



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LAURA GRIFFIN

LAST SEEN ALONE

"I love smart, sophisticated, fast-moving romantic thrillers,
and Laura Griffin writes them brilliantly."—JAYNE ANN KRENTZ

BOOK CLUB KIT

Hello from Austin!

Thank you for selecting *Last Seen Alone* for your group.

Book clubs have a special place in my heart, and I always look forward to getting together with friends to talk, drink, laugh, and chat about books. *Last Seen Alone* is the story of Leigh Larson, an up-and-coming attorney who is a fierce advocate for victims of online abuse and revenge porn. When Leigh's newest client goes missing under suspicious circumstances, homicide detective Brandon Reynolds tracks Leigh down, hoping she'll be able to help him with the case.

Leigh dives into the investigation and soon finds herself in the cross-hairs of a vicious criminal bent on revenge. *Last Seen Alone* takes place in my hometown of Austin, Texas, a colorful city that is growing and changing every day. Some of the scenes in the book are set in my favorite spots around town, which made writing this story a lot of fun. Please drop me a note if you would like some signed bookmarks for your group or if you'd like to set up a virtual bookchat. You can reach me at laura@lauragriffin.com. Thanks again for choosing *Last Seen Alone*, and happy reading!

Laura Griffin



A Conversation with
Laura Griffin

Tell us about *Last Seen Alone*! What inspired you to write this story?

I used to be a newspaper reporter, and I'm constantly reading headlines for ideas. This story was inspired by an article I read about a teenage girl whose life was turned upside down when an ex-boyfriend posted intimate photos of her online. My heart just went out to this girl, and I started digging in and reading everything I could find about revenge porn and online abuse.

What do you feel are the main themes/issues that are addressed in *Last Seen Alone*?

I think people underestimate how much harm can be done to people online. It isn't just revenge porn but stalking, bullying, sextortion, harassment on social media—the list goes on. Many of the abusers (mostly men) hide behind anonymity, which can make it hard to hold them accountable. *Last Seen Alone* tells the story of a young attorney who is a fierce advocate for women who have gone through things like this. Leigh Larson is tough, smart, and resilient, and she isn't afraid to take these guys on.

Did the book require any special research?

I learned way more than I ever wanted to know about the hell people go through when they become the target of online abuse. It's especially awful when it happens to teens and children. I read an interview with victims' rights attorney Carrie Goldberg, and she was part of the inspiration behind Leigh's character. I also spoke with FBI agents who

investigate cybercrime, and one of the sad things I learned was that they are so overwhelmed with cases that they have to prioritize the most urgent situations, such as a child in danger of physical harm, kidnapping, etc. So it's triage, really, and there are way too many cases that don't get the attention they need from law enforcement.

What sets this book apart from your Texas Murder Files series?

Like the Texas Murder Files books, this story is set in Texas—in this case, Austin, where I live. This book is a standalone rather than a series, so Leigh and Brandon are part of an all-new story world, which was fun from a writing perspective.

What do you hope readers will take away from this story?

Sometimes people shrug off online abuse and say, “Ignore it” or “It will die down.” But that doesn't address the problem of how truly devastating this sort of abuse can be. Online abuse can completely upend people's lives, wrecking relationships and careers and, in many cases, self-esteem. Victims of revenge porn have been betrayed in such a searingly personal way. I want people to see through Leigh's eyes the courage that it takes for people—especially young women—to pick themselves up from the experience and reclaim their lives again. Leigh's story offers hope.



An Insider's Guide to Austin, Texas: **Eight Highlights You Don't Want to Miss**

One of the many fun things about writing *Last Seen Alone* was giving readers a glimpse of some of my favorite Austin hangouts. The city is growing and changing, but locals are determined to preserve Austin's eclectic personality, and you'll still see our slogan, "Keep Austin Weird," displayed around town. If you come for a visit, here are some ideas for your itinerary!



1. Check out SoCo

A tour of Austin isn't complete without a visit to South Congress Avenue just south of the lake. Bars, eateries, and boutiques line this iconic street, which offers a view of the state capitol dome. You can shop for boots, grab an ice cream cone, or snap photos in front of popular local murals, including *Willie for President* (near Home Slice Pizza) and the "I love you" wall (at Jo's coffeeshop).

2. Catch some live music

Known as the live music capital of the world, Austin offers all sorts of music venues, including the Moody Theater (home to Austin City Limits), the Continental Club (on South Congress), and many more options on Sixth Street, one of Austin's hubs for nightlife. Check out *The Austin Chronicle* for listings.

3. Get wet

If you want a break from the heat, head to Barton Springs Pool for a dip. The natural-springs pool in Zilker Park is open year-round for swimming. Or head to Lady Bird Lake, where people love to canoe, kayak, and paddleboard. Rentals available at several docks on the lake.

4. Eat Tex-Mex

No self-respecting tour guide would let you leave town without sampling some Austin Tex-Mex and margaritas. The famous Matt's El Rancho on South Lamar might have a wait, but there are plenty of other delicious options scattered around town, including Maudie's and Guero's.

5. Watch the Bats

Did you know that Austin is home to the largest urban bat colony in the world? From spring to fall, crowds gather at dusk near the Congress Avenue Bridge to watch 1.5 million bats emerge from slumber and soar into the night sky.

6. Cruise The Drag

Guadalupe Street just west of the University of Texas campus is known locally as The Drag. You can shop thrift stores (Buffalo Exchange), grab a bite (Torchy's Tacos), or just people watch as UT students come and go. If you need a dog-friendly spot to take a break, try Lucky Lab Coffee Co., just off The Drag on San Antonio Street.

7. See a game

You don't have to be a Longhorn fan to enjoy sports in Austin. The new Q2 Stadium is home to our pro soccer team, Austin FC. During baseball season, head just up the road to Round Rock to catch the Triple-A Round Rock Express at the Dell Diamond.

8. Explore Lamar & Sixth

This busy corner is home to some famous local hotspots. Whole Foods (which originated in Austin) offers lots of pick-up food and outdoor seating, plus an ice-skating rink in the wintertime. Shop for vinyl at Waterloo Records, which occasionally features live performances. And last but not least, I have to recommend one of my favorite spots in town, BookPeople. Texas's largest indie bookstore offers a huge selection of titles and comfy chairs for curling up with a book.

Discussion Questions

- 1.** The story begins in Vanessa's point of view on an isolated road. How does your opinion of Vanessa evolve as you learn more about her backstory and how she ended up in a situation where she fears for her life?
- 2.** What are some of the ways, large and small, that Leigh shows empathy for her clients? At what point did you figure out why Leigh has such a strong connection to the women she represents?
- 3.** Leigh quit a high-paying job at a prestigious law firm to join Javier's fledgling practice. Do you think she was wise to take such a risk? What would you have done if you faced a similar problem at your workplace?
- 4.** Leigh and Vanessa are very different, but they have a past trauma in common. Do you think Vanessa could have avoided her fate if she had done anything differently, such as breaking off her toxic relationship sooner or going to the police? What options did Vanessa have that she didn't pursue?
- 5.** At one point, Leigh tells Brandon that social media is "rife with misogyny." Have you seen that in your own experience? In what ways do you try to shield yourself from online harassment or abuse?
- 6.** Brandon starts out determined to track Leigh down and enlist her help with the case, but he later regrets getting her involved because she ends up in danger. Do you think he was right or wrong to involve her in his investigation?
- 7.** During a pivotal scene, Brandon accuses Leigh of lying to him by omission. Do you think he's right? Do you think Leigh's actions were justified?
- 8.** Early in the book, Brandon says he's used to being lied to by witnesses, suspects, even colleagues. Why do you think he seems to accept being lied to by so many people in his life but takes issue when he believes Leigh isn't telling him the full truth?
- 9.** Many of the problems in the book—vengeful exes, bullying, harassment—were around long before social media. Do you think today's technology makes these problems worse or gives people more resources and ways to cope?
- 10.** If you could choose to live in a world with or without social media, what would you choose?



About Laura Griffin

Laura Griffin is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of more than twenty-five books and novellas. She is a two-time RITA® Award winner, as well as the recipient of the Daphne du Maurier Award.

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