

## One of Us Is Lying Chapter 14 - Tips

0 14 minutes read

Addy

Saturday, October 6, 9:30 a.m.

I'm at home with Ashton and we're trying to figure out something to do. But we keep getting stuck on the fact that nothing interests me.

"Come on, Addy." I'm lying across an armchair, and Ashton nudges me with her foot from the couch. "What would you normally do on a weekend? And don't say hang out with Jake," she adds quickly.

"But that is what I'd do," I whine. Pathetic, but I can't help it. I've had this awful sickening lurch in my stomach all week, as though I'd been walking along a sturdy bridge and it vanished under my feet.

"Can you honestly not come up with a single, non-Jake-related thing you like?"

I shift in my seat and consider the question. What did I do before Jake? I was fourteen when we started dating, still partly a kid. My best friend was Rowan Flaherty, a girl I'd grown up with who moved to Texas later that year. We'd drifted apart in ninth grade when she had zero interest in boys, but the summer before high school we'd still ridden our bikes all over town together. "I like riding my bike," I say uncertainly, even though I haven't been on one in years.

Ashton claps her hands as if I'm a reluctant toddler she's trying to get excited about a new activity. "Let's do that! Ride bikes somewhere."

Ugh, no. I don't want to move. I don't have the energy. "I gave mine away years ago. It was half-rusted under the porch. And you don't have one anyway."

"We'll use those rental bikes—what are they called? Hub Bikes or something? They're all over town. Let's find some."

I sigh. "Ash, you can't babysit me forever. I appreciate you keeping me from falling apart all week, but you've got a life. You should get back to Charlie."

Ashton doesn't answer right away. She goes into the kitchen, and I hear the refrigerator door opening and the faint clink of bottles. When she returns she's holding a Corona and a San Pellegrino, which she hands to me. She ignores my raised eyebrows—it's not even ten o'clock in the morning—and takes a long sip of beer as she sits down, crossing her legs beneath her. "Charlie's happy as can be. I'm guessing he's moved his girlfriend in by now."

“What?” I forget how tired I am and sit up straight.

“I caught them when I went home to get more clothes last weekend. It was all so horribly clichéd. I even threw a vase at his head.”

“Did you hit him?” I ask hopefully. And hypocritically, I guess. After all, I’m the Charlie in my and Jake’s relationship. She shakes her head and takes another gulp of her beer.

“Ash.” I move from my armchair and sit next to her on the couch. She’s not crying, but her eyes are shiny, and when I put my hand on her arm she swallows hard. “I’m so sorry. Why didn’t you say something?”

“You had enough to worry about.”

“But it’s your marriage!” I can’t help looking at Ashton and Charlie’s wedding photo from two years ago, which sits next to my junior prom picture on our mantel. They were such a perfect couple, people used to joke that they looked as though they came with the frame. Ashton had been so happy that day, gorgeous and glowing and giddy.

And relieved. I’d tried to squash the idea because I knew it was catty, but I couldn’t help thinking Ashton had feared losing Charlie right up till the day she married him. He was tremendous on paper—handsome, good family, headed to Stanford Law—and our mother had been thrilled. It wasn’t until they’d been married a year that I noticed Ashton almost never laughed when Charlie was around.

“It’s been over for a while, Addy. I should have left six months ago, but I was too much of a coward. I didn’t want to be alone, I guess. Or admit I’d failed. I’ll find my own place eventually, but I’ll be here for a while.” She shoots me a wry look. “All right. I’ve made my true confession. Now you tell me something. Why did you lie when Officer Budapest asked about being in the nurse’s office the day Simon died?”

I let go of her arm. “I didn’t—”

“Addy. Come on. You started playing with your hair as soon as he brought it up. You always do that when you’re nervous.” Her tone’s matter-of-fact, not accusing. “I don’t believe for one second you took those EpiPens, so what are you hiding?”

Tears prick my eyes. I’m so tired, suddenly, of all the half-truths I’ve piled up over the past days and weeks. Months. Years. “It’s so stupid, Ash.”

“Tell me.”

“I didn’t go for myself. I went to get Tylenol for Jake, because he had a headache. And I didn’t want to say so in front of you because I knew you’d give me that look.”

“What look?”

“You know. That whole Addy-you’re-such-a-doormat look.”

“I don’t think that,” Ashton says quietly. A fat tear rolls down my cheek, and she reaches over to brush it away.

“You should. I am.”

“Not anymore,” Ashton says, and that does it. I start flat-out bawling, curled in the fetal position in a corner of the couch with Ashton’s arms around me. I don’t even know who or what I’m crying for: Jake, Simon, my friends, my mother, my sister, myself. All of the above, I guess.

When the tears finally stop I’m raw and exhausted, my eyelids hot and my shoulders sore from shaking for so long. But I feel lighter and cleaner too, like I’ve purged something that’s been making me sick. Ashton gets me a pile of Kleenex and gives me a minute to wipe my eyes and blow my nose. When I’ve finally wadded up all the damp tissues and tossed them into a corner wastebasket, she takes a small sip of her beer and wrinkles her nose. “This doesn’t taste as good as I thought it would. Come on, let’s ride bikes.”

I can’t say no to her now. So I trail after her to the park a half mile from our house, where there’s a whole row of rental bikes. Ashton figures out the sign-up deal, swiping her credit card to release two bikes. We don’t have helmets, but we’re just going around the park so it doesn’t really matter.

I haven’t ridden a bike in years but I guess it’s true what they say: you don’t forget how. After a wobbly start we take off on the wide path through the park and I have to admit, it’s kind of fun. The breeze flutters through my hair as my legs pump and my heart rate accelerates. It’s the first time in a week I haven’t felt half-dead. I’m surprised when Ashton stops and says, “Hour’s up.” She catches sight of my face and asks, “Should we rent for another hour?”

I grin at her. “Yeah, okay.” We get tired about halfway through, though, and return the bikes so we can go to a café and rehydrate. Ashton gets our drinks while I find seats, and I scroll through my messages while I wait for her. It takes a lot less time than it used to—I only have a couple from Cooper, asking if I’m going to Olivia’s party tonight.

Olivia and I have been friends since freshman year, but she hasn’t spoken to me all week. Pretty sure I’m not invited, I text.

“Only Girl” trills out with Cooper’s response. I make a mental note that when all this is over and I have a minute to think straight, I’m going to change my text tone to something less annoying. That’s BS. They’re your friends too.

Sitting this one out, I write. Have fun. At this point, I'm not even sad about being excluded. It's just one more thing.

Cooper doesn't get it. I guess I should thank him; if he'd dropped me like everyone else, Vanessa would have gone nuclear on me by now. But she doesn't dare cross the homecoming king, even when he's been accused of steroid use. School opinion is split down the middle about whether he did it or not, but he's not saying either way.

I wonder if I could have done the same—bluffed and brazened my way through this whole nightmare without telling Jake the truth. Then I look at my sister, chuckling with the guy behind the coffee counter in a way she never did with Charlie, and remember how careful and contained I always had to be around Jake. If I was going to the party tonight I'd have to wear something he picked out, stay as late as he wanted, and not talk to anyone who might make him mad.

I miss him still. I do. But I don't miss that.

Bronwyn

Saturday, October 6, 10:30 a.m.

My feet fly over the familiar path as my arms and legs match the rhythm of the music blaring in my ears. My heart accelerates and the fears that have been crowding my brain all week recede, replaced by pure physical effort. When I finish my run I'm drained but pumped full of endorphins, and feel almost cheerful as I head for the library to pick up Maeve. It's our usual Saturday-morning routine, but I can't find her in any of her typical spots and have to text her.

Fourth floor, she replies, so I head for the children's room.

She's sitting on a tiny chair near the window, tapping away at one of the computers. "Revisiting your childhood?" I ask, sinking to the floor beside her.

"No," Maeve says, her eyes on the screen. She lowers her voice to almost a whisper. "I'm in the admin panel for About That."

It takes a second for what she said to register, and when it does my heart takes a panicky leap. "Maeve, what the hell? What are you doing?"

"Looking around. Don't freak out," she adds with a sideways glance at me. "I'm not disturbing anything, but even if I were, nobody would know it's me. I'm at a public computer."

"Using your library card!" I hiss. You can't get online here without entering your account number.

“No. Using his.” Maeve inclines her head toward a small boy a few tables over with a stack of picture books in front of him. I stare at her incredulously, and she shrugs. “I didn’t take it from him. He left it lying out and I wrote down the numbers.”

The little boy’s mother joins him then, smiling as she catches Maeve’s eye. She’d never guess my sweet-faced sister just committed identity theft against her six-year-old.

I can’t think of anything to say except “Why?”

“I wanted to see what the police are seeing,” Maeve says. “If there were any other draft posts, other people who might’ve wanted to keep Simon quiet.”

I inch forward in spite of myself. “Were there?”

“No, but there is something odd. About Cooper’s post. It’s date-stamped days after everyone else’s, for the night before Simon died. There’s an earlier file with his name on it, but it’s encrypted and I can’t open it.”

“So?”

“I don’t know. But it’s different, which makes it interesting. I need to come back with a thumb drive and download it.” I blink at her, trying to pinpoint the exact moment when she morphed into a hacker-investigator. “There’s something else. Simon’s user name for the site is AnarchiSK. I Googled it and came up with a bunch of 4chan threads he posted to constantly. I didn’t have time to read them, but we should.”

“Why?” I ask as she loops her backpack over her shoulder and gets to her feet.

“Because something’s weird about all this,” Maeve says matter-of-factly, leading me out the door and down the stairs. “Don’t you think?”

“Understatement of the year,” I mutter. I stop in the empty stairwell, so she does too, half turning with a questioning look. “Maeve, how’d you even get into Simon’s admin panel? How did you know where to look?”

A small smile tugs at the corners of her mouth. “You’re not the only one who grabs confidential information off computers other people were using.”

I gape at her. “So you—so Simon was posting About That at school? And left it open?”

“Of course not. Simon was smart. He did it here. Not sure if it was a one-time thing or if he posted from the library all the time, but I saw him one weekend last month when you were running. He didn’t see me. I logged in to the computer after him and got the address from the browser history. I didn’t do anything with it at first,” she says, meeting my incredulous look with a calm gaze. “Just put it aside for future reference. I started

trying to get in after you came back from the police station. Don't worry," she adds, patting me on the arm. "Not from home. Nobody can trace it."

"Okay, but ... why the interest in the app? Before Simon even died? What were you going to do?"

Maeve purses her lips thoughtfully. "I hadn't figured that part out. I thought maybe I'd start wiping it clean right after he posted, or switch all the text to Russian. Or dismantle the whole thing."

I shift my feet and stumble a little, grabbing the railing for support. "Maeve, is this because of what happened freshman year?"

"No." Maeve's amber eyes get hard. "Bronwyn, you're the one who still thinks about that. Not me. I just wanted the stupid hold he had over the entire school to stop. And, well"—she lets out a short, humorless laugh that echoes against the concrete walls of the stairwell—"I guess it did." She starts back down the stairs with long strides and pushes hard on the exit when she gets to the bottom. I follow her silently, trying to wrap my brain around the fact that my sister was keeping a secret from me similar to the one I kept from her. And that both of them tie back to Simon.

Maeve gives me a sunny smile when we get outside, as if the conversation we just had never happened. "Bayview Estates is on our way home. Should we pick up your forbidden technology?"

"We could try." I've told Maeve all about Nate, who called this morning to say he'd leave a phone in the mailbox of 5 Bayview Estate Road. It's part of a new development of half-built houses, and the area tends to be deserted on weekends. "I'm not sure how early Nate gets moving on a Saturday, though."

We reach Bayview Estates in less than fifteen minutes, turning into a street filled with boxy, half-finished houses. Maeve puts a hand on my arm as we approach number 5. "Let me go," she says with a forbidding air, eyes darting around dramatically as though the Bayview Police could descend with sirens blaring at any minute. "Just in case."

"Have at it," I mutter. We're probably too early anyway. It's barely eleven.

But Maeve returns waving a small black device with a triumphant flourish, laughing when I yank it from her. "Eager much, nerd?" When I power it up there's one message, and I open it to a picture of a yellow-brown lizard sitting placidly on a rock in the middle of a large cage. Actual lizard, reads the caption, and I laugh out loud.

"Oh my God," Maeve mutters, peering over my shoulder. "Private jokes. You're soooo into him, aren't you?"

I don't have to answer her. It's a rhetorical question.

Cooper

Saturday, October 6, 9:20 p.m.

By the time I get to Olivia's party, nearly everyone's out of it. Somebody's puking in the bushes as I push open the front door. I spot Keely huddled next to the stairs with Olivia, having one of those intense conversations girls get into when they're wasted. A few juniors are toking up on the couch. Vanessa's in a corner trying to paw at Nate, who couldn't look less interested as he scans the room behind her. If Vanessa were a guy, somebody would've reported her by now for all the unsolicited groping she does. My eyes briefly meet Nate's, and we both look away without acknowledging each other.

I finally find Jake on the patio with Luis, who's headed inside for more drinks. "Whaddya want?" Luis asks, clapping me on the shoulder.

"Whatever you're getting." I take a seat next to Jake, who's listing sideways in his chair.

"Wha.ssup, klller?" he slurs, and sputters out a laugh. "Are you getting tired of murder jokes yet? 'Cause I'm not."

I'm surprised Jake is this drunk; he usually holds back during football season. But I guess his week's been almost as bad as mine. That's what I came to talk to him about, although as I watch him swat hazily at a bug, I'm not sure I should bother.

I try anyway. "How're you doing? Been a lousy few days, huh?"

Jake laughs again, but this time not as though he finds anything funny. "That's so Cooper of you, man. Don't talk about your sh!t week, just check in on mine. You're a goddamn saint, Coop. You really are."

The edge in his voice warns me I shouldn't take the bait, but I do. "You mad at me for something, Jake?"

"Why would I be? It's not like you're defending my whore ex-girlfriend to anybody who'll listen. Oh, wait. That's exactly what you're doing."

Jake narrows his eyes at me, and I realize I can't have the conversation I came to have. He's in no frame of mind to talk about easing up on Addy at school. "Jake, I know Addy's in the wrong. Everybody knows it. She made a stupid mistake."

"Cheating isn't a mistake. It's a choice," Jake says furiously, and for a second he sounds stone-cold sober. He drops his empty beer bottle on the ground and c0cks his head with an accusing glare. "Where the hell is Luis? Hey." He grabs the arm of a passing sophomore and plucks an unopened beer out of his hand, twisting the cap off and taking a long sip. "What was I saying? Oh yeah. Cheating. That's a choice, Coop. You know, my mom cheated on my dad when I was in junior high. Screwed up our

whole family. Threw a grenade right in the middle and—” He flings an arm, spilling half his beer, and makes a whoosh sound. “Everything exploded.”

“I didn’t know that.” I’d met Jake when I moved to Bayview in eighth grade, but we didn’t start hanging out till high school. “Sorry, man. That makes it even worse, huh?”

Jake shakes his head, eyes glittering. “Addy has no clue what she’s done. Ruined everything.”

“But your dad ... forgave your mom, right? They’re still together?” It’s a stupid question. I was at his house a month ago for a cookout before all this started. His dad was grilling hamburgers and his mom was talking to Addy and Keely about a new manicure place that opened in Bayview Center. Like normal. Like always.

“Yeah, they’re together. Nothing’s the same, though. It’s never been the same.” Jake’s staring in front of him with such disgust that I don’t know what to say. I feel like a jerk for telling Addy she should come, and I’m glad she didn’t listen to me.

Luis returns and hands us both a beer. “You going to Simon’s tomorrow?” he asks Jake.

I think I can’t possibly have heard Luis right, but Jake says, “I guess.”

Luis catches my confused look. “His mom asked a bunch of us to come over and, like, take something to remember him by before they pack his stuff. Creeps me out since I barely knew the guy, but she seems to think we were friends so what can you say, right?” He takes a sip of his beer and cocks an eyebrow at me. “Guess you’re not invited?”

“Nope,” I say, feeling a little sick. The last thing I want to do is pick through Simon’s things in front of his grieving parents, but if all my friends are going, the slight’s pretty clear. I’m under suspicion, and not welcome.

“Simon, man.” Jake shakes his head solemnly. “He was freaking brilliant.” He holds his beer up and for a second I think he’s going to pour it onto the patio in a homeboy salute, but he refrains and drinks it instead.

Olivia joins us, wrapping one arm around Luis’s waist. Guess those two are back on again. She pokes me with her free hand and holds up her phone, her face bright with that excited look she gets when she’s about to share a great piece of gossip. “Cooper, did you know you’re in the Bayview Blade?”

The way she says it, I’m pretty sure they’re not covering baseball. This night keeps getting better. “Had no idea.”

“Sunday edition, online tonight. All about Simon. They’re not ... accusing you, exactly, but the four of you are named as persons of interest, and they mention that stuff Simon



was gonna post about you. There're pictures of you all. And, um, it's been shared a few hundred times already. So." Olivia hands me her phone. "It's out there now, I guess."