothing to say. If someone can't imagine how I feel there's no need for me to say anything to try to convince them otherwise. I mean, it is what it is. If a person can't figure it out, then that's not for me to say.

If a person genuinely doesn't think that I feel something towards the people who put me in prison, then me saying it, it really has no validity, in my eyes anyway because either you think I did it or you don't. If you think that I did it, then you can assume because I'm a normal — I'm just a regular — I think what happens is people come expecting a monster, and they don't find that, well next they come expecting a victim, and when they don't find that, they don't know what to think, and the reality of it is I'm just a normal person.

# 07. more evidence



I'VE COME ACROSS DOZENS OF BITS OF EVIDENCE LIKE THIS. INFORMATION THAT COULD EITHER MEAN ONE THING, OR PERHAPS ITS OPPOSITE DEPENDING ON WHO'S TALKING.

I may have said it as a joke you know like man hey "I'm going to hell because I'm dating you," or something, but I never meant it in the type of way that she took it. I never really felt as if, man you know Hae is 'tearing me away from my religion.' You know, and only 'til I read her diary that I really kinda understood that wow this is the perception that she kinda had. Just like the gravity and the magnitude with which she took these things. I didn't really feel that way about these things.

# I didn't really feel that way about these things.

All this information, every scrap, it's currency for whatever side you're on. Spin. And the trouble with spin is that you can't totally disregard it, because swirling around somewhere inside, some tendrils of it, is true.



Muslim in question about it, and much and when it comes to choosing, I'm gonna let him go his way. I hate the fact that I'm the cause of his sin." So, yeah, anytime someone smoking weed from the time he was fourteen or fifteen. Culturally, yes a Muslim, but the rest, he means life' in reference to their secret relationship, But ask the that's not good. But ask the himself in them.

topic. When I read it, I thought "whoa. This does not look so good for Adnan." I keep crying over the phone because I miss him so much," she writes. He told me that his religion means life to him. He tried to remain a faithful Muslim all his life but he fell in love with me which is a great sin. But he told me there is no way he'll ever leave me because he can't imagine a life with me. Then he said that one day he'll have to choose between me and I'm against his religion. He called me a devil a few times. I know he was only joking, but it's somewhat true." And then there's this, which wasn't read at trial but is from July when Adnan went to an Islamic conference in Texas with his dad. This is the most distressed Hae gets on the

Remember the setup for this crime that the State laid out was that Adnan was betraying everything he held dear for this girl. As a good Muslim he was not supposed to be dating and so he was sacrificing his religion and lying to his family all just so he could be with her and it twisted him up inside. And

Hae's diary seems to be where they found some evidence for that. In fact they had a friend of Hae's, Debbie Warren, read excerpts from it at trial. "I like him, no I love him." She read at trial, dated May 15. "It just all the things that stand in the middle. His religion and lying to his family all just so he could be with her and it twisted him up inside. And



*he was proud of the phone*

Adnan says he wanted the phone so that he could call girls unfettered. And he was proud of the phone. He'd worked hard at his job as an EMT to pay for it.

As for his job, Adnan, says he was proud of being certified. He'd gotten the highest score on the qualifying test of anyone in his class and a real job as a result. He liked old people and his job was mostly to ride in the back of the ambulance with old people, make sure they were okay.

In the detective's notes, they interview Adnan's English teacher, Jane Efron, who apparently tells them, "Adnan had a dark side which is in his poetry." The words 'dark side' are underlined.

Adnan's cellphone — he bought it just two days before Hae disappeared. The state tried to show that was all part of his plan. That he needed the phone to carry out the murder. Adnan's job — the State would also argue that because he was an EMT Adnan would have known how to strangle someone, and would have had the training to revive them if he wished.



## Adnan had a dark side

### Jane

It was like all the teenagers that I taught because everything in their lives was dark. I don't remember any of them having anything upbeat to say, so he was just another one that makes you think that you're living on another planet. Cuz when you look out at them and they're healthy and hearty and playing and being stupid so — (laughs)

### Sarah

So it didn't stick out in anyway, it was just like all teenagers write broody, dramatic poetry —

### Jane

Absolutely.



# epilogue

I realize there was only three things I wanted after I was convicted. To stay close to my family, prove my innocence and to be seen as a person again. Not a monster. I'm always overthinking. Analyzing what I say, how it sounds and the fact that people always think I'm lying. All this thinking, it's to protect myself from being hurt. Not from being accused of Hae's murder, but from being accused of being manipulative or lying. And I know it's crazy, I know I'm paranoid, but I can never shake it because no matter what I do, or how careful I am, it always comes back. I guess the only thing I could ask you to do is, if none of this makes any sense to you, just read it again. **Except this time, please imagine that I really am innocent. And then maybe it'll make sense to you.**

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