

how we
bury our
secrets

How We Bury Our Secrets

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For my sister, Annabel
Schiff, who always loves and
supports me, and is my
motivation for writing.
Without her, this book would
not exist. Thank you for
always being there for me,
and thank you for making the
world a better place. I love
you.

Skyler

“Did you hear?” someone whispered behind Skyler and Addison, ignoring the fact that they were clearly audible.

“What are they talking about now?” Addison groaned, the two sharing an exasperated look.

Skyler shrugged. “It’s probably nothing,” he replied. And he’d meant it. Some wild rumor was always circulating through the school, but it was never anything serious. Of course, just when he thought he had everything figured out about the workings of the gossip at Spring Valley High, the universe had to throw it back in his face.

“That’s her!” a girl next to them not-so-whispered-whispered while pointing with her hand lowered, as if she didn’t know whether or not she was trying to hide the fact that she was talking about... Addison?

Skyler turned and gave her a quizzical look. “Let’s get to class,” he said under his breath, already steering her away from the gawking onlookers.

“Um... what was that about?” he asked, leaning closer.

Addison turned her head to look at him, eyes wide. “I... I genuinely don’t know...” She adjusted her blonde hair so that it covered her face from any staring classmates, subconsciously trying to hide. Where blue eyes had met his, now all Skyler saw were loose highlighted curls.

“Again, I wouldn’t worry,” he said as they placed their books on their desks and got ready for class. When Addison didn’t respond, he subtly attempted to look at her out of the corner of his eye.

She was tapping her foot against the floor nervously, distracted and anxious as she mindlessly twirled her mid-length hair around her index finger.

“Are you okay?” he asked as the teacher walked in, but they were quickly interrupted.

“Alright, class!” the teacher called. “Let’s get started!” And though he turned to the front of the room and tried to focus, the sound of Addison’s tapping foot drowned out the rest of the lesson.

Damien

Damien leaned against the brick wall of the school's empty parking lot. Wherever people weren't, Damien was, which meant that he spent an awful lot of time standing on the cracked asphalt of the lot. He lit a cigarette and sat down, making sure his long black jacket was underneath him to provide extra protection against the brisk cold of the November parking lot floor. Damien sighed. He really, really, *really* would rather be anywhere but here. Although... thinking it over, that thought seemed to follow him despite his location.

He sighed again, stretching his legs out in front of him. School ended... when? He thought it was sometime around 3:30 but then again, how would he know if he couldn't remember the last time he stayed that long? He checked his watch. It was 1:03. Damien leaned his elbows on his legs and went back to his daily activity of memorizing the cracks in the concrete as he waited.

Autumn

Autumn listened to her teacher, eagerly leaning forward and scribbling furiously in her neat notebook. Her long brown hair created a curtain around her face as her nose practically touched her page. She knew a test was bound to come up soon, and as always, she would be ready when it did. When the bell rang, Autumn packed up her books quickly, hurrying to her next class. “Hey! Clay!” someone called behind her, running to catch up with her fast pace.

“Yes?” she asked politely, but didn’t stop walking.

The boy next to her--she believed his name was James--started to twist his hands together. Autumn sighed and stopped abruptly, staring at him. If he made her late to her next class she would *not* be happy. She arched an eyebrow when he was still silent, and he seemed to take that as permission to talk, launching quickly into his request.

“So, the homework? You know the one due two classes from now?” Autumn didn’t even have time to nod before he kept talking. “Well, I don’t think I’ll be able to finish it. I was wondering--well, I heard that sometimes you--if you could do it for me?”

“Do your own work...” Autumn grumbled, annoyed that *this* would be what made her late. She started to tap her fingers against her leg, trying to get him to hurry.

If he noticed, it only succeeded in making him more full of nervous energy. He started bouncing on the balls of his feet. “I can’t because it’s my grandmother’s funeral...” he whispered quietly. Normally, Autumn would tell him to get lost. No one in this school ever seemed to be honest, but something about this kid made her think he was telling the truth.

“Alright,” she grumbled after a moment of consideration, annoyed she had been talked into this.

He grinned slightly. “Thank you!”

“I’ll text you everything, but right now I really have to get to class.” Before he could reply, which judging by his earlier rush of words was no small feat, Autumn sped off to class, only feeling slightly guilty.

Oliver

Oliver placed his tray of food carefully on the far end of a table in the back of the lunch room. He rarely had a set group of friends he ate lunch with, but the back table was always filled with *some* configuration of people.

It wasn't that he didn't have friends, Oliver thought, as he laughed at something someone said in the seat across from him. It was that he didn't have many--or any--*close* friends. Oliver was grateful for the respect the grade seemed to hold for him, but sometimes, sitting here at lunch, surrounded by people but feeling so very alone, Oliver wished things were different.

"You okay?" someone further down the table asked, concerned but not fully caring.

Oliver nodded with a friendly smile and went back to eating his lunch, listening to the din of the dining room but tuning out any conversations. *You'll never have any close friends if you can't bother to listen*, he silently reprimanded himself. So shaking his head as if to clear it, Oliver joined the conversation next to him.

Addison

Addison stopped walking as a familiar voice called, “Yo! Addi!”

She turned around, smiling. Landon jogged to her side and kissed her on the cheek. “Let’s get this fucking assembly over with already!” he grumbled, grabbing her hand and leading her in the direction she was already going.

“It won’t be *that* bad,” Addison amended.

“No... it definitely will be...” Landon said as he pushed open the gym doors and held them for her. The gym was huge, but right now it felt small and cramped as towering bleachers took up more than half the room.

“Jesus, it’s crowded! And hot!” Landon complained, walking up the bleachers. He ran a hand through his short dark hair in frustration. Addison nodded. She didn’t think it was that uncomfortable, but she didn’t want Landon to get annoyed with her if she disagreed.

“Maybe we should sit near the front, with Skyler and Gracie?”

“No,” he responded shortly, pushing her slightly into a seat all the way in the back.

Addison bit her lip, but knew it was no use arguing. It never got her anywhere with Landon. Landon took his seat next to her, and within one minute his leg was bouncing up and down. “Can this be over already?” he mumbled, sliding down in his

seat as if hoping to sink through the hard bleachers and out of the school.

“It hasn’t started, though...” Addison pointed out, tentatively.

Landon groaned, exaggerating his annoyance. “Don’t remind me!” he pleaded, now almost fully lying down, he was so low in his seat. As Addison opened her mouth to tease him, the principal walked up to the podium in the middle of the gym, clearing his throat into the microphone to signal silence.

“Good afternoon, everyone! As I’m sure you all know by now, homecoming will be coming up shortly! Here to talk a bit more about the proceedings is... Aiden Morris!”

Everyone clapped politely, but Landon scowled. “This kid gives me the fucking creeps.”

“Why?” Addison asked under her breath as Aiden made his way to the stage. He smiled and waved and seemed... charming. Surprisingly so. He had an air about him that was entrancing while simultaneously arrogant. It was like he *knew* he was charming, and he seemed to think that made him better than everyone, but the fact that he thought that didn’t make him *less* charming, and he knew that too.

“I don’t know. He’s so... I don’t know,” Landon tried to explain, brow furrowed.

“Hello, all!” Aiden said, still smiling. Or was it smirking? Addison was immediately struck by his slight British accent.

“How long has he gone to this school again?” she asked quietly, trying to figure out the details of his past. She knew almost everyone in the school, despite the large number of students, but that didn’t mean she knew much about their lives.

“He transferred here sophomore year from someplace in England, I think.”

“Hm...” was all Addison said, interested by this mysterious Aiden Morris.

“Everyone excited for homecoming?” A loud and uncharacteristically enthusiastic cheer met Aiden’s question.

“The game is on next Friday after school, and let’s all make sure to go and show our support! The dance is--” Aiden suddenly stopped, eyes widening as his hand rushed to his throat. Addison bolted upright, but Aiden just cleared his throat and kept talking, though seemingly with difficulty.

“Is he okay?” Landon asked, now interested.

“I hope so...” Addison murmured in a concerned manner. The teachers sitting at the edges of the room also seemed nervous, shifting in their seats.

“Make sure to--” Aiden coughed, “bring your forms to submit as you enter the dance! The theme--” Aiden started to shake, his now tense smile sliding off his face into a look of fear.

“What’s happening?” Addison said over the mutters filling the gym.

Aiden opened his mouth, but all that he managed was a breathy, “Um.”

“Shit...” Landon said, intrigued, now sitting up completely straight. “Cat got his tongue?” he continued, smirking.

“Shut up, this isn’t a joke. I think... I think he needs help!” Addison snapped, getting louder as the words rushed out of her.

Landon’s expression immediately soured. “Did you just tell me to *shut up*?” he growled, and while normally Addison would be frantically apologizing, right now, Aiden seemed to be struggling to breathe.

“Someone call an ambulance!” a teacher near the front cried.

Aiden fell to the floor with a thump, the podium hiding him from view.

The gym went silent as his body hit the floor, everything going still. Addison felt that the whole gym could hear her pounding heart. The silence hung suspended, thick and poisonous in the air, before it was broken suddenly with an ear piercing scream from the front of the room. A teacher ran over to Aiden’s now-prone body, and the murmurs came quickly back, louder than ever, as if making up for the moment of silence.

“Is he...?” Addison trailed off, hand covering her mouth.

Landon squinted, trying to get a glimpse of the chaotic situation going on below them.

“Damn, if only we had sat at the front!” Landon complained, standing on his tiptoes despite his tall height.

Addison held her tongue, not bothering to say “I told you so!” or bothering to scold him for insensitivity.

“I wish we could help!” she said instead, standing on her seat to see the floor of the gym. Students were rushing around as teachers tried to keep them away from Aiden.

“Call an ambulance!” someone called again, but they were mostly drowned out by the commotion.

Addison took out her pink phone. “Should I call, or will others? We don’t want to overwhelm the department with a flood of calls...”

“The teachers will, I think,” Landon said, distracted. Addison discreetly crossed her fingers, and wished for luck.