

One of Us is Lying



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KAREN MCMANUS

Karen M. McManus lives and writes in Massachusetts, where she earned a BA from the College of the Holy Cross and an MA in journalism from Northeastern University. Her background in journalism helps her to craft the fake news headlines for her novels, which are thrillers and mysteries. After dabbling in writing dystopian fiction inspired by [The Hunger Games](#), McManus found her stride when she decided to undertake a modern retelling of *The Breakfast Club*—with a serious twist. In just two months, she wrote *One of Us Is Lying*, and it shot to the top of the *New York Times* Bestsellers List shortly after its publication. She is a single mother who works in marketing, and her second novel, *Two Can Keep a Secret*, is scheduled for release in 2019.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel is set in Southern California, and focuses on many concerns typically associated with the millennial generation—specifically social media addiction and abuse, entitlement, and the unique financial struggles members of this generation are facing throughout not just the United States, but the world over. The novel also delves into questions of large-scale violence in schools across America; when Simon Kelleher becomes hell-bent on taking revenge against the conformist “lemmings” at his school, he looks up to the work of mass shooters but wants to do something more original. By engaging issues both of social media abuse and mass violence, McManus shows how insidious webs of lies, rumors, and scandals can be turned against popular students by those in less socially advantageous positions in order to incite suspicion, anger, and even violence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Many mysteries and thrillers set in contemporary American high schools have been topping best-seller charts over the last several years, and it's no secret why: more authors than ever are engaging contemporary issues of violence, race, apathy, and the damaging effects of social media and capitalism on modern American teenagers. Dana Mele's *People Like Us* and Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* focus on revenge plots—or moralistic lessons—taught by deceased high-school students from beyond the grave, while Lauren Oliver's [Before I Fall](#) considers the effects of social media, popularity contests, and insidious gossip on a group of high school students. McManus's use of a rotating first-person point of view and a cadre of

unreliable narrators is inspired by popular thrillers for adults, too: Gillian Flynn's [Gone Girl](#), Paula Hawkins's *The Girl on the Train*, and Alice Feeney's *Sometimes I Lie* are all twisty thrillers whose narrators are often less than truthful.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *One of Us Is Lying*
- **When Written:** 2010s
- **Where Written:** Cambridge, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 2017
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young adult fiction, mystery
- **Setting:** Bayview, California
- **Climax:** Addy, with the help of her classmates Bronwyn, Cooper, and Nate, discovers that their classmate Simon Kelleher orchestrated his own death in order to frame the four of them for his murder and get back at them for possessing the social and intellectual gifts he lacked.
- **Antagonist:** Simon Kelleher
- **Point of View:** Alternating first-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Nevertheless, She Persisted. Karen M. McManus maintains an active Twitter account from which she shares writing advice and insider info about the often-cutthroat world of Young Adult publishing; during a #ShareYourRejections campaign, she tweeted that her first (unpublished) novel was rejected by over 120 agents.



PLOT SUMMARY

Five students are held in detention by Mr. Avery, a stickler for **social media and cell phones**, who caught all five with phones in their bags during class despite his zero-tolerance policy. All of the students claim that the phones were planted in their bags, and even produce their real cell phones to prove their innocence, but Avery ignores their claims and leaves them all to work on their essays about how social media is ruining American teens. The students in detention are Bronwyn Rojas, the class brain; Addy Prentiss, the most popular girl in school; Cooper Clay, a jock; Nate Macauley, a druggie “criminal”; and Simon Kelleher, who runs the school's reviled but ubiquitous gossip app, About That. After Simon can't find his water bottle, he pours himself a cup of water from the sinks at the back of the lab; a car crash in the parking lot brings all the students over to the window, and when they turn back around, Simon

has taken a drink from his glass and fallen to the floor, suffering a potent allergic reaction. As the students and Mr. Avery scramble to find Simon's epi-pen—he's allergic to peanuts—they find that not just Simon's bag but the nurse's office, too, has been emptied of all epi-pens. Simon chokes and writhes until he's taken away by paramedics.

A few days later, as the student body grapples with Simon's death, Cooper, Addy, Nate, and Bronwyn are all called into the main office. A policeman reveals that Simon's autopsy shows he ingested a large amount of peanut oil shortly before his death. The officer asks the four students if any of them ever ran into any trouble with Simon or his app, but they all deny ever having been featured on it. All four students worry separately about the secrets they possess: Cooper is indifferent to his girlfriend, Keely, and spends all his time texting a mystery person; Addy struggles with her controlling boyfriend Jake and her vain mother; Nate spends all his time taking care of his alcoholic father.

All four students are called down to the police station and are separately informed that Simon had queued up an About That post shortly before his death that detailed secrets about each of them. The rumors reveal that Bronwyn stole tests from a teacher's Google Drive; Nate is dealing drugs; Cooper is using steroids to enhance his baseball performance; and Addy cheated on her boyfriend with a student named TJ. All four students are now suspects in Simon's murder—and their secrets are less than safe. Bronwyn is forced to come clean to her parents; Nate texts all of his suppliers and tells them he's not dealing anymore; Addy confesses to Jake that she cheated on him, and he breaks up with her. Cooper, however, is confused by the rumor about him, which is not true—he is relieved that Simon didn't reveal his true secret. Meanwhile, though Nate and Bronwyn are total opposites, they begin talking secretly with one another.

The next day, the cafeteria is plunged into chaos when an anonymous post made to a new blog—About This—purports to be written by Simon's killer, and reveals the secrets hidden on the unpublished About That post. A voice on the loudspeaker summons Addy, Cooper, Bronwyn, and Nate to the office, where their principal, Principal Gupta, offers them the chance to reveal what's going on in a "safe space." None of them say anything, and instead glumly head back to class. That weekend, Bronwyn and her sister Maeve visit the public library. Maeve has found a way to hack into Simon's old app using the public computers; there is an encrypted file in the queue, and Simon's username is connected to a series of strange posts on the forum 4chan. The next morning, a newspaper article affirms that Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy, and Nate—the "Bayview Four"—are all officially "persons of interest" in the case.

The media begins hounding the four students, and Nate and Bronwyn try to protect each other from being harassed by the news as they leave school one day; they are nursing a crush on

one another despite having been told by investigators to stay away from one another, as well as Addy and Cooper. Addy befriends Janae—a Goth girl who was close with Simon and now spends her days crying in the bathroom—after her popular friend group snubs her in the wake of her cheating scandal. Maeve and Bronwyn continue their research and find out that Simon often hung out on forums that glorified gun violence; Simon even expressed support for school shooters. As more and more major news outlets begin covering the Bayview Four, Cooper and Keely break up. Investigators find a comment on one of Simon's old About That posts—a nasty exposé about Maeve's drunken behavior at a party—which reads *Fuck off and die, Simon*. The comment was written by Bronwyn, and she comes under scrutiny. Cooper, who has to switch clothes and hats with his friends to avoid being harassed by the media, escapes the news crews and drives out to San Diego where he meets with his male lover, Kris. Nate and Bronwyn kiss for the first time, admitting their intense feelings for one another.

Bronwyn admits she doesn't trust Janae, but Addy continues trying to befriend her—especially since other girls in class are turning against Addy. One evening, Cooper is called down to the police station. He meets with his lawyer and an investigator, who reveals the police have finally unencrypted the queued file on About That—it contains a post concerning Cooper's sexuality. Investigators tell Cooper he is now a more "significant person of interest" than the others, since it seems as if someone switched the posts and made sure Simon wouldn't be around to switch them back. Cooper comes out to his parents, knowing that the information will leak; sure enough, just a few days later, Cooper's secret leaks to the school via the About This blog, and the only person who stands up for Cooper is Nate. Bronwyn is so proud of Nate that she kisses him in full view of the whole school; Addy brings Cooper over to sit at their lunch table, where the "murder club" defiantly bands together at last. The media coverage in the wake of Cooper's outing begins to shift, with many prominent news people like Mikhail Powers suggesting that the investigation has been unfairly focused on the Bayview Four, and has now invaded their private lives with little evidence to suggest that they are responsible.

One morning, Maeve calls Bronwyn downstairs—Nate has been arrested in connection with the murder. As Bronwyn scrambles to bring Nate's mother together with a local pro-bono lawyer, Eli Kleinfelter, who can represent Nate better than a public defender, it emerges that school received an anonymous tip informing them that Nate had drugs in his locker; when officials searched it they found no drugs, but did find a bag containing the nurse's supply of epi-pens. Bronwyn knows that Nate has been framed and is desperate to find the truth. Even as Cooper and Addy—relieved to be "off the hook"—are happy just to be out of the limelight, they agree to help Bronwyn continue to search for the answer to it all. As the

“murder club” combs through the About This posts, they spot an anecdotal detail that none of them recognize; only Addy knows what it means, because she mentioned it offhand to Jake months ago. With his friend Luis’s help, Cooper tracks down one of the cars involved in the accident in the parking lot the day of Simon’s murder; it belongs to a student at another high school named Sam Barron. Bronwyn confronts the student, and he reveals that a Bayview student paid him a thousand dollars to fake a car crash. Bronwyn shows him a picture of Jake, asking if it was Jake who paid him off; Sam gravely reveals that Simon Kelleher himself paid him.

The murder club meets at a coffee shop to go over the new information they have. Cooper’s boyfriend, Kris, comes with them, and his outsider’s perspective is helpful in putting together a few strange details; he suggests that Simon committed suicide, and that Jake is simply some kind of “accomplice.” This accusation distresses Addy, but several days later, she can’t shake the feeling that Jake is involved. She asks Cooper to drive her to Janae’s house. Janae admits that she has “massively fucked up,” and retrieves from her bedroom a sheaf of papers—Simon’s manifesto, detailing his desire to shake up his school unlike every other mass-murderer in America and bring four people down with him in an unforgettable way. Janae reveals that Simon—who always longed to be popular but faced rejection from the popular crowd at every turn—orchestrated his own death and framed Cooper, Bronwyn, and Nate, whom he hated for three separate reasons, to go down with him. When Jake learned an embarrassing secret about Simon at a party (that Simon rigged the prom court in his own favor in a desperate grab at popularity), Jake asked to become involved; having already learned about Addy’s infidelity, he wanted to bring Addy down too. The evidence found in Nate’s locker was planted by Janae; Janae was supposed to stick Addy with it all, but after Addy showed her so much kindness, she couldn’t bring herself to do it. At that very moment, the doorbell rings; it’s Jake, whom Janae reveals comes by often to cajole her into keeping quiet about their plan, which Janae has been feeling worse about. Addy suggests Janae let Jake in and act as if nothing is the matter—she’ll record their conversation from the next room, and then she and Janae will bring the evidence to the authorities. As Addy records Jake, however, her phone goes off with a message. Jake, enraged, pursues Addy out of Janae’s house and into the woods out back, where he grabs her, smashes her head on a rock, and tries to kill her by choking her. Cooper comes to her rescue at the last minute and manages to get her—and Janae—away from Jake.

Nate is released from the holding facility; when he hears that the rest of the “murder club” had been working so hard to clear his name, he feels he isn’t deserving of their kindness, and retreats into himself. Jake, meanwhile, is incarcerated and charged with numerous crimes; Cooper becomes a national hero, and is confused by the alternating love and hatred he’s

received from the media. Addy suffers a skull fracture but makes a full recovery; she moves in with her sister, Ashton, escaping her vain mother’s influence and making a fresh start away. Bronwyn, meanwhile, confronts Nate, who has been avoiding her since his release; she tells him that she still wants to be with him, but he claims they’re too different and that their feelings for one another were just fleeting.

Three months later, Bronwyn plays in a High School Spotlight concert at the San Diego Symphony; all her old friends and new friends attend, and she plays beautifully. After the performance, she is surprised to see Nate pulling up on his motorcycle; he reveals that he snuck into the performance and watched, and, urged on by Addy, now wants to apologize to Bronwyn for convincing himself that she was better off without him. Though Bronwyn tells him that things can’t just go back to the way they used to be, Nate suggests they begin repairing their friendship; Bronwyn accepts his invitation to a movie, and smiles rapturously for the first time in months.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Simon Kelleher – The self-proclaimed “omniscient narrator” of Bayview High’s rumor mill, Simon Kelleher runs a ubiquitous but reviled gossip app called **About That** which aggregates the juiciest gossip on campus. Though Simon’s reports are daily, they are almost never inaccurate. He uses his fellow students’ initials so as to avoid being accused outright of libel or harassment, but because the school community is so tight-knit, it’s always obvious who the gossip is about. Simon is dead by the end of the first chapter after supposedly suffering an allergic reaction while being held in detention for having a **cell phone** in his bag during Mr. Avery’s class. The four students who were in detention with him—Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy, and Nate—are immediately singled out as suspects. As the novel progresses, the “Bayview Four” struggle individually and ultimately collectively to prove their innocence, weaving together the many disparate threads of Simon’s story until they uncover the truth: the depressed Simon, who hated his life and everything in it, decided to kill himself and vengefully frame four more popular, more intelligent, more successful students for his murder. Simon had been spending a lot of time working his way down dark wormholes on the internet, and longed to create an event that would have an impact of a mass-shooting but signal originality and inspire imitators for years to come. Simon plotted with his close friend Janae and Addy’s boyfriend, Jake—who wanted revenge against Addy for cheating on him—to orchestrate strategic information drops on a new gossip blog, About This, and a year from the date of his death release his manifesto revealing his grand plan. Simon’s dark apathy, desire for acknowledgement, and sense of “aggrieved entitlement” to popularity and success ties makes him an

important character despite his physical absence from most of the book.

Bronwyn Rojas – The “brain” of the Bayview Four, Bronwyn is an overachiever with dreams of attending Yale. Her squeaky-clean image, though, is compromised when an **About This** post reveals that she cheated her way through chemistry last year—and the rumor turns out to be true. As Bronwyn is drawn deeper and deeper into the investigation of Simon’s murder, she worries that her future will be jeopardized by her past mistakes, even though she only did what she did—stealing test answers off of a teacher’s Google Drive account—in order to live up to the enormous pressure her family places on her to succeed. As the investigation continues, Bronwyn’s sister Maeve helps her to uncover information that could help exonerate not just Bronwyn but all of the Bayview Four—including Nate, with whom Bronwyn strikes up an unlikely but intense romance. Bronwyn is headstrong, opinionated, insecure, and committed to defending those she loves no matter the cost to her own image or reputation.

Nate Macauley – The “criminal” of the Bayview Four, Nate is a burnout, womanizer, and drug dealer who has earned a bad reputation for himself over the years. Nate is on probation for dealing marijuana, and rumors started on the **About This** blog suggest that Nate hasn’t learned from his past mistakes. Though Nate seems like a stereotypical druggie, it’s eventually revealed that he only turned to his illicit trade out of necessity; his mother abandoned him and his low-functioning alcoholic father years ago, and Nate has been left to pick up the pieces of his family’s shattered life. Nate’s emotional world is fraught, but he is a loving pet owner and a dedicated movie buff. As the investigation continues, Nate develops an attraction to Bronwyn—though he knows it’s dangerous to pursue her, she brings out the best in him, and he feels like with her he finally has a chance at being the person he’s always wanted to be. Nate is defensive, walled-off, and apathetic; however, beyond his carefully calculated exterior, he has a warm heart that has not yet healed from the traumas of his adolescence.

Cooper Clay – The “jock” of the Bayview Four, Cooper is a popular athlete who seems destined for greatness as a baseball player. Originally from Mississippi, Cooper is incredibly close with his tight-knit family and intensely focused on his athletic career. Cooper is kind, pure, and well-intentioned, but desperate to keep the truth about himself—the fact that he is gay and in a closeted relationship with a male underwear model—under wraps for as long as possible in order to continue impressing his conservative family and the baseball scouts who are pounding down his door to offer him scholarships. Cooper is eventually outed when an encrypted **About This** post comes to light. This traumatic ordeal threatens his social life, his friendships, and his career, but ultimately results in more sympathetic media coverage not just of Cooper but of all of the Bayview Four, who have been hounded by the press and the

authorities alike since day one despite a lack of hard evidence tying them to Simon’s death. Cooper is a force for good and truth throughout the novel from that point on, and recognizes the importance of living an authentic, open life no matter the cost.

Addy Prentiss – The “princess” of the Bayview Four, Addy is a popular and beautiful Bayview student who has been dating her equally popular and beautiful boyfriend, Jake, since their freshman year. Addy has been raised by a mother who values the physical above all else—Ms. Calloway has instilled in Addy and her sister Ashton the belief that their sole purpose in life should be to attract men who will hopefully support them financially throughout their lives. Addy has internalized this information deeply and has allowed her relationship with Jake to veer into abusive territory—Jake controls what Addy wears, where she goes, and who she’s friends with, but she barely even notices this problematic behavior until almost halfway through the novel. Once the **About This** blog releases information about Addy having cheated on Jake over the summer, Addy finds her social life crumbling to the ground. At first, she’s miserable, but soon realizes that she has been liberated from a life of entrapment and careful social graces. She takes advantage of her new lease on life and begins investigating Simon’s death with the other members of the Bayview Four, chopping off all of her hair and making friends with better, more interesting people than her shallow friends. It is Addy who eventually uncovers the horrible truth about Simon’s death—that he orchestrated the entire ordeal as a way of committing suicide while taking four of his most-hated classmates down with him. Addy is almost killed for finding out this information, but survives an attack from Jake, her ex-boyfriend, and goes on to move into a San Diego apartment with her older sister, away from her mother’s poisonous rhetoric and towards a new life lived on her own terms.

Mr. Avery – Mr. Avery is a science teacher at Bayview High who is repulsed by **social media and technology**. At the start of the novel, Simon, Addy, Cooper, Nate, and Bronwyn are all held for detention in his classroom after having been discovered with cell phones in their bags during his lab—though Addy, Cooper, Nate, and Bronwyn all insist the phones were planted in their bags, Avery’s revulsion is so intense that he will not even listen to their pleas. After Simon’s death, Avery mostly avoids being singled out as a suspect—though the intensity of his open hatred of social media, technology, and his students’ “screens” makes the Bayview Four themselves question whether Avery could have resorted to drastic measures to make his unorthodox perspective heard in an increasingly tech-obsessed world.

Jake Riordan – Jake is Addy’s boyfriend, a popular and good-looking student at Bayview High. Though from an outsider’s perspective Jake and Addy seem to have the perfect relationship, Jake is in fact demanding and controlling, and has

been systematically working to break Addy down for several years. At the end of the novel, it is revealed that Jake was working together with Simon to help bring Addy—and the rest of the Bayview Four—down, hoping to take revenge on Addy after discovering that she slept with TJ Forrester over the summer. When Addy finds out, Jake attacks and nearly kills her, but Cooper intervenes at the last minute. Jake is indicted and awaiting trial by the novel's end.

Janae – A Goth girl with few friends at Bayview. She was extremely close with Simon Kelleher before his death; after he dies, she is visibly distraught, and spends much of her time crying in the bathroom at school. She befriends Addy and Bronwyn, but her skittish behavior and rapid weight loss worry them and cause them to think she might have something to do with the **About This** posts that have been cropping up. When Addy confronts Janae, she reveals that Simon killed himself and framed the Bayview Four for his murder, hoping to “take down” the people who’d hurt him or out-achieved him over the years.

Nate’s Mother / Mrs. Macauley – Nate’s mother is a bipolar addict who struggled with substance abuse and mental illness throughout Nate’s childhood before abandoning him and his father several years ago. She returns from Oregon when she hears that Nate is part of a murder investigation, having since turned her life around. She promises Nate that she is going to stick around and show up for him at long last, but he has been hurt so many times before that he’s reluctant to believe her.

Addy’s Mother / Ms. Calloway – Addy’s mother is a self-absorbed, vain, materialistic woman who has been married several times and is now dating a man half her age. She believes that the only way for women to succeed in life is to make themselves attractive enough to rope in and lock down a successful man, and tries her best to impress this knowledge upon her daughters.

Mikhail Powers – A TV personality who hosts a weekly **news show** called *Mikhail Powers Investigates*. His early reports on the Bayview Four suggest they are guilty; as the investigation becomes more invasive, though, and after Cooper Clay is outed as gay, Mikhail’s reports turn defensive and suggest that the investigation is being handled poorly, to the detriment of all four students.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Maeve Rojas – Bronwyn’s younger sister and a student at Bayview High. Maeve suffered from leukemia throughout her childhood, and as a result is seen as fragile and sheltered even in her teen years; Maeve is trying as hard as she can, though, to shed this image.

TJ Forrester – A student at Bayview High. Addy slept with him the previous summer—though she had been with her boyfriend, Jake, since freshman year.

Ashton Prentiss – Addy’s older sister, who escapes her loveless

marriage and moves home shortly after Addy gets into trouble at school.

Kate – One of Bronwyn’s close friends.

Yumiko – One of Bronwyn’s close friends.

Luis – Cooper’s best friend and one of the only people at Bayview to stand by his side after he is outed in the course of the investigation.

Keely – Cooper’s girlfriend.

Leah – A Bayview student who once attempted suicide because of a piece of vile gossip spread about her via Simon’s **About That** app.

Kris – Cooper’s clandestine lover and an underwear model who eventually helps Cooper, Bronwyn, and Addy to make a large break in the case of Simon Kelleher’s murder.

Detective Wheeler – A detective working the case of Simon Kelleher’s murder.

Detective Mendoza – A detective working the case of Simon Kelleher’s murder.

Detective Chang – A detective working the case of Simon Kelleher’s murder.

Officer Budapest – A policeman who questions the Bayview Four early on in the investigation.

Officer Lopez – Nate’s probation officer.

Eli Kleinfelter – A pro-bono lawyer whom Bronwyn first sees on *Mikhail Powers Investigates*. She later convinces him to represent Nate after he’s framed for Simon’s murder.

Sam Barron – A local kid whom Simon paid to fake a car accident outside of Mr. Avery’s classroom during his detention alongside the Bayview Four in order to create a distraction and complicate the details surrounding his death.

Nonny – Cooper’s grandmother.

Robin Stafford – Bronwyn’s lawyer.

Mary – Cooper’s lawyer.

Vanessa – A popular, mean girl at school.

Olivia – A popular girl at school and one of Addy’s former best friends.

Principal Gupta The principal at the high school.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



STEREOTYPES AND UNLIKELY CONNECTIONS

At the start of the novel, Karen M. McManus introduces four characters who seem to be little more than teen-movie archetypes: there is the brain (Bronwyn), the jock (Cooper), the popular princess (Addy), and the druggie burnout or “criminal” (Nate). Despite being well-aware of the stereotypes they present to the world, all of these characters are also painfully aware and sometimes even frightened of the ways in which their true selves go against the grain of the archetypal roles they’re expected to live up to. As each character’s journey of self-discovery and search for truth gets underway, they begin forming connections with one another, shattering the stereotypes that have been thrust upon them and helping one another to do the same. Through her characters’ unlikely connections, McManus ultimately argues that nothing is ever quite as it seems, and that even the most straightforward-seeming individuals and situations contain hidden depths.

The first half of the novel is dedicated to establishing the stereotypes McManus’s characters inhabit—and dismantling them bit by bit. The catalyst for all the revelations about the ways in which each of the “Bayview Four” subvert the high school stereotypes thrust upon them is Simon Kelleher’s unpublished [About That app](#) post, which reveals a major secret about each one. Bronwyn is a brain, but she cheated her way to perfection; Cooper is a jock, but has been carrying on a clandestine love affair with a male model in between baseball games; Addy is a mega-popular girl dating the hottest guy in school, but their relationship is deeply problematic; Nate deals drugs, but only does so as a way to provide a meager income for himself and his deadbeat alcoholic father whose unemployment checks can’t cover the bills. As the stereotypes surrounding each of her characters come crashing down, McManus employs the use of nearly constantly shifting first-person points of view in order to explore how her characters feel about the changing landscape of their social and emotional worlds. Cooper reflects on how he has endured “years of conditioning” which have caused him to deny his own feelings and place others’ comfort first; Bronwyn is forced to confront how other people’s perception of her as a perfect student drove her to take desperate, unethical measures in order to preserve her false image; Addy begins to learn what it’s like on the other side of the social divide, the side she feared so much that she lingered in a socially advantageous but emotionally destructive relationship to avoid; Nate has to examine the emotional defense mechanisms he has built up in order to stave off the feelings of rejection, trauma, and isolation caused by his mother’s abandonment and his father’s alcoholism.

After dismantling the stereotypes about all of her major characters, McManus spends the second chunk of the novel exploring how they each begin looking past what they thought

they knew about one another and band together to solve the mystery that threatens to topple each of their lives—who killed Simon, and why—even as they fall prey to continuing to believe the harmful things society has told them about themselves. Unlikely friendships—and romances—begin to form between several of the major characters as they get to know one another for who they really are. Nate and Bronwyn begin a clandestine romantic relationship, and their connection deepens even as experts and officials connected to the case warn each of the Bayview Four to minimize interactions with one another to avoid heightening the public’s suspicions about their involvement in Simon’s death. Rejected by her popular friends once the truth about her having slept with another classmate, TJ, comes to light, Addy befriends Bronwyn and even Simon’s best friend, Janae. Even Addy’s materialistic sister, Ashton, escapes her dead-end marriage and strikes up a romance with the brainy and justice-oriented Eli Kleinfelter, a pro-bono lawyer who assists the Bayview Four. McManus creates and strengthens these unlikely connections between her characters to show how giving into and perpetuating stereotypes often isolates people from one another and locks them into choices and paths that are actually detrimental to them—just because they believe it’s what’s expected of them based on who others think they are. As she delves into her characters’ complicated cores, McManus mines the tense gulf between who these characters think they should be and who they *want* to be in order to explore how stereotypes hinder meaningful but unlikely connections between people.

Towards the novel’s end, several characters are still struggling to reconcile the things they’ve learned about themselves—and each other—over the course of all that has happened to them. Nate, who was framed for Simon’s murder and placed in juvenile hall, has been exonerated and lifted up as a hero. However, after so many years of leaning into other people’s perception of him as a delinquent, he has trouble seeing himself in this new light. He begins intentionally pushing Bronwyn away, “disappointing her right on schedule.” Although rejecting the new idea of who he could be, and who he has perhaps been all along, hurts him, it is the only thing in all the chaos that “makes sense” to him. Meanwhile, Addy is in a state of mild post-traumatic shock after being assaulted by her ex-boyfriend Jake; he lashed out when Janae revealed to Addy that Jake was responsible for the cruel About This posts in the wake of Simon’s death. Addy has mostly recovered from the grave skull fracture Jake inflicted on her, but the heavy “emotional stuff” she’s dealing with is still settling in. Addy struggles to come to terms with the fact that the stereotypes she believed about Jake are all falling down. Jake, the golden boy of Bayview, turned out to be a controlling, vengeful misogynist who nursed a dark desire for violence beneath a sunny exterior. The high school stereotypes that have informed Addy’s academic and social experience have crumbled all around her, and she is left literally dizzy in the rubble of all she thought she knew.

As the novel unfolds, the characters within it untangle the webs of all they've been conditioned to believe about themselves and one another. As they do so, the connections they form with one another allow them to begin breaking down those stereotypes. Through her characters' unlikely but profound connections, McManus shows how stereotypes stand in the way of meaningful relationships—and argues that the only way to create those bonds is to look past the harmful labels standing in their way.



GOSSIP, SECRETS, AND LIES

From the novel's very first page, Karen M. McManus establishes that the world of Bayview High is ruled by a volatile network of gossip,

secrets, and lies. The novel's title is deceiving—it's not just one of the protagonists, but all four, who are lying to each other and often to themselves. Over the course of the novel, McManus puts her characters on separate but connected paths: away from lives lived in fear of their secrets being exposed, and towards lives lived in the light of the truth. Through her exploration of the economy of gossip and subterfuge that rules Bayview—and how her four protagonists manage to subvert and overcome it—McManus ultimately argues that communities ruled by truth, openness, and transparency are infinitely stronger than those united by cruelty, fear, and deceit.

Simon Kelleher, a Bayview High student who runs a popular gossip blog called **About That**, describes the blog—a source of fascination but also of fear and dread for the student body—as a “public service.” Simon, who knows that the people at his school will always “lie and cheat,” has seized upon the emotionally and socially fraught world of high school. Through his blog, he has helped to foster an environment—and an economy—in which gossip is both manna and poison; everyone reads the app voraciously and believes it unequivocally, but everyone is terrified of winding up in one of its posts. Simon is both hated and revered at Bayview; Cooper Clay admits in the novel's early pages that Simon has the power to turn the tides of the social stratosphere at Bayview based on what he writes on his app, and has destroyed friendships and relationships throughout the student body because of gossip he's spread and secrets he's revealed. Cooper himself is “freaked” at the thought of what Simon could do to him using the app. Simon—a powerful, fearsome figure in the novel's first few pages—is quickly dispatched when he dies early on due to a supposed allergic reaction. The suspicious circumstances surrounding Simon's death quickly lead to a murder investigation in which Cooper, Addy, Bronwyn, and Nate—the four students who were in detention with him at the time of his death—are prime suspects. The students' guilt is presupposed even more when it is revealed that Simon had queued up an About That post featuring explosive secrets about each of them. Bayview High is a place where gossip is powerful enough, even in the eyes of

outside investigators, to derail someone's life—to the point that they'd consider murder a welcome alternative to having their secrets revealed and leveled against them. In establishing the extremely high stakes of life at Bayview, McManus elevates the atmosphere of uncertainty within the novel and suggests that cruel gossip and the revelation of peoples' darkest secrets is actually so traumatic that it drives people to commit heinous acts. As the novel progresses, the ways in which this suggestion is true will come to light—though none of her characters are murderers, they have all organized their lives around ferociously guarding their secrets and attempting to inure themselves against the gossip that hounds their classmates.

Once everyone's worst fear has been realized—their secrets have been dragged out into the open—the secrets themselves are revealed to be far less destructive than the atmosphere of oppression and intimidation that made the secrets seem like such valuable currency in the first place. Bronwyn owns up to and apologizes for her cheating scandal, and as a result receives a missive on Twitter from her dream school, Yale, stating that they're looking forward to receiving her application; Cooper, who is outed, struggles for a while with his father's confusion and disappointment at the revelation of his son's homosexuality but eventually receives more offers than ever from top college baseball teams around the country (and is able to openly date his partner, Kris); Addy fears she has been turned into a pariah because of the revelation that she cheated on her long-term boyfriend, Jake, but the resulting breakup actually removes her from a dangerous and controlling situation; Nate, who has in fact been violating his parole by selling drugs, is at last given the motivation to stop leading such a shady life when the whole fracas throws him and Bronwyn together, and he longs to improve himself in order to be with her. Though Simon posthumously retains his hold on Bayview through About This, a blog secretly being run by Jake in order to stoke the flames of the investigation, the divisions that seeped into the student body under Simon's “reign” slowly begin to dissolve as the Bayview Four look past their own failures (and each other's) and work together to pursue the larger truth—the truth of what happened to Simon, and of how he came to rule their school in the first place.

In the end, McManus's characters have had all of their deepest and darkest secrets dragged out into the light—even if many of the revelations happened against their will. Though the exposition of their most painful secrets has been a taxing ordeal, McManus shows that her characters are stronger in the end now that their secrets are out in the open, and no one can use those secrets to manipulate them or to try and strike fear or shame into their hearts. The friendships and connections the four of them have formed have forever changed not just their own lives, but the lives of their larger school community—which has witnessed firsthand how destructive secrets, gossip, and lies truly are.



WISDOM OF THE YOUTH

One of Us Is Lying is largely set at Bayview High, and its four major “point-of-view” characters are all students there. Though young and seemingly naïve,

having been raised in an idyllic Southern California town, the four main characters prove over the course of the novel that they are more savvy, passionate, and well-adjusted than many of the adults in their lives. As the novel’s young protagonists work together to solve the mysterious web of lies they’ve all been caught up in, McManus argues that it is often children and young adults rather than their parents, teachers, or elders who have the wisdom and the wherewithal to change their lives—and even the world.

The adult characters throughout the novel are detached from their children, often backwards in their thinking about gender roles and social justice, and quick to judge. By creating a set of adult characters whose thinking is seriously flawed—and whose opinions and snap judgements often directly threaten the well-being of the younger characters—McManus establishes a counterintuitive, subversive thesis: adults are often more self-obsessed and out of touch than the children they so easily indict for the same reasons. Bronwyn’s parents are so focused on making sure their children’s choices and trajectories reflect well on themselves that they ignore whether or not their children are actually happy. Bronwyn is crumbling under an inordinate amount of pressure to thrive in her academics and her extracurricular activities, and it nearly costs her everything. Meanwhile, her sister Maeve, who suffered from leukemia as a child, has been so caged-in by the pity of others that she attempts to break the mold and prove that she’s a normal kid in ways that are often dangerous, such as getting drunk at parties and developing a startling proficiency as a **hacker**. The Bayview Four’s lawyers are also more concerned with their clients’ appearances than their actual well-being. Bronwyn, Cooper, and Addy are all instructed to avoid one another, and Nate as well, for fear of raising suspicion. Because the four are kept apart for so much of the novel by the trusted adult forces in their lives, their ability to band together and focus on their common goal of solving the mystery surrounding Simon’s death once and for all is delayed and hindered.

Another adult character whose advice is seriously flawed is Addy’s mother, Ms. Calloway. A stereotypical California mom who clings to her youth, plumping her lips through plastic surgery and dyeing her hair to match her daughters’, Ms. Calloway is alone in life and yet fiercely believes that the only way to find stability and success is on the coattails of a man. She brazenly tries to impress this knowledge upon Addy and Ashton, and is blind to the ways in which her harmful advice has landed both her daughters in unhappy—and in Addy’s case, even dangerous—relationships. Addy puts up with her mother telling her that she isn’t “college material,” and Bayview is the only place she’ll ever find “a decent boy with a good future” who

can take care of her. She internalizes this rhetoric to the point of sacrificing her own happiness to be with Jake because she believes that being unhappy with a boy is better than being happy and single. McManus uses Ms. Calloway as the most obvious symbol of the ways in which the adults in the novel are failing the children within it. Addy and her other peers eventually realize that the only way to get to the truth is to ignore the harmful influence of the ill-informed adults who have underestimated them at every turn and try to make some change themselves.

When the Bayview Four at last start collaborating—away from the watchful eyes of their parents, lawyers, and teachers—they eventually make important connections between the seemingly disparate events surrounding Simon’s death and track the story to its source. They crack the case without help from any adults—and in doing so, save themselves. McManus contrasts the resilience, wit, passion, and deep inner lives of her young protagonists against the incompetence, judgement, and ruthlessness of the adults who rule their lives in order to demonstrate how powerful children and young adults can be—and how despite all of the prejudice and stereotyping millennials face, they have the ability to change the world around them.



MILLENNIAL PROBLEMS

One of Us Is Lying is set in a contemporary high school in Southern California. The students who attend Bayview High are millennials—a generation facing down a unique set of problems both serious and shallow, ranging from entitlement issues to financial uncertainty to **social media** addiction. Through each of the four major characters in the novel—Bronwyn, Addy, Nate, and Cooper—as well as the absent but “omniscient” Simon, author Karen M. McManus suggests that the insidious and often-dismissed or overlooked problems millennials face actually have the power to derail young peoples’ lives.

McManus focuses on a few major, stereotypically “millennial” problems throughout the novel: entitlement, social media addiction, and financial instability. Feelings of entitlement are a major problem for many millennials, who feel that the dreamy lives of wealth, luxury, and ease peddled to them by entertainment, media, and advertisements should be as easily attained as an Amazon order. For Simon, his feelings of entitlement—to popularity, adoration, and control over others—are ultimately his downfall. Once it is revealed that Simon orchestrated his own death as a way of getting back at “everyone who made him miserable” and bring down the “lemmings” he attended school with and hated so deeply, Bronwyn reflects on what the media has been calling Simon’s “aggrieved entitlement”: the belief he was owed something he didn’t get, and [that] everyone should pay because of it.” The idea that Simon, as the arbiter of Bayview High’s rumor mill, felt

he was owed respect, deference, or even a place in the school's highest social tiers, reflects a distinctly millennial form of entitlement; entitlement not necessarily to material wealth but to social clout and power, and to the status of "influencer" he felt he should possess.

The second major millennial issue the novel addresses is social media addiction. The novel opens with five students in detention for possessing a cell phone during Mr. Avery's lab. Avery, a stickler for cell phones and other "screens," has a deep-rooted hatred of social media that reads more as revulsion than disdain. Though he takes an extreme approach to trying to curb his students' screen time, his indictment of all Bayview students as being overly obsessed with social media isn't wrong. Throughout the novel, the characters' obsessions with invented social media platforms (such as Simon's About That app) overlaps with McManus's invocation of real life internet "black holes"—Facebook, 4chan, and Instagram are just a few of the sites and platforms that have consumed several of the novel's characters. As the Bayview Four come under greater scrutiny, their lives become even further threatened by the influence of social media; even as popular news shows cast doubt upon their innocence and suggest that they may have colluded to murder Simon, "fan pages" spring up on Facebook for Cooper and for Nate, and Bronwyn and Addy struggle with whether they should make their social accounts private or bask in the unfiltered, invasive national attention.

It's commonly predicted that millennials will be the first generation who won't do better financially than the generation that came before them—millennials disproportionately stare down student loan debt, low-paying jobs, and an unstable economic climate in which wealth is hoarded by a lucky few, while the majority of the nation struggles just to pay the bills. In light of this serious crisis, which is often reframed to shame or indict millennials for spending money on comfort, "self-care," and frivolities (like the contentious but ubiquitous millennial symbol, avocado toast), McManus chooses to use *One of Us Is Lying* to highlight the very real financial difficulties that contribute to millennial angst and anxiety alike. Nate is the most primary example of this financial struggle in the novel. Though many of his peers at Bayview are well-off, Nate is hiding a very grim financial situation: his mother, struggling with bipolar disorder and addiction, abandoned his family years ago. Nate has been left alone in a crumbling house with his alcoholic father, whose addiction is so bad that hasn't been able to function, let alone hold a job, for years. Nate can't even think of paying the bills that are racking up day by day—he is focused solely on survival, and because his father's unemployment checks simply don't cut it, he has taken up drug-dealing in order to supplement his household's meager income. Nate is stereotyped early on as a "criminal," but his dealings in marijuana and narcotics are a survival mechanism. Another set of characters struggling with financial stability are Addy, her

sister Ashton, and their mother, Ms. Calloway. Addy and Ashton have been told all their lives that they need to find and lock down a man whom they can depend upon for financial stability—their mother has impressed upon them that their beauty and sexual availability is of the utmost importance, and the only way they can hope to snag a husband. Ashton, who is a few years older than Addy, is stuck in an unhappy marriage with someone who looks great "on paper" but in reality treats her poorly. Addy who began dating at fourteen, just like her mother, is similarly stuck in a relationship with a boy who doesn't make her happy but whose social capital is alluring and promises if not financial stability then at least social stability. As the novel progresses, Addy and Ashton find their way out of these stifling relationships, and choose to ignore their mother's advice and instead lean on one another for support. In the end, Ashton rents an apartment in San Diego and offers Addy the chance to move in with her—though she predicts that things will be financially tight for them, they'll at least be out of their mother's house, and away from the oppressive ideal that they need a man's support in order to thrive.

If "millennial problems" seem absurd and maddening, it's because they are; never before have the shallow-seeming but all too real pressures of curating both public and private identities collided so confusingly with the very real issues of egomania, financial failure, and resulting depression and anxiety. Karen M. McManus uses *One of Us Is Lying* as a platform for showcasing and dissecting these issues, exploring how millennials live in a world that is increasingly focused on proving one's worth through constructed identities while, behind the curtain, serious emotional, financial, and societal problems threaten to derail the livelihoods—and lives—of an entire generation.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



SOCIAL MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Throughout the novel, social media, cell phones, computers, and other forms of technology represent the double-edged sword of connection in the contemporary digital age. From the novel's very first page, social media is used as a weapon, a tool of intimidation, and a method of control throughout Bayview High thanks to Simon Kelleher's ruthless yet reliable gossip app, About That. After Simon's death—which, despite its mysterious circumstances, seems intimately connected to his role as the primary gossipmonger throughout the Bayview community—many students expect that life at Bayview will return to "normal"; however, when blog posts written from the perspective of

Simon's "murderer" begin cropping up on About This, it becomes clear that the gossip-hungry, social media-saturated atmosphere throughout the school is inescapable.

As the novel unfolds, characters use technology as a means of connecting with one another, often intimately, despite the painful role social media and its attendant modes of access have had in many of their lives; Nate and Bronwyn, desperate to get to know one another better but forbidden from being seen together for fear of arousing suspicion of collusion, use burner phones to communicate with one another and fall asleep on the phone together each night. Meanwhile, Cooper Clay's cell phone is his only way of communicating with his lover Kris—though their communication renders his phone a liability, and when characters such as his girlfriend Keely interact with the object, Cooper is plunged into abject fear. Meanwhile Mr. Avery, a strict science teacher with a zero-tolerance policy for cell phones in the classroom, is at the heart of the Kelleher murder investigation because all of the students who earned detention in his classroom on the day of Simon's death had had fake cell phones planted in their backpacks; Avery is repulsed by his students' addiction to their "screens," and this calls into question whether he is so hateful of social media, cell phones, and other modes of contemporary communication that he would do something drastic to make a point of it. Throughout the novel, McManus's vastly different characters navigate the complicated webs of communication that unspool from their various devices, plunge into internet rabbit-holes on websites like 4chan in search of clues to the truth about Simon's death, and struggle with the media's perception of the events swarming through their gossip-obsessed high school. As they do so, social media, cell phones, computers, and other tools of technology emerge as symbols of the failures—and possibilities—of modern-day communication.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *One of Us Is Lying* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☞☞ A sex tape. A pregnancy scare. Two cheating scandals. And that's just this week's update. If all you knew of Bayview High was Simon Kelleher's gossip app, you'd wonder how anyone found time to go to class.

"Old news, Bronwyn," says a voice over my shoulder. "Wait till you see tomorrow's post."

Damn. I hate getting caught reading About That, especially by its creator. I lower my phone and slam my locker shut. "Whose lives are you ruining next, Simon?"

Simon falls into step beside me as I move against the flow of students heading for the exit. "It's a public service," he says with a dismissive wave. [...] "Anyway, they bring it on themselves. If people didn't lie and cheat, I'd be out of business."

Related Characters: Simon Kelleher, Bronwyn Rojas (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which contains the novel's opening lines, situates readers in the middle of the gossip-obsessed world of Bayview High. In just a few sentences, McManus foreshadows the idea that her protagonists' lives will be ruined as a result of this toxic climate of gossip, secrets, and lies; at the same time, she introduces a character who believes that his rumor-mongering is a "public service" and even a kind of justice. Simon, the creator of the About That app, believes that lying and cheating are unavoidable parts of high school life. In his eyes, he is simply parlaying his classmates' natural instincts into a kind of currency, and seems to actually rejoice in his role in perpetuating a claustrophobic, distrustful environment at his own school. Simon is anything but blind to the consequences of his actions; he is actually gleeful at the thought of being the one wearing the executioner's hood, so to speak.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ The phone almost slips out of my hand. Another text from Chad Posner came through while I was reading. *People r fucked up.*

I text back, *Where'd you get this?*

Posner writes *some rando emailed a link*, with the laughing-so-hard-I'm-crying emoji. He thinks it's somebody's idea of a sick joke. Which is what most people would think, if they hadn't spent an hour with a police officer asking ten different ways how peanut oil got into Simon Kelleher's cup. Along with three other people who looked guilty as hell.

None of them have as much experience as I do keeping a straight face when shit's falling apart around them. At least, none of them are as good at it as me.

Related Characters: Nate Macauley (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage—which comes several chapters after the death of Simon Kelleher, webmaster of the notorious gossip app About That—someone forwards Nate a link to a new gossip website. Like the app, the website is called About This, and purports to be run by Simon's murderer. Though Nate's friend clearly thinks the site is a funny hoax, Nate—who is a person of interest in Simon's death—knows that the situation he's in is anything but hilarious. Nate doesn't know who to trust, and because none of the other students who were in detention when Simon died seem to be able to hide the fact that they're each hiding something, Nate begins to worry that someone could be hiding a very dangerous secret. This atmosphere of distrust and instability is both a precursor to and a product of Simon's peculiar reign over Bayview High. Even after his death, the effects of Simon's rumormongering and gleeful outing of his classmates' most carefully guarded secrets is being carried on by someone with an equally intense penchant for chaos and bad blood.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ Four days after we're featured on the local news, the story goes national on *Mikhail Powers Investigates*. I knew it was coming, since Mikhail's producers had tried to reach my family all week. We never responded, thanks to basic common sense and also Robin's legal advice. Nate didn't either, and Addy said she and Cooper both refused to talk as well. So the show will be airing in fifteen minutes without commentary from any of the people actually involved. Unless one of us is lying. Which is always a possibility.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Cooper Clay, Addy Prentiss, Nate Macauley, Robin Stafford, Mikhail Powers

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

This passage—which contains a sly reference to the novel's title—shows the uncertainty and distrust Bronwyn feels towards the other students who were in detention with her at the time of Simon's death. She wants to believe they are going to be able to function, despite their different social backgrounds and relative indifference to one another, as a united front against the storm of gossip and scandal coming their way. However, there's no one she can quite manage to trust. Bronwyn has been conditioned—partly because of where she attends school, and what the culture of secrets and lies there is like—to never fully believe anyone; the “possibility” that someone (or everyone) has something to hide is always at the forefront of her thoughts.

●● Maeve and I are sprawled on my bed watching the minutes on my alarm clock tick by until my debut as a national disgrace. Or rather, I am, and she's combing through the 4chan links she found through Simon's admin site.

"Check this out," she says, angling her laptop toward me.

The long discussion thread covers a school shooting that happened last spring a few counties over. A sophomore boy concealed a handgun in his jacket and opened fire in the hallway after the first bell. Seven students and a teacher died before the boy turned the gun on himself, I have to read a few of the comments more than once before I realize the thread isn't condemning the boy, but celebrating him. It's a bunch of sickos cheering on what he did.

"Maeve." I burrow my head in my arms, not wanting to read any more. "What the hell is this?"

"Some forum Simon was all over a few months back."

I raise my head to stare at her. "Simon posted there? How do you know?"

"He used that AnarchiSK name from About That," Maeve replies.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas, Maeve Rojas (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Bronwyn's sister Maeve is a master hacker—proficient at all things technological and great at worming her way through obscure, complex social media trails. In this passage, Maeve links the username Simon used to run About That to his online profile on the forum 4chan—and finds that he was involved in some unsavory discussions, perhaps even glorifying mass murderers and violence. Simon's screenname, a play on the word “anarchist,” says a lot about who he thought he was when no one else was looking—someone who went against the grain, shirked popular opinion, and pursued a cause he believed in at any cost. Though Simon is not present physically for much of the novel, the digital footprint he's left will come to represent a major series of clues as the case surrounding his murder unravels—and will paint a horrifying portrait of what Simon believed about his cruel practices both on and off the web.

Chapter 17 Quotes

●● Sexism is alive and well in true-crime coverage, because Bronwyn and I aren't nearly as popular with the general public as Cooper and Nate. Especially Nate. All the tween girls posting about us on social media love him. They couldn't care less that het a convicted drug dealer, because he's got dreamy eyes.

Same goes for school. Bronwyn and I are pariahs—other than her friends, her sister, and Janae, hardly anyone talks to us. They just whisper behind our backs. But Cooper's as golden as ever. And Nate—well, it's not like Nate was ever popular, exactly. He's never seemed to care what people think, though, and he still doesn't.

Related Characters: Addy Prentiss (speaker), Janae, Nate Macauley, Cooper Clay, Bronwyn Rojas

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Addy reflects jealously on how Nate and Cooper are being shown “love” all across social media. Addy's warped idea of what it means to be revered has no doubt been influenced by the damaging culture of gossip, secrets, and lies that permeates her high school. As she and the rest of the “Bayview Four” are hounded by the press and the public alike, she feels actively jealous of the positive attention the boys are getting; there are good kinds and bad kinds of gossip, and though the line between them seems blurry, it's clear that Addy wouldn't mind being talked about so much if she were being talked about in a more forgiving light. This addiction to attention says a lot about the culture that has been fostered not just at Bayview, but in Addy's own home life—which McManus will explore in greater and increasingly unforgiving detail as the novel progresses.

Chapter 19 Quotes

☞ Another long silence descends while I try to gather my thoughts. I should be angrier, probably. I should demand proof of his trustworthiness, even though I have no idea what that would look like. I should ask lots of pointed questions designed to ferret out whatever other lies he's told me.

But the thing is, I do believe him. I won't pretend I know Nate inside and out after a few weeks, but I know what it's like to tell yourself a lie so often that it becomes the truth. I did it, and I haven't had to muddle through life almost completely on my own.

And I've never thought he had it in him to kill Simon.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Nate's Mother / Mrs. Macauley, Nate Macauley

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Bronwyn has recently learned that Nate has been lying—for years—about a major part of his life. Nate told everyone years ago that his mother died in a car crash. At the time, Bronwyn had felt a special sympathy for Nate, having lost an uncle the same way. Now, though, Bronwyn knows the truth: Nate's mother never died, but simply left him and his father while she was struggling with mental health and addiction issues. Bronwyn is disappointed in Nate, and slightly angry—but despite her emotions, she does not question whether he might be lying to her about other things. Against all odds, Bronwyn finds herself believing Nate—the class “criminal”—and still standing with him when it comes to their shared status as suspects in a murder. Bronwyn's faith in Nate is solid, and this will be important—and further tested—as the novel progresses.

Chapter 21 Quotes

☞ It's a mundane, innocuous conversation compared to yesterday's lunch, when we caught up on my police visit, Nate's mother, and the fact that Addy got called to the station separately to answer questions about the missing EpiPens again. Yesterday we were murder suspects with complicated personal lives, but today we're just being girls.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Nate's Mother / Mrs. Macauley, Nate Macauley, Addy Prentiss

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 237

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Addy and Bronwyn are blithely discussing nail polish and makeup—simple girly things. Considering what they've been going through the last several weeks, it's a welcome reprieve from their usual topics of conversation—though Bronwyn points out the oddity of how a “normal” conversation is, for them, a milestone. Addy and Bronwyn (not to mention Cooper and Nate) have been swept up in something way beyond their years and forced to answer to crimes they didn't commit. They have had to grow up, and fast, and haven't been able to indulge in normal teen behaviors. McManus wants to show the fleeting moments of normalcy her characters must now scrounge for given the ways in which their lives have become more complicated than most adults' since the start of the novel.

☞ “I'm getting what I deserve, right? That's what everybody thinks. I guess it's what Simon would've wanted. Everything out in the open for people to judge. No secrets.”
“Simon . . .” Janae's got that strangled sound to her voice again. “He's not . . . He wasn't like they said. I mean, yes, he went overboard with About That, and he wrote some awful things. But the past couple years have been rough. He tried so hard to be part of things and he never could. I don't think . . .” She stumbles over her words. “When Simon was himself, he wouldn't have wanted this for you.”

Related Characters: Janae, Addy Prentiss (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 243

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Janae helps Addy recover after a classmate trips Addy during gym class. Addy muses that she's getting what she deserves—and the kind of treatment Simon would have wanted her to get. Janae, who was closest to Simon out of anyone in school while he was alive, is forced to reckon with her dead friend's reputation for wanting to make popular kids squirm. Despite this, Janae believes that

there was a side to Simon that was the true Simon—a side that didn't want his classmates to suffer at all. This complicates both Addy's and McManus's readers' perceptions of Simon, and raises the question of who Simon truly was and what he actually wanted out of his much-reviled app—did he want to level the playing field, cause harm, or did he simply want to fit in? The truth is growing more and more obscure as the novel progresses, and competing portraits of every character emerge bit by bit—mirroring the way gossip, secrets, and lies function in real life.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☝☝ I sit with Mary in the interrogation room after Detective Chang leaves, thankful there's no two-way mirror as I bury my head in my hands. Life as I knew it is over, and pretty soon nobody will look at me the same way. I was going to tell eventually, but in a few years, maybe? When I was a star pitcher and untouchable. Not now. Not like this.

"Cooper." Mary puts a hand on my shoulder. "Your father will be wondering why we're still in here. You need to talk to him."

"I can't," I say automatically. *Cain't*.

"Your father loves you," she says quietly.

I almost laugh... He loves when I strike out the side and get attention from flashy scouts, and when my name scrolls across the bottom of ESPN. But me?

He doesn't even know me.

Related Characters: Cooper Clay (speaker), Mary

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 251-252

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, compromising information about Cooper has just come to light; one of Simon's queued-up about that post, encrypted and never shared, contains the (accurate) revelation that Cooper is having an affair with a male underwear model. Cooper's whole life is threatened by the exposure of this secret—his baseball career, his social standing, and his relationship with his father could all be brought crumbling down if this gets out. This passage serves to show the strange nature of gossip. Though Cooper has presented a carefully calculated front to his friends and family, the real him is tied to a dark secret which

threatens his life. The gulf between who Cooper truly is and who he wants to be lies within this carefully guarded secret; Simon's desire to bring everything out into the open is about to force Cooper to confront the truth of who he is, and bring everyone he'd kept himself walled-off from up to speed on his deepest secrets.

Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ [Nate] crosses to our table and dumps his backpack next to Bronwyn. She stands up, winds her arms around his neck, and kisses him like they're alone while the entire cafeteria erupts into gasps and catcalls. I stare as much as everyone else. I mean, I kind of guessed, but this is pretty public. I'm not sure if Bronwyn's trying to distract everyone from Cooper or if she couldn't help herself. Maybe both.

Either way, Cooper's effectively been forgotten. He's motionless at the entrance until I grab his arm. "Come sit. The whole murder club at one table. They can stare at all of us together."

Related Characters: Addy Prentiss (speaker), Cooper Clay, Bronwyn Rojas, Nate Macauley

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Cooper has had his worst nightmare realized—he has been outed at school after Simon's queued-up About That post is shared on the mysterious About This blog, purportedly run by Simon's murderer. Cooper's whole social life threatens to come tumbling down—but at the last minute, his unlikely new friends (the Bayview Four, or the so-called "murder club") come to his rescue to deflect attention from him and lessen the value of his secret by flooding the "market" of their school's gossip bazaar with a slew of other revelations. Nate and Bronwyn are together, and the "murder club" have formed an alliance—with so much fresh gossip, the Bayview rumor mill will be full-up with other distractions, lessening the impact of Cooper's secret.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☞ We're not getting anywhere with this conversation. But I'm struck by a couple of things as I listen to them talk. One: I like all of them more than I thought I would. Bronwyn's obviously been the biggest surprise, and *like* doesn't cover it. But Addy's turned into kind of a badass, and Cooper's not as one-dimensional as I thought.

And two: I don't think any of them did it.

Related Characters: Nate Macauley (speaker), Cooper Clay, Addy Prentiss, Bronwyn Rojas

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

As the Bayview High “murder club,” or the Bayview Four, begins meeting secretly in order to try and unravel the tangled web of secrets and lies which keeps them from the truth of what happened to Simon, Nate Macauley—a social pariah and a “criminal” at his school—finds himself surprised by how much he likes these people he’s been thrust together with due to unlikely and unpleasant circumstances. Just as Bronwyn’s trust in Nate was fortified in earlier chapters, here, Nate experiences a surge of goodwill towards his fellow “criminals.” Nate realizes that, despite the odds, they have established an atmosphere of trust and camaraderie in the face of their classmates’—and the media’s—constantly churning lies and rumors.

☞ Maeve's hand finds mine as Mikhail drops his last bombshell—a screen capture of the 4chan discussion threads, with Simon's worst posts about the Orange County school shooting highlighted:

Look, I support the notion of violently disrupting schools in theory, but this kid showed a depressing lack of imagination. I mean, it was fine, I guess. It got the job done. But it was so prosaic, Haven't we seen this a hundred times now? Kid shoots up school, shoots up sell film at eleven. Raise the stakes, for God's sake. Do something original.

A grenade, maybe. Samurai swords? Surprise me when you take out a bunch of asshole lemmings. That's all I'm asking.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Simon Kelleher, Mikhail Powers, Maeve Rojas

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Mikhail Powers—going off of Maeve’s mailed-in tips—reveals that Simon Kelleher was not the innocent victim he’s being made out to be in the press. Mikhail is outraged by the ways in which the investigation has taken a turn for the personal, resulting in Cooper being outed and the rest of the Bayview Four being dragged through the metaphorical mud. Though not the most serious journalist, Mikhail Powers has realized he has a duty to the truth. For him to perpetuate the malicious gossip and lies being spread about the Bayview Four would be to become complicit in their ordeal—this would also make him no better than Simon Kelleher, who stoked an atmosphere of fear and secrecy at his high school while privately dreaming of upping the chaos and torturing his classmates even further.

☞ I'm not sure you could call it journalism, but Mikhail Powers Investigates definitely has an impact over the next few days. Somebody starts a Change.org petition to drop the investigation that collects almost twenty thousand signatures. The MLB and local colleges get heat about whether they discriminate against gay players. The tone of the media coverage shifts, with more questions being raised about the police's handling of the case than about us. And when I return to school on Monday, people actually talk to me again. [...] Maybe my life won't ever be fully normal again, but by the end of the week I start to hope it'll be less criminal.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Mikhail Powers

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

Up until this point in the novel, the media and online coverage of the “Bayview Four” has been wholly unforgiving as every aspect of the kids’ lives have been scrutinized and laid bare for all the world to see. Once the media outs Cooper, though, putting his social and athletic worlds at risk, Mikhail Powers helps to shift the tide of public opinion by

indicating the investigators on the case for unfairly implicating four teenagers and botching the whole investigation. This passage demonstrates that the ways in which information is disseminated and engaged with has consequences—though social media and technology make every major breaking news event a spectator sport, there are real people’s lives at stake every time some scandalous story seizes the nation’s attention. As Bronwyn realizes that things are changing, she wonders—for the first time in the novel—whether things could go back to normal for her; she’d begun to feel that her life was one unending parade of media scrutiny, gossip, and lies.

Chapter 26 Quotes

☝ "I'm not looking for another boyfriend, Mom."

She stares at me like I've sprouted wings and started speaking Chinese. "Why on earth not? It's been ages since you and Jake broke up."

"I spent more than three years with Jake. I could use some downtime." I say it mostly to argue, but as soon as the words come out of my mouth I know they're true. My mother started dating when she was fourteen, like me, and hasn't stopped since. Even when it means going out with an immature man-boy who's too cowardly to bring her home to his parents.

I don't want to be that afraid to be alone.

Related Characters: Addy's Mother / Ms. Calloway, Addy Prentiss (speaker), TJ Forrester, Jake Riordan

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, McManus highlights one of the most prominently destructive adult influences in the novel—Addy's mother. Throughout the novel, McManus has been displaying the ways in which the younger characters are often wiser and more capable than their adult counterparts; in this passage, Addy, who has been struggling through a breakup with her long-term boyfriend Jake, realizes all the advice that her mother has been giving her over the years is wrong. Addy has become more and more her own person as the novel has unfolded, and as her popularity and "princess" image have been stripped away, she has gotten more in touch with who she wants to be—and has realized some uncomfortable truths about who she once thought she was. Addy is more prepared to take on the world than her own mother—and more comfortable

with herself than Ms. Calloway, it seems, ever will be.

Chapter 28 Quotes

☝ "Let's go back to what we know," Bronwyn says. Her voice is almost clinical, but her face is flushed brick red. "Simon was one of those people who thought he should be at the center of everything, but wasn't. And he was obsessed with the idea of making some kind of huge, violent splash at school. He fantasized about it all the time on those 4chan threads. What if this was his version of a school shooting? Kill himself and take a bunch of students down with him, but in an unexpected way. Like framing them for murder." She turns to her sister. "What did Simon say on 4chan, Maeve? *Do something original. Surprise me when you take out a bunch of lemming assholes.*"

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas, Cooper Clay (speaker), Maeve Rojas, Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, as the "murder club" meets at a coffee shop in order to covertly try to get to the bottom of Simon's death, Bronwyn explores Simon's psychology and begins connecting the dots between his real-life persona and his dark online life. Bronwyn realizes that if Simon really *was* seriously depressed in his final weeks—and if he'd been spending enough time online fantasizing about how to "take out" the people he hated most at school—he could have tried to prove himself through a drastic act, implicating the Bayview Four in his murder and ruining as many lives as he could as a way of proving his originality and superiority. Bronwyn, Addy, Cooper, and Nate have regularly been meeting to try and solve the case which threatens all their lives and reputations—and in this passage, their work finally outstrips the work of the reporters, investigators, and lawyers who have been fumbling in vain for an answer to the strange case of Simon Kelleher's murder.

Chapter 29 Quotes

☝ I look up from the papers. "Why?" I ask, bile rising in my throat. "How did Simon get to this point?"

"He'd been depressed for a while," Janae says, kneading the fabric of her black skirt between her hands. The stacks of studded bracelets she wears on both arms rattle with the movement. "Simon always felt like he should get a lot more respect and attention than he did, you know? But he got really bitter about it this year. He started spending all his time online with a bunch of creepers, fantasizing about getting revenge on everyone who made him miserable. It got to the point where I don't think he even knew what was real anymore. Whenever something bad happened, he blew it way out of proportion."

Related Characters: Janae, Addy Prentiss (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Addy confronts Janae—one of Simon's only friends—about what is really going on, demanding to know the truth about Simon's death. Janae, who has been visibly suffering throughout the entirety of the novel, breaks down and shows Addy what she's been hiding; she has, for weeks, been guarding Simon's handwritten manifesto, which details his desire to inflict pain and violence on the classmates who he feels have wronged him. As Janae reveals the truth behind Simon's decline into anger, misery, and entitlement, she talks about the role social media played in stoking Simon's revenge fantasies. Unable to be who he wanted to be in high school, Simon came up with an alternate persona online—and in his head—and soon fell victim to his own delusions of grandeur and issues related to entitlement and self-aggrandizement.

☝ I'm barely dragging myself forward, and the noises behind me get louder until a hand catches my arm and yanks me back. I manage to scream once more before Jake clamps his other hand over my mouth.

"You little bitch," he says hoarsely. "You brought this on yourself, you know that?"

Related Characters: Jake Riordan, Addy Prentiss (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Jake—who was involved in Simon's death and his subsequent, posthumous torture of the Bayview Four through the About This blog—chases Addy the woods after discovering her attempting to record evidence of his involvement in the whole affair. When he finally catches up to her, he physically attacks and tries to restrain her, and speaks a sentence which echoes directly some of Simon's first words, back at the beginning of the novel. Simon remarked to Bronwyn that those featured on his app brought their shame on themselves; now, Jake maliciously spits those same words at Addy, attempting to blame her for crimes and slights which are not at all her fault. This mirroring effect shows the harmful ways in which abusive, ill-intentioned people try to excuse their hateful actions and couch them in qualifiers, pawning them off on anyone else who could feasibly take the blame. Jake and Simon, though very different people, ultimately suffer from the same entitlement, cruelty, and desire for vengeance against those who have not played along with their malicious games.

Chapter 30 Quotes

☝ "Maeve, I don't care about Twitter," I say wearily. I haven't been on there since this whole mess started. Even with my profile set to private, I couldn't deal with the onslaught of opinions.

"I know. But you should see this." She hands me her phone and points to a post on my timeline from Yale University: *To err is human @BronwynRojas. We look forward to receiving your application.*

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Maeve Rojas

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

Throughout the novel, social media and technology—despite being tools meant to foster connections, bridge physical, linguistic, and intellectual gaps, and bring people together—have largely been tools of

malice and cruelty used to spread only gossip and sow discord. In this passage, situated at the very end of the novel's main story, social media is used for the first time in an earnest, well-intentioned way. As the Yale University social media account reaches out to Bronwyn in the wake of her Mikhail Powers-aired confession about cheating, Bronwyn sees that her past mistakes do not have to define her; though she has buried the secret of her transgression for so long that it became a weapon others could use against her, she has remade her biggest secret into a way to reflect on her growth as a person and build a bridge towards her future.

Epilogue: Three Months Later Quotes

☝ I think a lot about Simon and about what the media called his "aggrieved entitlement"—the belief he was owed something he didn't get, and everyone should pay because of it. It's almost impossible to understand, except by that corner of my brain that pushed me to cheat for validation I hadn't earned. I don't ever want to be that person again.

Related Characters: Bronwyn Rojas (speaker), Simon Kelleher

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 349

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, which is taken from the epilogue set three months after the events of the rest of the novel, Bronwyn reflects on what she learned from Simon's death—and from being named a prime suspect in his murder. As she looks back on all of the secrets, lies, and betrayals that led her and the rest of the Bayview Four to their shared status as murder suspects, she thinks about her own role in the whole mess. Though Simon's "aggrieved entitlement" had vicious, violent, and vengeful ends, Bronwyn had felt a kind of entitlement to the same things Simon did—success, ease, and validation. Now, Bronwyn has decided that she does not want entitlement to become a part of her personality or her motivations in life, and is trying to move forward with the understanding that life does not owe her anything; she must work hard for what she wants.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

On a Monday in late September, Bronwyn Rojas scrolls through **About That**, the gossip app featuring all the rumors and drama swirling through her Southern California school, Bayview High. Simon Kelleher, the creator of the app, comes up behind her at her locker and tells her to just wait until she sees tomorrow's post. Bronwyn, embarrassed to be caught on About That—especially by Simon of all people—closes her locker and walks down the hall, dismissively asking Simon whose life he's planning on ruining next. Simon follows her, explaining that his app is a "public service," and that the students featured on it "bring it on themselves" by lying and cheating in the first place.

Bronwyn's phone flashes an alert, reminding her that she has Mathlete practice at a local coffee shop. Bronwyn isn't going to make the meeting, though—today, she has detention. Simon does, too, and is shocked to learn that he and Bronwyn are heading down the hall towards the same destination—Mr. Avery's third-floor lab. Bronwyn insists she's been "wrongfully accused" of whatever she did as she storms into the lab, where three other students are already seated.

Nate Macauley, a drug dealer and troublemaker, taunts Bronwyn for getting detention. Cooper Clay, a jock, tosses a piece of paper his friend, a popular girl named Addy Prentiss. Bronwyn is devastated that she's stuck in detention—she wants to be at Mathletes so she can flirt with the team's newest recruit. She tries to plead her case to Mr. Avery, insisting that the **phone** he found in her backpack earlier wasn't hers. To prove it, she holds up her own phone. Bronwyn knows any student would have to be "clueless" to have a cell phone in their bag during Mr. Avery's lab—he requires students to leave their phones in their lockers during his class, and spends the first several minutes of every session checking bags. This afternoon, Bronwyn's phone was in her locker, and Avery found a dummy phone in her bag.

Addy turns around, shocked; a dummy **phone** was in her bag, too. Cooper speaks up to say that the same thing happened to him. Simon laments that someone has "punked" them all, and wonders why someone would want to trap a group of students with overwhelmingly clean school records in detention. Simon speculates that Nate rigged detention so that he could have some company, but Bronwyn thinks Nate is too lazy for such a scheme.

The first paragraphs of the novel establish the atmosphere of Bayview High: it is a place obsessed with gossip, and controlled by a resident rumor-monger who deals in people's secrets and lies. Though Simon inflicts stress, humiliation, and pain on his classmates, he sees his work as a "service," and takes pride in exposing people's darkest secrets; any collateral damage they suffer he sees as their problem, not his.



It is clear that Bronwyn, a brainy student dedicated to her extracurricular activities, is not usually—if ever—in detention. The novel is beginning on a day that is not like any other at Bayview, and it follows that the events about to unfold will be similarly singular and disorienting.



This passage serves to establish the great irony of Bayview High; though it's a place totally steeped in gossip and rumors, many of which are fueled by rampant and ubiquitous use of social media and technology, there are some teachers like Avery who have had enough. Additionally, this passage sets up one of the novel's central mysteries: it seems that someone put a fake phone in Bronwyn's bag to get her into trouble, and as readers will soon see, she is not the only victim of this questionably intentioned prank.



An atmosphere of finger-pointing and assigning blame quickly descends upon the room as the students gathered for detention try to make sense of the strange circumstances that brought them here. Whether this group will be able to overcome their judgements of one another and work together to solve this mystery will become one of the novel's most crucial plot points.



Mr. Avery tells the students he doesn't believe them and begins outlining their assignment. For the next hour, until 4:00 P.M., they'll each be tasked with writing a 500-word essay on how **technology** is ruining American high schools—by hand. Whoever doesn't complete their essay will have to return for detention again tomorrow. Bronwyn begs Mr. Avery to reconsider, as they've all clearly been the victims of a prank, but Avery just confiscates Bronwyn's real phone and sits down at his desk.

The narrative switches to Cooper's perspective. His hand cramps as he writes his essay—he can't remember the last time he wrote something by hand. Plus, he's using his right hand—though his left hand is the dominant one, his father urged him to learn how to develop strength in his right hand as well so that he didn't waste his left arm (his pitching arm) on “crap that don't matter.” Cooper has struggled for years with the pressure his father has put on him to become a great baseball star.

Simon reaches for his backpack and digs around inside, complaining that he can't find his water bottle. Mr. Avery points towards the sink at the back of the room and tells Simon to quietly get a drink from there. Simon takes a cup from a stack on the counter, fills it, and heads back to his seat with it. Once he's back, he asks Nate if he has rigged detention. Mr. Avery shushes the boys before they can argue—at that moment, there is the sound of a car crash out of one of the windows in the school parking lot. Nate gets up and goes over to one of the windows, remarking that there are never any accidents in the lot.

Bronwyn, Addy, and Cooper go over to the window as well. After a moment, Simon joins them. They all stare outside: two cars, a red one and a gray one, have collided at a right angle. Mr. Avery goes outside to make sure no one has been hurt, leaving Bronwyn in charge. Simon heads back to his desk, picks up his water glass, and leans out into the hallway, watching Mr. Avery leave. Simon points out that each student in detention today is a “teen-movie stereotype.” Cooper is the jock, Addy is the princess, Bronwyn is the brain, Nate is the criminal, and Simon is the “omniscient narrator.” Cooper thinks of Simon's widely-hated **gossip app**, and wishes Simon wouldn't publish the cruel rumors that already make the hallways of their high school hard enough. Cooper admits that he's “pretty freaked” by the idea of what Simon could write about him.

Avery's stubborn hatred of all things technological causes him to turn a blind eye to his students' pleas; he clearly doesn't trust or respect his students, and certainly doesn't take them seriously. The ways in which adults underestimate or judge teens is a central theme throughout the novel, and it starts with Avery's willful ignorance of his students' very real issues.



This passage begins to more deeply establish the inner lives of the four central characters. Though Cooper, through Bronwyn's eyes, was introduced as a stereotypical jock, the perspective switch to his point of view allows him a chance to show the ways in which his life and his thoughts are deeper and more complex than they seem at first glance.



There is a strange and almost mechanical flow to the events of detention—and Simon, who more or less runs the entire school, seems to be orchestrating the connections and conversations going on within the room. The car accident—which other students state almost never happens in the student lot—is another hint that something is afoot.



This passage further cements the idea that Simon is a deeply feared puppeteer who pulls strings throughout the school every day. Even in this scene, he seems to be in control of the atmosphere in the room, even though two far more popular students are present. Simon's cruel grip on the school gives him a kind of power that even someone as popular as Cooper cowers before, afraid of how fragile his own reputation is in the hands of someone as ruthless and petty as Simon.



Simon takes a drink of water and then frowns, saying the water tastes like crap. Cooper thinks Simon is being dramatic—but then Simon drops his cup and falls to the floor, wheezing. Bronwyn and Nate immediately rush over to Simon, and Nate realizes that Simon needs an epi-pen. Bronwyn gets up to find a teacher and call 9-1-1, grabbing her **phone** from Mr. Avery's desk and running into the hall. Cooper kneels next to Simon, whose lips are already turning blue. Nate rifles through Simon's bag, looking for his epi-pen, but can't find it.

Mr. Avery, Bronwyn, and two other teachers rush into the room, and Mr. Avery sends Cooper down the hall to the nurse's office to look for an epi-pen. Cooper runs to the office—it's empty. He quickly sees a wall-mounted box labeled EMERGENCY EPINEPHRINE, and pulls the cabinet open. There is nothing inside of it. He rifles through a storage cabinet, but can't find anything resembling a pen. Ms. Grayson, one of the teachers, enters the nurse's office and helps him check the supply cabinet. Another teacher joins them, and after a minute Ms. Grayson sends Cooper back to Mr. Avery's room. She asks him to tell the others that she and the other teacher are going to keep looking.

Cooper rushes back to Mr. Avery's room and finds that the paramedics have arrived. Three of them bring a stretcher into the room; one of the paramedics stabs Simon with a syringe while the other two lift him up onto the stretcher. Addy is standing in a corner of the room, crying. Cooper goes over to her and comforts her. The paramedics ask Mr. Avery to accompany them out of the room; he does, leaving the four students shell-shocked. Addy asks if Simon is going to be okay; Nate admits that he doesn't think he will be.

CHAPTER 2

Distressed by what she's just witnessed, Addy calls her boyfriend, Jake. When he answers, though, she begins crying too hard to talk, and Cooper takes over the phone call. He tells Jake to meet him and Addy outside—something has happened, he says. Cooper's Deep South accent is out in full swing—it becomes thicker when he's agitated or excited.

Bronwyn asks Ms. Grayson if their detention group is free to go. Ms. Grayson supposes they are; she asks the students if Simon ate anything with peanuts in it before the attack, as he's allergic to them, but they all insist he just drank a sip of water. Ms. Grayson thinks it's possible that Simon could've had a delayed reaction to something he ate at lunch, but nonetheless she picks up the cup he dropped in case one of the paramedics or "somebody" wants to take a look at it.

The events of the afternoon grow stranger—and even deadly—when Simon collapses. The fact that his epi-pen is missing (combined with all the other strange occurrences that have been observed this fateful afternoon) seems impossibly convenient—or inconvenient, depending on who's really pulling the strings.



Events continue to grow stranger and more dire as Cooper realizes that someone has taken all of the epi-pens from the nurse's office; this seems to confirm that Simon's attack is not an accident, but a premeditated act which has been carefully planned. This information doesn't even rise to the forefront of Cooper's consciousness, though, as he seems genuinely desperate to find the pens and help save Simon.



The events of the strange and fateful afternoon crescendo as the paramedics arrive; the students are alternately shell-shocked and traumatized by what they have just witnessed, and have not yet considered how bad the situation will be for each of them.



In a mystery like this, characters' reactions to pain and violence might be clues to their involvement—or lack thereof. McManus will continue toying with the truth as the novel progresses, forcing her characters to consider how everything they say, do, or feel reflects back on perceptions of their guilt or innocence.



For someone with as serious an allergy as Simon, this weakness would have been common knowledge throughout a school—especially one as gossip-oriented as Bayview.



Addy, still crying, shouts that she wants to go home. Ms. Grayson tells Cooper to help Addy home, and the two of them leave. Addy is grateful for Cooper's arm around her shoulder—he is like a brother to her. In the hallway, they run into Jake, and Addy jumps into his arms. As Jake comforts Addy, Cooper walks out of school and heads home. Addy feels sorry that she didn't do more for Cooper—he must be just as “freaked out” as she is. She knows, though, that Cooper's girlfriend, Keely, will know how to help him.

Jake drives Addy home, where Addy's mother, having already heard the news through her “mysterious but foolproof” school gossip network, is waiting out on the porch. Addy's mom greets her theatrically, begging to know what happened, but Addy doesn't feel like talking—especially with her mother's much-younger boyfriend, Justin, waiting just inside the house. Jake tells Addy's mother that he's going to take her upstairs and help her settle down—afterwards, he says, he'll come down and fill her in. Addy is always “amaze[d]” by the way Jake talks to her mother “like they're peers.”

Addy reflects on how she and her sister, Ashton, were raised. Addy's mother entered them both in beauty pageants when they were little, but they were both always the runners-up. Addy's mother has instilled in her the belief that the only way to get through life is by the side of a man who can take care of her; despite this, Addy's older sister Ashton is failing in her two-year-long marriage, and Addy's mother can't make a man “stick.”

Back in the parking lot at school, the narrative switches to Nate's perspective. Nate offers Bronwyn a ride home on his motorcycle; Bronwyn refuses, calling the bike a “deathtrap.” Nate shrugs and takes a swig from a bottle of bourbon he keeps in his jacket pocket. He offers her a sip, but she is outraged at the idea that he'd drink both on school property and before driving home. Nate admits he doesn't drink all that much, and only took the flask from his father's bar this morning. He is about to put the flask away when Bronwyn suddenly extends her hand and asks for a drink.

Nate thinks back to elementary school, when he and Bronwyn attended the same Catholic school—this was “before life went completely to hell.” Bronwyn and Nate sit together in shock, drinking from the flask and remarking on the strangeness of what has just happened. When Nate remarks that Addy was “useless” during the ordeal, Bronwyn chastises him—they have all been through a “huge trauma” together, and must support one another. Nate finds Bronwyn tiring—but at least, he thinks, she isn't boring.

Cooper and Addy were the only two people in detention who have a connection to one another outside the bounds of that room, and this passage serves to show how close they are and how tight-knit their insular, popular friend group is.



Addy's mother is a stereotypical Southern California housewife—she is just as invested in the gossip and drama swirling through Addy's life as she is in her own problems. Her desire to be close to her youthful daughter—and Addy's friends, too—shows how enviable Addy's life is even to her own family, and how pervasive the economy of popularity and gossip is in Bayview.



As Addy's point of view roves deeper and deeper into the cracks of her life, it becomes clear that the way Addy moves through the world and makes decisions has been influenced by some bad—even damaging—advice from her own mother, demonstrating how the adults in the world of this book are often untrustworthy and uninformed as to what their children and students really need.



As Nate and Bronwyn talk—and then drink—together in the school parking lot, the first of the novel's major unlikely connections begins. Nate and Bronwyn couldn't be more different—he is a druggie, she is a brain—but of course they are more than their Simon-inflicted stereotypes, and their capacity to connect with one another blossoms as they bond over what has just happened to both of them.



Nate and Bronwyn are revealed to have overlapping parts of their pasts—deepening the points of connection they share, despite the outward appearance of having absolutely nothing in common.



Bronwyn tells Nate that she's sorry to hear about his mother, who died in a car accident a little while ago. Nate doesn't want to talk about his mother, though, and redirects the conversation back to Simon's collapse. Bronwyn expresses amazement and admiration at how fast Nate came to Simon's aid, and then says she should get going. Nate offers her a ride one more time—this time, she accepts. As Nate helps her up, she stumbles, already apparently feeling the effects of the alcohol.

Bronwyn gives Nate her address—he notes that she lives in “the rich part of town.” Nate helps Bronwyn put on a helmet, and then they take off. Bronwyn squeezes Nate tightly the whole time, clearly frightened. When they arrive at Bronwyn's house, she hops off the bike, and her **phone** begins ringing. She pulls it out of her backpack and answers it—the call upsets her, and when she hangs up, she informs Nate that Simon is dead.

There is more to Nate than Bronwyn thought—though they were in class together as children, they've clearly drifted far apart since then, and perhaps have allowed the stereotypes that have been thrust upon them dictate the way they relate—or don't relate—to one another.



Bronwyn is symbolically putting her trust in Nate when she allows him to drive her home on his motorcycle—as soon as they arrive, though, the realization that Simon is dead throws everything they've just experienced into sharper relief—and makes everything more dangerous.



CHAPTER 3

The next morning, as Bronwyn sits down in homeroom, she is still having trouble absorbing the fact that Simon is dead. As the bell rings, her homeroom teacher stands up in front of the class and makes a small speech informing the class of the details of Simon's death—after suffering an allergic reaction, he was taken to the hospital where he died shortly after arrival. Almost the whole class is crying and swiping through Simon's app, **About That**, on their phones. Though Bronwyn always hated the app, she admired it slightly; despite being a gossip app, every word reported on it was always true. Bronwyn herself was never featured on the app; there was “only one thing” Simon ever would've been able to write about her, but now he will never find out what it is.

Mrs. Park tells the class that there will be a memorial service for Simon on Saturday, after a football game, and the faculty will keep students informed as to Simon's family's plans for his funeral. The bell rings and the whole class gets up to depart, but Mrs. Park asks Bronwyn to stay back; Bronwyn's friends Yumiko and Kate tell her they'll wait for her in the hall.

Simon's death throws his status at Bayview into a new light. Though his app was hated, it wasn't inaccurate; Simon clearly had his finger on the pulse of what was going on at Bayview, and knew intimately many unpleasant details from his classmates' lives. He was a controversial and not necessarily well-liked figure, but even someone like Bronwyn, who condemns rumors and gossip, could see that Simon had at least some kind of integrity in his “service.”



Though Simon wasn't well-liked while he was alive, he's certainly being mourned in death. McManus is exploring the effect death has on a community—even one like Bayview, where many people don't seem to like or trust one another.



Mrs. Park tells Bronwyn that Principal Gupta wants all of the students who were present in detention to attend special one-on-one counseling; the school is bringing in a professional, and Bronwyn will meet with them at 11:00 A.M. Bronwyn steps out into the hall, where Kate and Yumiko shield her from other students' stares as they walk down the hall towards calculus. Evan, a Mathlete Bronwyn has a crush on, approaches her in the hall and tells her that if she ever feels like talking, he's around. Though Yumiko tells Bronwyn that Evan was asking about her at Mathletes practice yesterday, Bronwyn feels nothing—she has lost all enthusiasm for her crush in the wake of what has happened.

After calculus, Bronwyn and her friends run into Nate in the hallway. He looks disheveled, as if he has just rolled out of bed. Despite his rumpled appearance, Bronwyn feels overwhelmingly attracted to Nate. She asks him whether he's been to his counseling session yet, but he doesn't know what she's talking about; he's just arrived at school even though it's after ten in the morning. The two say goodbye, and Yumiko and Kate remark on how bad—and promiscuous—Nate's reputation is. Bronwyn wishes she could tell them how carefully Nate drove her home on his motorcycle yesterday, but decides not to say anything about it.

After her next class, Bronwyn heads to her counselling session. She sits down across from her regular guidance counselor, who tells her that the special counselor will be in soon. In the meantime, he talks to her about her college application to Yale, her many extracurricular activities, and her stellar grades, but Bronwyn is unenthusiastic; she doesn't want to think about what she had to do to pull up her chemistry grades last year.

The narrative jumps forward two days, to Thursday, and switches to Cooper's point of view. In between classes, an announcement over the loudspeaker at school summons Cooper—along with Addy, Nate, and Bronwyn—to the main office. He already answered several questions from Principal Gupta about the afternoon of Simon's death a few days ago, but supposes she wants to do "another round."

Cooper joins Gupta, Addy, Bronwyn, Nate, and a police officer in Gupta's office. The policeman introduces himself as Officer Budapest, and then tells the group that Simon's autopsy results have come back—and indicate that he ingested a large amount of peanut oil shortly before his death. He asks the students about whether they saw any oil in the cup Simon took from the sink in Mr. Avery's room, but none of them recall seeing anything.

Bronwyn is so shocked and disoriented by her tangential role in what has happened to Simon that she feels disconnected from things that mattered to her just a day ago. This rapid change is part of McManus's dissection of high-school stereotypes; when emotions run as high as they do at Bayview, nobody can stay the same for long, even if others try to impress an identity upon them.



Bronwyn is changing; between what happened in detention and the connection she shared with Nate in the parking lot, she's learning to see past the harmful divisions that rule her school and examine individuals for who they truly are, not for what others have told her about them.



Bronwyn is a textbook overachiever with lofty goals for her future. This passage shows, though, that perhaps the way she has maintained her squeaky-clean image and perfect record has actually been less than admirable.



Despite the relative lack of common ground they share, Addy, Nate, Cooper, and Bronwyn are being thrown together time and time again in the wake of what has happened; soon, the divisions between them will begin to morph and dissolve, though they are all still relatively committed to playing their "roles."



The circumstances of Simon's death—already odd to begin with—are now being cast as suspicious and perhaps even malicious.



Addy remembers Simon saying something about the cell phones that had wound up in all their bags, the result of a prank. Bronwyn elaborates, explaining to Gupta and the officer that all of them found fake **cell phones** in their bags and were given detention. The officer asks if Simon might have been responsible for the prank, but Addy points out that he had a fake cell phone in his bag, too.

The officer asks if any of the students ever had trouble with Simon or his **gossip app**—Nate was the only one of them ever featured on the app, and though he admits that being gossiped about was irritating, he denies that he was very bothered by it. Officer Budapest asks if the other three ever worried about ending up on Simon's app. Cooper speaks up and says that he wasn't, but his voice doesn't sound very confident. He notices that Addy has gone pale, and Bronwyn is blushing. Nate blithely tells the officer that "everybody's got secrets."

That night at dinner, Cooper's family sit down to eat and all begin talking about Simon's death. Cooper's little brother wants to hear all the gory details, but their grandmother, Nonny, shushes him. She has lived with them ever since their family moved to California from Mississippi so that Cooper could play baseball more seriously. Cooper's father reminds him of an upcoming game he has that weekend, but Cooper can't stop thinking about how Officer Budapest asked him probing questions earlier about the missing epi-pens.

As Cooper's family cleans up after dinner, the doorbell rings—Cooper's girlfriend, Keely, is at the door, even though earlier he'd told her he was too busy to see her that evening. Keely hugs Cooper and gives him a pack of his favorite candy. Cooper's **cell phone** buzzes in his pocket—he pulls it out. Someone has texted him "Hey, handsome." He tries to hide his grin as he replies to the text (which asked if he's available that evening) that it's a "bad time." Cooper watches Keely talk excitedly with his family—he knows how beautiful and kind she is, but nonetheless texts the mystery person that he misses them.

The important fact of the cell-phone prank is a detail that many people have overlooked since the start of the novel—though it crops up again as a reminder that someone wanted all five students in that exact room at that exact time.



Nate, the rebel of the group, is willing to admit that not only was he connected to Simon's app, but he believes that all of his classmates have something to hide. This seems to be true from the expressions on everyone's faces, but the climate of gossip, secrets, and lies at Bayview has warped everyone's perceptions of how precious their private secrets are.



This passage shows how much Cooper's family has sacrificed in hopes of securing a better future for Cooper—he stands to lose it all if the investigation into Simon's death takes a sharp turn and attempts to implicate someone from detention.



This passage shows that despite his clean, all-American jock image, Cooper is also hiding something serious—and even, seemingly, living a kind of double life that undermines everything readers know to be true of his outward-facing persona.



CHAPTER 4

The narrative switches to Addy's perspective. It is Thursday evening, and Addy knows she should be doing homework before Jake stops by, but instead sits at her vanity playing with her hair. The doorbell rings, and Addy knows Jake has arrived. While he talks with Addy's mother downstairs, Addy thinks about Simon. He had few friends, and though he had a few attempts at romance—one of which involved Keely, Cooper's girlfriend—he was unattached when he died. Addy thinks Simon and Bronwyn could have been a good match—but she thinks of Bronwyn's face earlier, during Budapest's questioning, and notes how “not sad” she looked about Simon's death.

Addy and Jake lie down on the bed together; Jake tells Addy that Simon's mother called him and asked if he would be a pallbearer at Simon's funeral on Sunday. Addy remembers that Jake and Simon were friends in grade school and middle school, before Jake got into sports. Addy thinks that Simon started **About That** to impress Jake and even try and restore their friendship, but the move backfired when the gossip app started making Simon more enemies than friends; for Simon, though, being feared was even better than being liked.

Jake tells Addy that their friend group's trip to the beach tomorrow is still on. Although Addy doesn't want a kid named TJ to be invited, Jake confirms that he's going to be there. Jake and Addy begin kissing—they only started having sex a few months ago, though everyone at school thinks they've been sleeping together for years. When Jake asks if Addy wants to have sex, she hears her mother's voice in her head telling her that “if you say no too much pretty soon someone else will say yes,” and she agrees.

The narrative switches to Nate's perspective. It is still Thursday evening, and Nate is at home in the ugly, crumbling house he shares with his “half-dead” father, who is constantly drunk or passed out, living off a settlement he won when he sustained an accident at his roofing job. Nate's bipolar mother is not actually dead—that's just what he tells people. In reality, she abandoned their family years ago, and Nate now makes some money for himself by dealing weed and painkillers to supplement his father's meager income.

Addy is clearly feeling stressed about the fracas surrounding Simon's death. In this passage, she attempts to piece together the disparate threads and unlikely connections surrounding Simon's death. She knows that Simon wanted love, attention, and popularity—but judging from Bronwyn and other people's reactions to his death, he was never able to achieve those things with any of his classmates.



The unlikely connections between the novel's tangential characters continue to unfold and unravel: the idea that Simon lived his whole life in pursuit of the kind of popularity his former best friend had shows how the economy of gossip and secrets at Bayview became so pervasive and so destructive.



Addy's relationship to sex and sexuality is deeply flawed. As a result both of her mother's coaching and the toxic atmosphere at her school, she sees sex as a kind of social currency; a way of cementing her connection to Jake and thus her popularity.



As the narrative delves deeper into the reality of Nate's life, it becomes clear that he is dealing with more serious issues than any of his peers. His druggie persona is a casualty of how rough his childhood has been—and how much he has had to sacrifice and lie just to survive.



Nate checks on his beloved lizard, Stan, and then answers his phone when it beeps. A girl named Amber whom he met at a party last month has texted him to see if he wants to hook up, and he invites her to come over. Another text comes in from one of his friends, Chad—it is a link to an anonymous blog headlined “**About This.**” The blog post, written anonymously, details a mysterious individual’s motivation for killing Simon Kelleher—someone “everybody want[ed] dead.” Chad thinks the blog is a “sick joke,” but Nate, who spent an hour being questioned by a police officer alongside three people who looked “guilty as hell” earlier that afternoon, doesn’t find it so funny.

CHAPTER 5

The following evening, Bronwyn and her sister Maeve are watching Netflix. Bronwyn can’t concentrate on the show, though; she can’t stop thinking about how the **About This post** blew up earlier that day at school. Though school officials tried to track the blog’s IP address all day, Bronwyn knows that no one in their right mind would send out something like that from their own phone or computer.

Maeve begins daydreaming aloud about this time next year, when she predicts Bronwyn will be blossoming socially at Yale; Bronwyn knows that Maeve, who has struggled with leukemia most of her life and only went into remission two years ago, often lives vicariously through her. Suddenly, Maeve presses her face against the window and announces that Nate Macauley is in the driveway.

Bronwyn invites Nate inside, and he reluctantly agrees. In the kitchen, Bronwyn introduces Nate to Maeve, who remarks to Bronwyn—in Spanish, so Nate can’t understand—that Nate is cute. Nate notices a grand piano in the living room and asks who plays; Maeve answers that Bronwyn does. Nate asks Bronwyn to play something, and she half-heartedly makes her way over to the piano; she has been struggling with a difficult piece for weeks. Now, though, as she sits down to play, the music comes more easily to her, and she finds herself making her way through the piece with gusto. When she finishes, Nate exclaims that it was “the best thing [he’s] ever heard.”

The bombshell dropped at the end of this chapter—the revelation that someone is carrying on Simon’s legacy by creating an imitation blog that seeks to keep Simon’s app alive—deepens the mystery and shows just how inescapable the climate of secrets, lies, and gossip is at Bayview High.



Whereas Simon’s app was all out in the open—everyone knew that he was its creator and proprietor—someone is, for good reason, attempting to shroud the About This blog in mystery, and perhaps even weaponize it against certain people.



Bronwyn and Maeve’s relationship is extremely close, but Bronwyn sometimes worries that even her beloved sister is responsible for pigeonholing her into a stereotype or a predetermined course.



Bronwyn and Nate are continuing to surprise each other at every turn, tearing down what they thought they knew about each other and revealing their secret hobbies, thoughts, and preoccupations to each other. They are the first two characters to do so together—though Cooper and Addy privately have complicated lives, Nate and Bronwyn are doing the work of dismantling each other’s perceptions and making room for a new way of seeing one another.



Over at Addy's house that same Friday evening, Officer Budapest is in her living room, flirting with Addy's mother. He diverts his attention away from Addy's mother to ask Addy a few "follow-up" questions—Addy knows that today at school, Mr. Avery's classroom was blocked off with yellow tape, and policemen were going in and out all day. Budapest says he has a specific question for Addy. The day of Simon's death, she was in the nurse's office earlier that afternoon, according to the log. At first, she claims to not remember being in the office, but then says she went because she had her period and needed medicine for cramps.

When Addy's sister Ashton, who is visiting for the weekend, speaks up and asks why Budapest is asking about Addy's visit to the nurse, Budapest reveals that the police are looking into why there were no epi-pens in the nurse's office during Simon's attack. The nurse has said that there were pens in the office that morning, but by afternoon, they were gone. He asks Addy if she happened to notice whether the pens were in their cabinet. Addy feels her heart beat fast as she tells Budapest she doesn't even know what an epi-pen looks like.

Budapest leaves after a few more routine questions, giving Addy his card so that she can call him if she remembers anything else about that afternoon. Addy and Ashton head upstairs, where Ashton asks her why she was so cagey about Budapest's questions. Before Addy can answer, though, her phone rings; Ashton picks it up and tosses it to her, announcing that Jake is calling. Addy chides Ashton for looking at her phone, which is "private." Ashton asks if Addy is having problems with Jake; Addy defensively says she isn't. Downstairs, the doorbell rings; Jake has arrived to drive Addy to the beach.

Addy goes downstairs to let Jake inside; when she opens the door, TJ is with him. Jake asks if Addy minds if they give TJ a ride, too; Addy pushes down a nervous laugh forming in her throat and says she doesn't mind. Jake, looking over Addy's cozy sweat-suit outfit, urges her to go put something "cuter" on.

Addy goes upstairs and starts changing. As she picks out a sexy outfit, Ashton warns her that she'll be chilly in it, and asks if the wardrobe change is Jake's idea. Addy doesn't answer her sister, and after changing heads right back downstairs.

As Addy gears up for yet another round of questioning, she is clearly nervous, and tries to avoid answering the officer's question. Her motivation for doing so remains unclear, but what is evident is that Addy, too, has something she's trying to hide.



It becomes clear that Addy does not want any part of the officer's questioning; she shuts down his interrogations and claims to not even know what he's asking her about in the first place.



Addy's sister knows that something is up; though she's unsure of what's going on, it's clear that the way Addy handled the officer's questions was uncharacteristic of her. Ashton wants to know what's really going on in Addy's life—and seems to believe that all her problems stem from her relationship with Jake.



This passage shows that despite Addy's protestations, there is something strange about her relationship with Jake; she feels uncomfortable with him, and allows him to tell her what to do.



Ashton wants to help her sister, but Addy is resistant to anyone trying to probe the depths of her life and uncover the truth.



Addy is miserable during the entire ride to the beach; she can't stop thinking about the mistake she made just a month after she and Jake slept together for the first time, when she got "blind drunk" and slept with TJ. When they arrive at the beach, TJ takes Addy aside and tells her that things don't have to be awkward between them—he would never tell anyone their secret. Though Addy knows their encounter wasn't TJ's fault—she was the first one to kiss him—she can't bring herself to say anything. She hopes that they will be able to keep their secret. Now that **About That** is gone, Addy must admit she is awash in relief.

This passage reveals just what Addy's big secret is; she was unfaithful to her popular, seemingly perfect boyfriend—who is also seriously controlling—and is terrified of what the consequences will be to both her personal and social well-being if the secret gets out. Addy never would have wished Simon dead—probably—but here admits that the app being defunct takes at least part of the weight of her secret off her shoulders.



CHAPTER 6

Saturday afternoon, Cooper finds himself feeling distracted during his baseball game. He gathers himself, focuses, and begins to pitch well—this is an invitation-only showcase game, and the stakes are high. After the game, a scout for the San Diego Padres approaches Cooper and tells him to keep up the good work. Right after leaving the stadium, Cooper's father drives him and his teammate Luis over to Bayview High, where Simon's memorial service is being held. Cooper wishes he didn't have to go, but knows that since he was one of the last people to see Simon alive, it would look bad if he didn't attend.

Cooper's baseball career is blossoming, even as his life at school is thrown under more and more scrutiny. He longs to move on, but the grasp his high school—and all the drama that goes on there—have on him is undeniable, and he feels himself being pulled into situations against his will.



On his way to find Keely and his friends, Cooper runs into Leah—a girl who tried to kill herself last year after Simon made a post about her sleeping around, which led to her being harassed for several months. Cooper is surprised to see Leah, and asks if she's headed to the field for the service, but Leah remarks that Simon's death is a "good riddance." She asks Cooper and Luis if they've seen the latest **About This** blog update; when they admit they haven't, she shows it to them on her phone. The post describes how the murderer regretted killing Simon by slipping peanut oil into his drink, but couldn't stop the plan once it was put in motion—after all, they'd taken his epi-pen, and every spare one in the nurse's office.

This passage shows that there are people other than Addy whose lives were emotionally or literally threatened by the existence of About That. In a whodunit novel like this, there are always new characters who are thrust into the light of suspicion; Leah, who openly hates Simon as a result of what he did to her, seems to be celebrating the idea that someone killed Simon and ended his reign over Bayview once and for all.



The post upsets Cooper; it seems to him like it was written by one of the students who was in the room at the time of Simon's death. Cooper bids Leah goodbye and heads for the football field, but as Principal Gupta begins leading the memorial service, Cooper can barely think about Simon, and instead anxiously cycles between thoughts of the blog post, Leah, and the Padres scout.

Cooper is distressed by the idea that someone in detention with him is hiding something potentially dangerous. He wants to focus on his friends and his athletic accomplishments, but feels as if Simon's death and everything surrounding it is taking over his life and his mind.



Sunday afternoon, Nate has a home visit from his probation officer, Officer Lopez. She asks Nate how school's going, and reminds him that he was lucky to get probation for a drug offense—keeping up with school and staying out of trouble is the only way to make sure that her reports to the judge keep Nate from having to go back to court. Lopez asks how Nate is doing as regards Simon's death, and suggests he attend the funeral later in the afternoon. When Nate seems reluctant to go, Lopez tells him that he has no choice, and offers to accompany him.

Nate's probation officer wants to keep him on the right track. She knows that on top of all the other stress he's facing, Nate's tangential relationship to Simon's death threatens to derail his life even further; she realizes that as a kid with a bad reputation, Nate could potentially face the fall based on other's perceptions of him alone.



Sitting in the pews with Officer Lopez, Nate can tell that the funeral service is swarming with undercover cops who are looking carefully at Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy—and Nate himself. Simon's only friend, a weird Goth girl named Janae, reads part of the Walt Whitman poem *Song of Myself*, including the section that reads, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)." When the service is over, the pallbearers carry Simon's casket out the door, and then one of the plainclothes cops approaches Nate and asks to speak with him—alone.

The poem Janae reads at Simon's funeral seems to point directly to one of the novel's major themes; the idea that despite the stereotypes thrust on individuals, they often "contain multitudes" and "contradict [themselves]" frequently. Though Simon peddled in gossip and stereotypes, his friend Janae seems to want to either apologize to the rest of the student body on his behalf—or make the case that there was more to Simon, too, than there seemed to be.



CHAPTER 7

After the funeral, Addy is approached by a plainclothes officer who asks her to come to the police station. Addy asks if they can have their conversation at the church, but the officer insists on heading "around the corner" the station. Addy reluctantly follows Detective Wheeler to the station, and is led to the back into a small, stuffy room.

Nate isn't alone in being dragged off by the police—even the popular, princess Addy has come under scrutiny. No one is safe in this investigation; everyone, no matter how seemingly innocuous, is a suspect.



Wheeler begins the interrogation after explaining that Addy's presence is voluntary, and she can leave at any time. The detective pulls a laptop out of her messenger bag and navigates to the admin panel Simon used to manage content for his **About That app**. Addy reads the post, which alleges that Bronwyn or "BR" stole tests from a teacher's Google Drive in order to pass a class; Nate or "NM" has been dealing drugs again; Cooper or "CC" is using steroids to enhance his baseball performance; and Addy, or "AP," took an "intimate detour" with TJ over the summer.

As everyone's secrets are finally revealed, Addy understands that she is not the only one with a secret—and, by extension according to the police, a motivation for wanting Simon's app and perhaps even Simon out of the picture.



After reading the post, Addy feels like she can't breathe, afraid that her whole life is about to come crashing down; Wheeler, though, assures her that the post is unpublished, and was merely in Simon's post queue on the day he died. When Wheeler points out that the other four students mentioned in the post are the same four students who were in detention with Simon on the afternoon of his death, Addy admits it is a "weird coincidence." Wheeler points out that the only four people in the room with Simon at the time he died all had a reason to want to "keep him quiet."

Wheeler reveals her point: she tells Addy that if she was part of a group effort to kill and silence Simon, she does not share equal responsibility with whoever came up with the idea in the first place. Addy says she doesn't understand; Wheeler points out that Addy lied about being in the nurse's office earlier that day. Addy insists she just forgot, but privately thinks that if she is made to take a lie detector test, she'll never pass.

As Wheeler goes on and on about how much pressure **social media** adds to kids' lives, Addy remembers that she does not have to answer any questions or admit to anything. Addy stands up and says that she's going to leave. Wheeler warns Addy that the help she can give her now "won't be the same" if Addy leaves the room. Addy replies that she doesn't need Wheeler's help, and then goes. Outside, she sits on a bench, wondering what to do and who to call. Knowing she can't talk to Jake, she dials Ashton, and tells her that she needs her help.

The narrative switches to Cooper's perspective; he has also been confronted by an officer, Detective Chang, who similarly shows him Simon's unpublished **About That** post. When Cooper sees the allegations of his steroid use, his pulse slows down; it is "not what [he] expected" to be revealed about him. Chang takes the same approach with Cooper that Wheeler did with Addy, implying that the four worked together to bring Simon down. Cooper, though, denies everything; the idea is "so stupid it wouldn't even make a good movie."

Chang brings up the dummy **cell phones**, and Cooper states that he still doesn't know who was responsible for those or why. He suggests to the officer that maybe the four of them were framed, but Chang seems unconvinced; he tells Cooper that the "focus" of the investigation is unlikely to move away from the four of them. Cooper says he wants to call his father, and Chang gives him leave to do so; on the phone, Cooper's father instructs him to come home and not to answer any more questions without a lawyer.

Addy feels grateful that the post has not been made public—but she is not off the hook yet. The police know how important reputations and public perceptions are at Bayview, and understand that the students there would do almost anything to protect how others see them.



Though it doesn't seem like Addy is a killer, she certainly has something to hide—she admits to herself that there is more going on than meets the eye, but is not willing to share her innermost thoughts with the detective for fear of seeming guilty.



The detective is clearly trying to pressure Addy into divulging more information—but Addy, scared out of her wits, doesn't have time for the detective's speech about how hard things are for kids of Addy's generation and how much "pressure" there is to conform and seem normal.



Cooper is surprised and relieved by what the About That post says about him, showing that he clearly still has something he's hiding. He is disdainful of the detective's idea that the four worked together; in comparing the idea to a bad movie, Cooper shows that he realizes the detectives, too, are dealing in stereotypes and clichés.



Despite all of the four students' insistence that they were framed—or at least thrown together in order to appear more suspicious—none of the adults will listen, and instead impose their own theories, rather threateningly, on the kids.



Detective Chang warns Cooper before he leaves that the other three are elsewhere in the building, talking to other officers; the one of them who agrees to “work with” the investigative team will be treated “very differently” from the others. Chang wants Cooper to “have that chance.” Cooper wants to tell the Detective that he’s got things wrong, but remembers his father instructing him not to say another word; he thanks Chang for his time, and leaves.

Chang tries to play to Cooper’s desire to be favored and exceptional by offering him if not immunity then at least special treatment, but Cooper knows that he hasn’t done anything wrong, and refuses to take the bait.



CHAPTER 8

Bronwyn, too, is approached after the service by a detective; her parents are with her, though, and do not allow her to answer any questions. Though Bronwyn is relieved that her parents were able to help her, she is embarrassed that they now know what she’s done—or at least the rumor about it. On the drive home from the service, Bronwyn’s mother angrily remarks how absurd it is that the officers think Bronwyn would hurt someone over a lie. Bronwyn speaks up and admits the post was not a lie—she confesses that she did cheat by stealing chemistry tests off her teacher’s **Google Drive** when she used a computer in the lab right after him, and then used them to get perfect scores in chemistry all of junior year.

Throughout the novel, technology—which should be a tool for connection and edification—is repeatedly shown to be a way in which people can lie, cheat, and steal with near-impunity. When Bronwyn reveals that the About That post is true—she did cheat, and she did use technology meant for connection to do so—it becomes clear that even those who appear squeaky-clean and innocent have dark impulses and things to hide.



Bronwyn’s parents are infuriated with her for cheating—and are especially concerned that Bronwyn now looks like she has a motive. She insists she didn’t do anything to Simon, but her mother says that if it comes out that Simon was telling the truth, things could get “very messy.” Bronwyn privately wonders why Simon wouldn’t have “pounced” on the information he had about her right away—and whether the information in the post about everyone else is true, too. As they pull into the driveway, Bronwyn’s parents ask her if there is anything else she hasn’t told them; Bronwyn says there isn’t, but this is also a lie.

Though Bronwyn thinks that her word should be enough, her parents know what a dangerous situation she’s in. She appears to be a goody-goody, but actually did something devious and uncharacteristic; if anyone finds out, it could follow that Bronwyn engaged in similarly dark and out-of-character behaviors throughout her school career. Even after her secret is out in the open, Bronwyn privately reveals she’s still hiding something, showing just how deep everyone’s inner lives go.



The narrative switches to Nate’s perspective as he endures a tense ride home with Officer Lopez after the service. Nate is relieved that he cleared all of the drugs out of his house since he knew Lopez was stopping by; otherwise, the officers (who told him they had obtained a warrant to search his house) would be able to arrest him.

The rumors about Nate it turns out, were true as well; he has been dealing drugs again, and has only narrowly escaped being discovered. Of course, Nate’s motivations for engaging in criminal activities are complex—but the law does not see that, nor does his strict probation officer.



Officer Lopez now warns Nate that going forward, if he deals drugs in any way, shape, or form, she cannot help him. She tells him that out of the four suspects, Nate is the only one who is not “materially comfortable” and lucky enough to have the support of two present parents. She drops Nate off at home and tells him to call her if he needs anything during the week.

Nate’s probation officer wants to help him, but knows that her powers are limited—she can’t keep Nate out of trouble if he doesn’t do the same for himself.



When Nate walks into the house, he realizes that his alcoholic father has vomited into the sink. He feels so sick of his terrible life that he “could kill somebody.” He feeds his lizard while he thinks about the police’s “interesting theory” about the group murder; he is grateful that the whole thing isn’t being pinned on just him, as he feels that Addy and Cooper would be all too happy to go along with using Nate as a scapegoat. Nate thinks, though, that Bronwyn would stick up for him.

Nate leaves the house and heads over to Bronwyn’s house, though he isn’t sure what he wants out of a visit there. Shortly after he arrives in the driveway, Bronwyn’s father comes outside and tells Nate to turn around and go home. Nate resignedly accepts that lines are being drawn—he is the outlier and the scapegoat, and there is nothing he can do about it. He backs his bike out of Bronwyn’s driveway and heads for home.

CHAPTER 9

Sunday evening, Addy arrives at the small San Diego condo her sister Ashton shares with her husband. Ashton picked Addy up from the police station, and now makes some coffee for Addy. The two sit together on the balcony and talk; Ashton implores Addy to tell Jake the truth about her dalliance with TJ, as it’s bound to get out at some point, and for him to hear it from someone else would be terrible. Addy realizes that her sister is right—after **texting** Jake to ask if she can come over, she has Ashton drive her back towards Bayview so that she can come clean once and for all.

Jake’s mom lets Addy into the house and tells her that Jake is waiting for her downstairs in the basement. She finds Jake playing X-box, excited to hear about her afternoon. Addy, though, tells Jake that she has had a “scary day,” and that the detectives think Addy, Cooper, Nate, and Bronwyn murdered Simon. She tells him about the motive—the **About That** post detailing all four students’ secrets. Addy takes a second to muster up some courage, and then reveals to Jake that she slept with TJ over the summer. Jake is furious, and though Addy insists she loves him and simply made a mistake, Jake tells her that she has ruined everything between them. He orders Addy to get out of his house, and she stumbles crying down the driveway back into Ashton’s car.

Nate’s life at home, and at school, is completely miserable and full of endless humiliations and slights. Here he reveals he has been worried about being used as a scapegoat because of his shady past; the idea that others are being considered both brings him relief and additional trepidation as he wonders how the four of them would react to such a crisis.



Nate wants to pursue his unlikely connection with Bronwyn—but with things getting more tenuous and heated, and suspicions springing up in all directions, he is going to have a difficult time fostering a connection with her and shedding his image as a delinquent.



Addy has been crushed by the weight of her terrible secret for months now. Since other people know about it now, it stands to reason that more will just keep finding out; Addy, encouraged by her sister, decides to get one step ahead of the rumor mill and take responsibility for her mistake at last. Addy doesn’t like living in a world governed by lies, and wants to own up to what she’s done and clear her name.



Though Addy believed that coming clean was the right thing to do, it’s possible that her love for Jake blinded her to his controlling, manipulative, unforgiving ways; when she confesses the truth, he reacts poorly, and shows no measure of empathy, understanding, or capacity for forgiveness. Addy realizes that her whole social life is about to come crumbling down—in the blink of an eye, she is no longer the stereotypical perfect, popular girl everyone once thought she was.



CHAPTER 10

The first morning of October is a Monday, and Bronwyn is going about her usual morning routine; what's different this morning, though, is that at 7:30 A.M., she has a meeting with her lawyer, Robin Stafford, a highly successful criminal defense attorney. Robin sits down with Bronwyn and begins giving her some advice for how to "handle school." She tells Bronwyn that the investigators probably don't think she and her classmates murdered Simon—they just wanted to shock and pressure them into revealing useful information. Robin advises Bronwyn to tell anyone who asks about the case that she's retained counsel and can't discuss it without her lawyer present; Bronwyn is overwhelmed by the new way she has to navigate her life at school.

Robin asks Bronwyn if she is friendly with any of the other students who were in detention that day, and Bronwyn says she isn't. Bronwyn's mother interjects to mention that Nate Macauley has been to the house three times in a week. Robin is intrigued by this, and asks what Bronwyn's relationship with Nate is; the question flusters Bronwyn, who doesn't even know how she feels about Nate. She tells Robin that though she doesn't know Nate very well, it's comforting for her to be around someone who's going through the same thing she is. Robin suggests Bronwyn think about "maintaining distance" from the other students—she advises Bronwyn against **texting** or emailing them, as this could give police further ammunition for their theories.

At school, there's only one person Bronwyn wants to talk to, but he's the one person she is supposed to stay away from. She spots Nate in the hallway, but he quickly ducks into a stairwell; she follows and apologizes for her father's behavior the previous night. Both of them admit that there's more they want to talk about, but Nate intuits that Bronwyn isn't supposed to talk to him. He reaches into his bag and pulls out a **flip phone**—a burner. He explains that no one but him has the number, and they can use it to communicate undetected. He warns Bronwyn not to leave it lying around, though—burner phones are tough to trace, but if the police get a warrant for her technology, they can confiscate the phone. Bronwyn knows she should drop the phone straight in the trash, but she puts it into her backpack.

This passage contrasts Bronwyn's regular morning with routine with the decidedly un-routine happenings in her 'new' life—she has to approach even a basic day at school with a full-on battle plan and a whole set of defense mechanisms for interacting with her friends and classmates. Things are very different for Bronwyn than they were just a short time ago.



In this passage, Robin explains to Bronwyn how even innocent attempts to foster new connections made in perfectly good faith can be weaponized against her by the investigators. Bronwyn has just barely begun to break out of her shell and expand her perceptions and her social circle, and is already being told that doing so may have potentially dangerous consequences not just for her but for any of the other three students from detention she chooses to engage.



Despite her lawyer's advice, Bronwyn feels herself helplessly pulled towards Nate. They conspire to find a way to connect against all odds—they use an antiquated tool of technology in order to do so, realizing how destructive, observable, and volatile more contemporary modes of communication are.



The narrative switches over to Cooper's point of view. Even though the atmosphere at school is tense, it's nowhere near as bad as things are at home, and Cooper is relieved to be there. After gym class, Cooper witnesses Jake punching TJ in the face; Cooper realizes that the part of Simon's **About That** column concerning Addy must be true. At lunch, Addy sits with Cooper, Keely, and the rest of their usual friend group, but everyone has caught on to what must have happened, and no one will talk to Addy except for Cooper.

Keely asks Cooper if she can look at a picture on his **phone** and show it to one of her other friends; they are trying to plan their Halloween costumes. Cooper reluctantly hands his phone over, but as Keely shows her friend Vanessa the picture, it starts to ring. Vanessa asks who Kris is—it's the name that has popped up on caller ID. Cooper insists it's just a guy from baseball, but Vanessa is suspicious of a guy who spells "Chris" with a K. Cooper quickly takes his phone back and insists he'll call his friend back later, then switches the topic over to Halloween.

After the last bell, Cooper is about to head home, but his coach corners him in the hallway, wanting to talk about the scholarship offers pouring in from schools all over the country for Cooper. Cooper doesn't have time to talk draft strategy, though—he has a meeting with a lawyer. On his way down the hall, Cooper runs into Mr. Avery, who is struggling with a heavy box. He offers Avery his help, but when Avery sees Cooper's **phone** in his hand, he disdainfully denies his offer. Avery condemns Cooper—and all the other students at Bayview—for being obsessed with "their screens" and their gossip, and then departs down the hall. Cooper is almost home when his phone goes off—this time, it's his mother, texting him to tell him that his grandmother, Nonny, has had a heart attack and urging him to come to the hospital.

CHAPTER 11

That night, Nate calls all of his suppliers to tell them that he's not planning on dealing drugs for a while. He tosses the **burner phone** he used to make those calls, and pulls out a new one, which he uses to call the phone he gave to Bronwyn. She picks up suspiciously, remarking on how late it is, but soon admits that she can't sleep. Bronwyn asks Nate if he remembers one of their classmate's birthday parties in the fifth grade; she believes that was the last time the two of them spoke before "all of this."

As Cooper examines the slowly shifting landscape of his social atmosphere, he realizes that while he dodged a bullet, Addy was not so lucky; she is now forced to deal with being emotionally outcast, and though Cooper does his best to keep her afloat, he realizes that the mechanisms of gossip and popularity that govern their school will soon take over.



This passage shows that Cooper is still hiding something—and what he's hiding is a personal connection with an individual it's clear he isn't supposed to be connected to. He narrowly avoids being discovered in this scene, but still feels the threat of his secrets being exposed even as he deftly changes the subject. It's clear that Cooper has had some practice in keeping this secret under wraps.



Even an innocuous offer to help Mr. Avery is met with disdain and resentment as soon as Avery sees a phone in Cooper's hand. This passage serves to imply that Avery's hatred of all things social media is perhaps not just an odd quirk or a teaching method, but perhaps a pathological or suspicious flaw. On the other hand, given how screens and social media have wrecked—and stand to further destroy—the lives of Cooper and his friends, perhaps Avery's stance isn't so far-fetched after all.



This passage is brimming with connections both broken and reestablished. Nate is literally cutting ties to significant parts of his recent past, and reforming a connection with Bronwyn—someone with whom he shares a connection that has faltered and faded, but has been thrust into their lives again by circumstances beyond their control.



There is a silence on the other end, and then Nate hears Bronwyn ask, “Did you do it?” Knowing she is referring both to the **About That** post and Simon’s murder, he replies, “Yes and no.” Bronwyn admits the same—she is guilty of the rumor Simon accused her of, but had nothing to do with his murder. Bronwyn confesses that she is afraid everyone will find out the truth about her; Nate tells her not to worry so much about what people think, but Bronwyn implies that Nate should perhaps care a little bit more about what people think of him.

Nate’s real **phone** goes off—it’s the girl he’s been hooking up with, asking if he wants to meet up, but Nate ignores the text in order to keep talking to Bronwyn, who is admitting how worried she is about disappointing her parents. Bronwyn then shares her memories of Nate’s own absent mother—Bronwyn remembers that when they were children, Nate’s mom was always nice to her, and often told her that Nate only teased Bronwyn in school because he had a crush on her. Bronwyn asks Nate now if this was true; Nate says he can’t remember. They are about to hang up when Bronwyn admits that she had a crush on Nate back in elementary school. After they say goodnight, Nate immediately texts his hookup back and invites her over.

On Wednesday morning, Addy’s older sister, Ashton, has to talk her into going to school. Addy’s mother is struggling to come up with the funds to retain a lawyer, and Addy’s absent father who lives in Chicago is not being helpful. On top of that, Jake is making Addy into a pariah at school—Ashton urges Addy not to let Jake ruin her life.

When Addy arrives at school for the day, she spots the only person on campus who looks worse than she does: Janae, Simon’s Goth friend, who has crying ever since Simon died and looks to have lost a significant amount of weight. The second person Addy runs into is Jake himself. Addy says hi to him, but he pretends she isn’t there; she asks if he’s ever planning on speaking to her again, and he replies that he isn’t. Addy makes her way to her own locker, trying not to cry, and sees that someone has written “WHORE” across the front in black marker. She runs to the nearest bathroom, ducks into a stall, sits down on the toilet, and sobs.

Bronwyn and Nate are being remarkably honest with one another. For two people who have spent years stewing in a school where the environment is so steeped in secrets and half-truths, they know how rare and important trust is—and are trying to establish a base of trust and mutual respect with one another now against all odds.



Nate and Bronwyn continue being radically honest with one another as their phone call goes on—but when Nate receives texts from a semi-regular hookup, he can’t help but continue forging ahead with that connection, too. This not only undermines the trust Nate and Bronwyn are establishing, but shows that even when people try to be as honest as they can be with one another, there are still private parts of themselves they are too ashamed to share or afraid to abandon.



Things are miserable for Addy, who has had the life she worked hard to construct and maintain for years ripped away in an instant. Everything she knew is gone, and she must rebuild herself—and her personal life—out of nothing.



Not only is Addy struggling with being part of an ongoing investigation, but now has to deal with being placed under intense scrutiny at school, too. It is all too much for her to bear—she collapses under the pressure, and decides to hide herself away rather than face down the cruel new world she’s found herself in.



Addy stays in the bathroom for two whole class periods; by the time she gathers herself together, her makeup has washed off and her face has grown puffy. She decides that she is going to cut class and go home. On her way through the hall, she runs into TJ. She confronts him and asks who he told about their sleeping together—he promises he told no one. Addy tells TJ that she’s going home—her friends have ostracized her, and will never let her sit with them at lunch again. TJ tells her that she’s welcome to sit with him anytime; Addy reluctantly smiles.

Even though Addy feels her world has been burnt to the ground, there are still people who want to make a connection with her—even if she knows that pursuing a relationship or friendship with TJ would only make matters worse.



CHAPTER 12

Thursday afternoon at lunchtime, Bronwyn notices that everyone around her is suddenly pulling out their **phones** and whispering—some of them are even staring right at her. Maeve shows Bronwyn her phone. Someone has made another blog post to About This, featuring Simon’s final About That post—the post revealing all four of the detention group’s secrets. At the bottom of the post is a note urging readers to try and “connect the dots”; it asks if someone is “pulling the strings” or if all four students are in it together.

The unthinkable happens, and all of Addy, Bronwyn, Nate, and Cooper’s secrets are thrust out into the open. It’s clear that someone wants to seriously wound these four—which makes it seem impossible that one of them is the virulent, angry blogger who’s determined to keep Simon’s legacy of rumor-mongering and secret-airing alive.



As Bronwyn’s friends Kate and Yumiko approach her to ask what’s going on, a voice over the loudspeaker summons Bronwyn, Addy, Cooper, and Nate to the main office. Bronwyn walks “like a zombie” past her staring, whispering classmates straight to Principal Gupta’s office, where she is the last to arrive. Gupta tells everyone that though she’s aware they all have legal representation, she wants her office to be a “safe space” where they can reveal anything that might help the school understand the truth behind the rumors. Cooper and Addy insist they have nothing else to say, and then Gupta is quickly called out of her office—the police are on the phone.

Things are getting out of control, and the school administration can barely keep up with the social media assaults, the press attention, and the tragedy of losing a student. Gupta wants to offer her students a chance to divulge their secrets on their own terms, but they are all so traumatized by having their secrets aired that they have nothing more to say.



Gupta leaves Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy, and Nate in her office—it is the first time the four of them have been in one room since they met with Officer Budapest last week. They discuss how “unreal” their situation is, and speculate that far more students than just the four of them had motive to kill Simon—he had been leaking people’s secrets and ruining people’s lives for years. When Principal Gupta returns, Cooper tells her that the four of them will not say anything else to her; she lets them know that her door is always open to them, but they are all already filing out.

The four students have been told to keep away from one another by their legal counsel, and remain mostly separated from one another by social standing; this is the first time they’ve been able to confront one another in private, and yet all they can discuss is how numb they are to what’s happening.



Bronwyn is anxious all day—until midnight, when Nate calls her on the **burner phone**. He has been calling her every night since Monday, divulging secrets about his painful home life or just staying on the phone with her as they watch movies simultaneously. Before they start a movie tonight, Bronwyn confesses that she wishes she could remember more about the day Simon died; she is distressed that the police have barely paid any attention to the matter of the dummy cell phones placed in everyone’s bags. Bronwyn wishes she could figure out who the murderer is herself—but she has to admit that out of the four of them she doesn’t really know anyone, even Nate.

The only person bringing Bronwyn any sense of calm or solidarity in all this is Nate. Though earlier, all four students were unable to really find any common ground other than shock, Bronwyn feels that she and Nate are connecting more deeply all the time. In the back of her mind is the fact that she still doesn’t truly know him—but she decides to explore whatever it is they’re doing in spite of that fact.



CHAPTER 13

Friday afternoon, Cooper visits Nonny in the hospital. She has had a heart attack, but a minor one, and is back to feeling like her old self again. She asks him to fill her in on the Simon Kelleher situation, and he tells her everything about the “mess” that has unfolded at school. Cooper’s grandmother comforts him and assures him that though things seem bad now, things always get worse before they get better. She insists she’s going to pay for Cooper’s legal fees out of her own savings—she is more than happy to do so.

Nonny has sacrificed a lot for Cooper to have a bright future—and even after enduring a personal trauma, she is still invested in making sure Cooper has every advantage he can. She loves and believes in him, and is more supportive of who he is than anyone else in his life.



Nonny asks how things are with Keely, and Cooper replies that she’s been acting clingy. Nonny tells him that if Keely’s not the one, that would be all right. She admits she has noticed that Cooper doesn’t seem happy with Keely, and tells him not to let himself get trapped in an unfair situation. When Nonny changes the subject and sends Cooper out into the hall to find his brother, Cooper worries that everyone will find out that there is “more to [his] story” than getting accused of steroids.

Nonny seems to know Cooper on a deeper level than anyone else; she can see the things others can’t, and wants to help him thrive even if it means choosing a path that’s different from what has been laid out for him.



Near midnight, Nate arrives home from a party. After a tense encounter with his father, who looks jaundiced and shaky and alludes to having spent the day drinking and hallucinating, Nate retreats to his room and calls Bronwyn. He half-jokingly asks her to come over and watch a movie—he can tell she is actually considering it before deciding that she’d be in too much trouble if they were found out. The two fall half-asleep watching the movie, as Nate ignores a series of texts from his frequent hookup, Amber. Bronwyn tells Nate she has to hang up, as her **burner phone** is almost out of minutes; Nate promises to get her another one tomorrow.

As Nate and Bronwyn grow closer and Nate seems to want more and more of a real connection with her, he lets his random hookup fall by the wayside. He doesn’t want to thwart his connection with Bronwyn, which offers both of them more and more comfort each day.



CHAPTER 14

On Saturday morning, Ashton is trying to come up with things for to do, but Addy is depressed—since she was 14, her weekends have been all about hanging out with Jake, and she can hardly remember what she used to do to fill her time before their relationship. Addy tells Ashton to stop “babysit[ting]” her and go home to her husband, Charlie; Ashton reveals that she caught her husband cheating on her a week ago. Addy tries to comfort her sister—even though she knows that she herself is a cheater. Ashton thanks Addy for her sympathy, but concedes that her marriage has been over for a long time, at least emotionally.

Having revealed a secret to Addy, Ashton now asks for one in return; she wants to know why Addy lied about being in the nurse’s office on the day of Simon’s death. Addy reveals that she didn’t go to the nurse’s office for herself—she went to get Tylenol for Jake, but didn’t want to say so in front of Ashton because she didn’t want her sister to judge her for being Jake’s “doormat.” Ashton tells Addy she’s not a doormat, and comforts Addy as she breaks down and cries from the stress of everything that’s happened.

Addy and Ashton rent bicycles and go out for an afternoon of cycling. Cooper texts Addy to ask if she’s attending a big party tonight, but Addy says she isn’t. Cooper tries to persuade her to come be with friends, but Addy feels surprisingly grateful not to have to go to another one of Jake’s friends’ parties and be subject to his controlling nature.

Saturday morning, Bronwyn finishes her daily run and goes to pick Maeve up from the library. Bronwyn finds her sister on the fourth floor using one of the library’s computers to access the admin panel for Simon’s original **About That app**—she is using a public computer to avoid being traced. She has discovered that there is an earlier file bearing Cooper’s name, but it’s encrypted; additionally, she has traced Simon’s username on the site to an account on the popular forum 4chan. Maeve wants to come back to the library later with a thumb drive to collect more information, and she logs out. On the way downstairs, she confesses to Bronwyn that a little while ago she ran into Simon at the library—she took his card, and, once he left, used the public computer’s search history to get the blog’s information.

On the way home, Maeve and Bronwyn stop at a neighborhood nearby—Nate has left another **burner phone** for Bronwyn in a mailbox at a random address. Maeve knows all about Bronwyn’s clandestine communication with Nate, and teases her sister for having a crush.

Addy is in a unique position for the first time in her life. She gets a fresh start—but she doesn’t quite see things that way. She is so caught up in the identity she constructed for herself that she can barely make a connection to who she once was—and yet, with the help of her sister, she begins to see that the end of a relationship isn’t necessarily the end of everything.



In this passage, Addy reveals that she was being cagey all along because she knew how bad and out of control things were with Jake—but she was afraid to fully admit it.



With the help of her sister, Addy is able to see how oppressive things were with Jake—and how lucky she is to be able to make a new start and figure out who she is independently of a man.



Maeve, who has spent a lot of her life being sick and prevented from doing things other kids do, has learned how to use technology to make her mark on the world. A master hacker, she is adept as Simon at uncovering other people’s secrets—though her hobby is a little on the dangerous side. Still, in this passage, she reveals that she has managed to uncover some information that could make a significant difference; she has used technology to her advantage in order to make an important connection for her sister.



Maeve doesn’t judge Bronwyn or try to deter her from connecting with Nate—she knows how invested Bronwyn is in Nate, and how much their relationship gives her comfort.



Saturday night, Cooper arrives at his friend Olivia's party to find that things have already gotten messy—people are puking in the rose bushes, and a drunk Jake approaches Cooper and immediately begins excoriating him for defending Addy—his “whore ex-girlfriend”—to “anybody who'll listen.” Jake reveals that when he was in junior high, his mother cheated on his father and the resulting drama tore their family apart.

At Olivia's party, Cooper uncovers some crucial information which explains—though it doesn't excuse—Jake's cruel treatment of Addy in the wake of her confession.



Cooper's friend Luis comes over and hands him a beer. He asks if Cooper is going to Simon's house tomorrow; Cooper is confused, and Luis explains that Simon's mother asked several students to come over and take something of his to remember him by before his parents pack his things away. Luis realizes that Cooper, of course, has not been invited. Olivia comes over, wrapping an arm around Luis's waist, and asks Cooper if he's seen the Sunday edition of the newspaper, which was posted online earlier that evening; there's an article all about Simon, and it includes Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy, and Nate—as “persons of interest.”

Cooper's life has changed so dramatically that he can't even attend a party with his friends and forget about the investigation for a while. Olivia's information seems to portend that things are about to get even worse for Cooper, Bronwyn, Addy, and Nate.



CHAPTER 15

When Nate gets out of school Monday morning, there are news vans parked outside—they've been waiting for the last bell to ring. His friend Chad advises him to head out the back way—the reporters have been sniffing around about Nate. Nate approaches Bronwyn and Maeve—Bronwyn is freaking out, unsure of whether she should push past the reporters or wait at school until they've all left. Nate offers to bring Bronwyn to the mall on his bike—Maeve can pick her up later. One of Bronwyn's friends warns her that things will look bad if they're caught together, but Bronwyn shrugs her off.

Nate and Bronwyn's relationship has been largely clandestine up to this point. Apart from the day he drove her home on his motorcycle and their encounter in the stairwell, they rarely allow themselves to be seen together at school. As things get more dramatic and intense, however, they decide to at last take the leap, and turn to the comfort and safety they've found in one another in public, not caring who sees.



As Nate and Bronwyn walk to the parking lot, Nate has a warm feeling inside, as if Bronwyn has “chosen” him. Nate takes them to the mall along some backroads through the woods, and when they arrive Bronwyn thanks him effusively. Nate feels unable to control his attraction to Bronwyn, and begins leaning in to kiss her when a van pulls into the spot next to them—they yank apart only to realize it's just an ordinary minivan, not a news vehicle.

Nate and Bronwyn are still afraid to take their relationship all the way public, however—they still don't know what they mean to one another, and know that being caught by the media could ignite a whole new set of problems not just for them but for Addy and Cooper, too.



Bronwyn notices that people are staring at them as they make their way through the mall. Bronwyn admits that the fact that Nate doesn't have a lawyer makes her nervous. She suggests Nate look into an organization called Until Proven—a pro bono legal group nearby. Nate is reluctant, but Bronwyn insists he can't just wait around—he'll be "railroaded." Nate harshly tells Bronwyn to mind her own business before realizing that Maeve has arrived. Nate worries that he has ruined everything, and gets up to walk away. He is nearly at the doors when Bronwyn tugs on his jacket and gives him a hug—and a kiss on the cheek. She asks Nate not to be mad at her; she can't make it through all this if she doesn't have Nate to talk to.

The narrative switches to Addy's perspective, and jumps ahead to Tuesday morning. She and Cooper were not as lucky as Nate and Bronwyn when it came to dodging the cameras, and both of them wound up on the evening news. This morning, thankfully, there aren't as many vans. In the middle of one of her classes, Addy goes to the bathroom, where she overhears another girl crying—she recognizes her as Janae from the black combat boots, and asks if she needs anything. Janae tells Addy to go away, but Addy tells Janae how sorry she is about her loss, and Janae softens, slowly opening her stall door.

Janae points out that Addy has never really spoken to her before—Addy admits that it was her boyfriend, not her, who was the popular one, and Addy herself is fairly clueless socially. Addy asks Janae if she has anyone to talk to; when Janae says she doesn't, Addy offers to listen if Janae ever needs anything. She heads back to class, but the lunch bell soon rings, signaling Addy's new least-favorite time of day. As Addy heads the cafeteria, she feels someone tug on her arm—she turns around to see Bronwyn, who asks if Addy wants to eat lunch with her, Maeve, Kate, and Yumiko. Addy agrees—it's better than hiding out in the library.

After school, there are no news vans out front. Addy rides her bike to a strip mall nearby and goes into a generic hair salon, where she asks one of the hairdressers accepting walk-ins to cut off all of her hair. The stylist suggests a less dramatic change, but Addy reaches for the scissors and lops off a chunk of her hair to above her ears, then orders the stylist to "Fix it."

Bronwyn is looking out for Nate, and wants him to guard himself against trouble. She doesn't understand, though, how indigent he is or how difficult life has been for him; they are stuck in the middle of the same problem, but the solutions available to them are vastly different. Nate is afraid to expose this part of himself to Bronwyn, and simultaneously fearful that what she's saying is right; he knows he's different from her, Addy, and Cooper, and is both the easiest scapegoat and the most defenseless.



In this passage, Addy decides to look out for someone else—despite the serious emotional turmoil she's in and the disorienting media attention she's recently been forced to face. This shows that Addy is growing, and exploring who she is outside of her identity as a popular princess.



When Addy is called out for being hypocritical, she admits that she's never stopped to consider other people's feelings before; she owns up to her mistakes, but assures Janae that she wants to get better at being a friend and an ally. Almost as a reward, Addy finds Bronwyn and her group of friends offering Addy, in turn, a chance at a new kind of friendship.



Addy is leaning into the chance to start fresh and make several big changes—she has changed the way she relates to people at school, the way she thinks about herself, and now wants a new look that will reflect all of her inner change.



CHAPTER 16

Friday night, Bronwyn and Maeve sit together on Bronwyn's bed counting down the minutes until a segment on Simon's murder airs on the national show of Mikhail Powers, a popular news personality. Bronwyn and her family haven't spoken to anyone affiliated with the program, despite numerous requests; as far as Bronwyn knows, no one else from school has, either. As Bronwyn waits anxiously, Maeve combs through **4chan** threads looking for posts under Simon's username—she soon finds a violent thread celebrating a recent school shooter, and realizes that Simon has posted on it. Bronwyn is shocked, but Maeve insists the internet is full of “weird people,” and wonders if it's possible Simon made some enemies on these strange forums.

Bronwyn's parents call her downstairs so that their whole family can watch the show together; as the program begins, Bronwyn feels her stomach tighten into knots. Mikhail Powers profiles each of the “Bayview Four,” and Maeve is troubled by how out-of-context and rudimentary Powers's introductions of Bronwyn, Cooper, Addy, and Nate are. The only moment of relief comes when Powers interviews a lawyer from Until Proven, Eli Kleinfelter, who suggests that the investigation's narrow focus on the Bayview Four is irresponsible.

That night, on the phone with Nate, Bronwyn wonders aloud about getting a second opinion from Eli Kleinfelter, but Nate doesn't want to discuss the investigation. He asks Bronwyn if she's ever going to come over and hang out with him in person—Bronwyn is reluctant, and expresses trepidation about sleeping with Nate. Nate insists he isn't trying to sleep with her—he just wants to spend time with her. Bronwyn says she'll try to “figure something out” soon.

Saturday afternoon, Cooper goes over to Keely's house to break up with her. She tries to get him to stay with her, insisting that she doesn't care about the investigation and is behind him no matter what—she doesn't even care about what's being posted on the new **About This** blog, including a post earlier that morning which suggested that Simon's old posts contained “interesting hints” about the Bayview Four.

Keely asks Cooper if he's breaking up with her because she hooked up with Nate just a few weeks before the two of them started going out the previous year. Cooper doesn't seem affected by this new revelation, and Keely accuses him of not caring about her and just wanting her as “the right accessory for scouting season.” She accuses him of using steroids, a claim he vehemently denies before standing up to leave.

Even as the media zeroes in on Bronwyn, Nate, Addy, and Cooper, Maeve desperately searches for an alternative perspective on Simon's death—and finds one. She finds disturbing and violent content linked to Simon's usernames, and shares the upsetting social media presence with Bronwyn as a way of helping her sister open up a new avenue of possibility.



Eli Kleinfelter echoes Bronwyn and Maeve's belief that the focus of the investigation is far too narrow, and unfairly persecutes Bronwyn, Addy, Cooper, and Nate with limited evidence. Bronwyn and Maeve have new information, though, and bolstered by hearing that someone in the justice world is on their side, they perhaps feel more emboldened to move forward with their own investigation.



Though Bronwyn is preoccupied by thoughts of the investigation, Nate's thoughts are becoming increasingly saturated with his relationship with Bronwyn. Bronwyn mirrors Nate's interest, but has fears about taking things to a physical level—still, she can't deny her interest in or attraction to Nate.



Cooper, perhaps spurred on by his grandmother's advice, knows it's time to do the right thing and break up with Keely—his heart just isn't in it. Keely, however, is possibly addicted to the attention she gets by being with Cooper, and resists his attempt to end things.



Keely inadvertently reveals a secret of her own to Cooper, but it doesn't faze him. Keely, unable to get through to Cooper on any level, strikes a low blow, angering Cooper—this passage more than anything makes it clear that Cooper's steroid use is not his real secret.



CHAPTER 17

Monday afternoon, Addy muses about how she and Bronwyn are essentially pariahs both at school and in the media coverage of the Bayview Four—meanwhile, everyone on the **internet** is swooning over Cooper and Nate, and the boys aren't being ostracized at school, either. During lunch, Addy scrolls obsessively on her phone, reading coverage of the investigation and trying to share it with Bronwyn and Janae, who have both been trying to avoid the coverage.

In science class, Addy's teacher switches up everyone's lab partners; Addy winds up with TJ, and though things are awkward at first, they quickly get down to work. TJ compliments Addy's dramatic haircut and remarks upon how funny she is—Addy ignores his compliments, though, and focuses on the assignment. After class, Jake follows her out of the classroom. He asks her if she's all right, and she says she isn't. He offers to "talk sometime" if she wants to, and she breathlessly agrees.

That afternoon, Nate and Bronwyn head to a small rocky outcrop in the woods near Nate's house—though it's a destination for drinking, drugs, and hookups, Nate knows that Bronwyn can't be aware of the spot's bad reputation. Bronwyn reveals that she spoke to Eli Kleinfelter. She didn't tell him anything about herself, but got him to agree to look into Simon's strange **internet** presence more. Kleinfelter also mentioned that the timing of the car accident during detention was suspect—he thinks the accident was planned as a distraction so that someone could slip into the room and frame the four students.

Nate doesn't buy Eli's theories, but Bronwyn really doesn't believe that anyone in the room murdered Simon. She has gotten to know Addy better, and doesn't think she seems capable of violence—Cooper doesn't, either. Nate points out that anyone could be capable of anything; the two jokingly promise "not to murder" one another, and then Nate roughly kisses Bronwyn. The two make out for a little while until Bronwyn pulls away—Maeve is texting her repeatedly. When Bronwyn looks at her phone, she sees that her lawyer has told her mother that the police want her to come to the station for further questioning.

Bronwyn texts Maeve to pick her up at Nate's house, and she and Nate make their way through the woods back to Nate's. As they walk through Nate's yard, Bronwyn observes that someone is at the front door—Nate worries briefly that it is a reporter, but a closer look reveals that it's Nate's mother.

Though Addy has turned over a new leaf, she's still preoccupied with what others think of her. She's distressed that she's not getting the right kind of attention in the media, and longs to be seen as she once was, despite the changes she's made.



This passage furthers the emotional quandary set up in the last; Addy, despite how far she's come in just a couple short weeks, still longs for things to go back to "normal"—even if that means bending once again to the controlling, unpredictable Jake.



Bronwyn, ever the overachiever, has been digging into every possible nook and cranny in order to try and gather up support for her and the rest of the Bayview Four. She has sparked the interest of Eli Kleinfelter, who shares her suspicions that there's more to the story than what the investigators have unearthed.



Bronwyn has reached a point where she trusts in Addy, Cooper, and Nate almost completely—she certainly is comfortable enough with Nate to take the next step in their relationship, kissing him passionately despite having been told not to forge a connection with him at all. Just as Bronwyn's confidence in her peers' innocence peaks, her own culpability is called into question once again.



Just when Bronwyn had confirmed her trust in Nate, a startling truth comes to light: Nate's mother isn't dead, and he has been lying to Bronwyn—and many others—all along.



CHAPTER 18

The narrative switches to Bronwyn's point of view. Just seconds after Nate recognizes his mother at the front door, Maeve pulls up; Bronwyn hurriedly gets into Maeve's car. When Maeve asks who the woman at the door is and Bronwyn tells her it's Nate's mom, she's confused; they'd both heard through the grapevine years ago that Nate's mom had died in a car accident.

Maeve drops Bronwyn at the police station—when she walks inside, her mother, her lawyer Robin, and Detective Mendoza are seated at a table. Neither Addy nor Cooper is there, and Bronwyn feels a flash of anxiety as she realizes investigators are focusing just on her. The detective asks Bronwyn if she is aware that Simon had a “companion website” for **About That**, where he collected longer posts. Robin tells the detective that Bronwyn won't answer any questions until she knows why she's here, and the detective pushes a laptop towards Bronwyn, asking her to determine whether a post that's pulled up looks “familiar.” As Bronwyn pulls the laptop closer, she already knows what she is about to read—and wishes she had said something about it earlier.

The **post** reveals that at the end of last school year, Maeve attended a party where she got drunk and hit on a varsity basketball player before throwing up in the host's washing machine. As the adults discuss the post, Bronwyn's mother grows upset and demands to know what the detectives are trying to accomplish by bringing it into the mix. The detective asks Bronwyn directly if she resented Simon because of his revelation of Maeve's embarrassment at the party, and her reluctance to participate in the social scene at school since. Robin states that Bronwyn has “no comment,” but Mendoza insists she does—or at least she did—before revealing that the post's history includes a violent comment left by Bronwyn which reads “Fuck off and die, Simon.”

That afternoon, Addy rides her bike over to Jake's house and rings the doorbell. He welcomes her in, and they sit down in the living room. Jake asks her about the investigation, but Addy doesn't want to talk about it, and she deflects his question, stating that things have become so cliché that she caught one of the detectives eating doughnuts. Addy says that the detectives should really be looking at Simon himself, and the many others who wanted bad things to happen to him as a result of **About That**. Knowing that Jake and Simon were friends when they were little, Addy attempts to ask what Simon was like as a child, but Jake accuses Addy of using him for her own little investigation, and says he didn't invite her over so they could argue.

As Bronwyn realizes that Nate has been lying to her about a very large, crucial part of his life all along, she is forced to question her own judgement and wisdom.



Bronwyn is upset with Nate for having lied to her—or at minimum kept the truth from her—but is now forced to confront the fact that her own lies and half-truths are catching up with her, too.



Bronwyn is fiercely protective of Maeve, and it makes sense that she would react violently to a public post that assaulted Maeve's character and made disparaging remarks about her. For the police to make the intellectual leap, though, from noticing Bronwyn's understandable burst of anger to assuming she actually killed Simon, shows that they have few leads elsewhere, and are keeping their unnecessarily tight focus on the Bayview Four in place for lack of any other answers.



Against her better judgement—and going back on all the positive changes she's made in her life—Addy once again puts herself in a situation in which she's beholden to Jake. She doesn't realize that perhaps Jake is not as trustworthy as she always thought he was—and still has ill intentions and bad feelings towards Addy as a result of her infidelity.



Addy asks Jake why invited her over—he claims that he “deserve[s]” to know what’s happening. Addy asks Jake if he’ll ever be able to forgive her, though she admits to herself that she isn’t even sure what “kind” of forgiveness she wants from Jake. He replies that he will never be able to forgive her. Addy is overcome with anger; moments later, as she pedals away on her bike, she congratulates herself for taking control of the situation and refusing to allow Jake to be the arbiter of her own feelings.

Jake’s feelings of entitlement to the details of Addy’s life despite having broken up with her show just how malicious, controlling, and narcissistic he is. Even after putting Addy through the emotional ringer, he still wants to take from her without offering her any forgiveness; realizing what Jake is doing, Addy removes herself from the situation and recommits herself to her path of autonomy and self-discovery.



Monday afternoon, Cooper laments that his life has become a media circus. News vans are outside his house more often than not, and he doesn’t even go on the **internet** anymore for fear of encountering slanderous articles about himself. Even weirder than all the negative attention, though, is the positive attention; paparazzi clips of the Bayview Four go viral on Youtube, remade as music videos, and Cooper’s little brother has discovered a Facebook fan page about Cooper with over fifty thousand likes.

This passage illustrates just how absurd and unpredictable social media is, and how unlikely the ways in which people react to what’s shared across its many channels are. Cooper is baffled by the conflicting opinions that come his way every moment, and the ways in which he is seen through the eyes of others.



Cooper heads out to meet Luis at the gym, and is surprised and miffed when a reporter accosts him at the door. After their workout, Cooper is nervous to leave the building again; Luis offers to dress in Cooper’s clothes and exit first, drawing the reporters so that Cooper can exit safely. The boys switch clothes and car keys, and Cooper is pleasantly surprised when the plan works.

Cooper’s friend Luis proves his allegiance to Cooper in this passage as he offers to put his own comfort on hold to allow Cooper a few moments of peace at the end of a difficult and disorienting day.



Cooper, high on the feeling of freedom, heads to downtown San Diego and parks in front of an expensive condominium. He gets out of the car and enters the building, riding the elevator up to the top floor and knocking on the penthouse apartment’s door. A man named Kris opens the door and envelops Cooper in a kiss. Cooper feels the world fade away as he relaxes into Kris’s embrace.

In this passage, Cooper’s true secret is revealed—he’s gay and has been carrying on an affair with a man named Kris. McManus at last shows her readers just how much Cooper stands to lose if the truth is revealed—but complicates questions of why he alone was spared from having his darkest, most painful fear realized.



CHAPTER 19

Monday afternoon, Nate listens to his mother and father talking in the next room while wondering what he can say to Bronwyn to make amends for allowing her to believe that his mother was dead. He can’t decide what to say, though, and puts his phone away. Nate’s mother comes into the room; she apologizes for abandoning him and tells him that she’s been sober for three months. As soon as she saw the news, she started coming by the house—but Nate was never home. Nate gestures to the dilapidated house and asks his mother if she would spend any time here if she were in his position.

Nate has been a loner for much of his life. This is largely out of necessity—he’s had minimal parental support, and has had to be his own advocate in life. He hasn’t been entirely successful, though, and his existence is impoverished in a lot of ways. Nate has learned to put walls up as a result; letting Bronwyn in is one thing, but reestablishing a connection with his mother, who betrayed him so deeply by leaving, is another thing altogether, and one that Nate may not be ready for.



Nate's mother apologizes for having left Nate with his father—she admits that she hoped he'd step up in her absence, but sees now that he hasn't. She tells Nate that she doesn't expect him to forgive her, but offers up the fact that she's sober and on the right medication for the first time in her life. She tells Nate he deserves more than what he's gotten in life—Nate brusquely dismisses her, telling her to leave and to send him a postcard sometime. She begs to help him, or at least take him out to dinner. Nate tells her that if she leaves a phone number, he might call her, and then slams his way out of the house.

Nate rides his motorcycle aimlessly. When he stops for gas, he considers calling Bronwyn, but still has no idea what to say. He drives out towards the desert, getting closer and closer to the campgrounds at Joshua Tree—the only place he and his parents ever went on vacation. It is midnight by the time Nate finally loops back to Bayview; there is a **text** on his phone notifying him of a party happening that night, and he decides to stop by.

It is not a Bayview High party, and Nate enjoys a little anonymity until two girls recognize him from Mikhail Powers' show. Nate says it wasn't him on the show, but the girls know he's lying. They tell him that they think he's innocent, and believe "the girl with the glasses"—Bronwyn—is guilty. The girls offer Nate acid, but he declines, and leaves the party. Out in the yard, his phone buzzes—it's Bronwyn, and Nate feels an enormous sense of relief.

The perspective switches over to Bronwyn, who is nervous about sneaking Nate into the house. Her parents are already furious with her and have grounded her for not telling them about Simon's **blog post**. Nevertheless, when she receives a text from Nate telling her he's waiting outside, she opens the basement door, sticks her head out, and beckons him in. Though her parents are three floors up and sound asleep, she keeps quiet, afraid of being heard. She and Nate sit together on the couch, and she asks him why he never told her the truth about his mother.

Nate resignedly states that the lie about his mother was easier than facing the truth—not to mention the fact that he half-believed it, sure that she'd never return. He promises Bronwyn that he hasn't lied to her about anything else—he really has stopped dealing drugs, and really didn't do anything to Simon. Bronwyn believes Nate, and asks him to tell her about her mother. They talk for over an hour, and Nate reveals many stories about his childhood.

Nate doesn't know how to relate to his mother; he's cold and dismissive towards her despite her attempts at connection. McManus gives the impression in this passage that Nate has had to deal with similar things before—with his mother's volatility and broken promises—and is emotionally drained, unable to make any more concessions.



Nate has no idea how to repair a broken or threatened connection—instead of calling Bronwyn or even driving over to see her, he launches himself into the desert to be alone.



Nate's old social scene no longer satisfies him—people assume things about him because of his public profile, and they only want to talk about the investigation, which Nate is sick of. He turns down an offer of drugs and leaves when the girls at the party insult Bronwyn, showing just how much he cares about Bronwyn and her reputation.



Though Bronwyn is playing with fire, her feelings for Nate are too strong to deny. He's hurt her and frightened her by lying to her, but she still believes the best in him—and wants to give him the chance to explain himself and redeem himself in her eyes.



Lies are always easier than the truth at first glance—but what Nate, and all of the other characters in the novel, have come to realize is that lies always make things harder in the end. As Nate settles in with Bronwyn, he finds himself telling her all about his past, reveling in the chance to tell the truth and expunge all of his past lies.



After a while, Bronwyn starts to get tired. Nate switches the subject, telling Bronwyn that his mother thought Bronwyn was his girlfriend earlier when she saw them together. Bronwyn asks if that would be out of the question, but Nate insists he “doesn’t know how to be with somebody like [Bronwyn.]” Bronwyn insists she’d liked to try, and confesses her true feelings for Nate. They begin kissing, but Nate stops and admits he’s afraid of being caught by Bronwyn’s parents. He suggests they watch a movie together—Bronwyn doesn’t care what they do, she thinks, as long as she gets to “stay wrapped around [Nate] for as long as possible.”

Bronwyn and Nate know that they’re polar opposites—and that, for this reason, other people might believe they’re bad for one another—but their feelings are too strong to deny. They have forged ahead in the face of hardship and recommitted to honesty with one another; bolstered by this change, Bronwyn allows herself to surrender fully to her feelings for Nate and her desire to be with him.



CHAPTER 20

Tuesday evening, Cooper is eating dinner with his family. When his father asks him what he did with his night off, Cooper imagines what would happen if he told his father the truth about Kris—he pictures his father’s head literally exploding. He knows he can’t tell his father the truth about being gay, despite having realized that he is deeply in love with Kris—the only one who has ever made Cooper feel like a “real person.” Cooper knows, though, that being an openly gay baseball player could wreck his career—and the admission could ruin his relationship with his father.

Cooper knows that the closer he gets to Kris, the further he gets from his family. He literally can’t imagine a scenario in which his parents are okay with who he truly is, and though he hates lying to everyone around him—and risking so much in the process—he can’t put aside his desire for the way he feels about himself when he’s with Kris.



Cooper’s father reminds him that he has to go in for steroid testing tomorrow—ever since Simon’s posthumous **post**, Cooper has had to get tested every week, despite the fact that he’s never touched steroids in his life. Cooper reflects on how he was sure that the secret about him on About That would be related to his sexuality, not sports—last spring, he believed Simon had figured out that he was gay, and urged one of Keely’s friends to disinvite Simon from their group’s afterparty. Cooper regrets having acted cruelly because he couldn’t deal with who he really was—and regrets that all this time later, he still can’t.

Cooper knows that his reluctance to come out has affected more people than just himself—he has acted cruelly towards people as a result of it, and now that Simon is dead, Cooper will never have the chance to apologize for his selfish actions or make things right.



The narrative switches to Nate’s perspective; he is eating a meal with his mother at a local diner, and things between them are awkward and tense. His mother tries to make conversation about school and Nate’s hobbies and interests, but Nate shrugs off every attempt she makes to connect. He asks his mother if she’s going to be able to pay for the meal, and his mother informs him she now has a steady remote job. She offers to help Nate and his father out financially, and even help Nate secure a lawyer. As the meal goes on and Nate’s mother talks normally about her life, Nate becomes more and more afraid that she’ll never be able to stay sober, stay employed, and stay sane. He gets up and leaves, unable to deal with his fear and pain.

Despite having taken a major step forward in his relationship with Bronwyn, Nate still can’t get over his issues with his mother and allow her into his life. He can’t believe that she’s here to stay—or that her promises to help him will actually materialize. Nate would rather be on his own than be let down again, and chooses to try and remove himself from his mother’s care entirely.



In the parking lot, Nate runs into Mikhail Powers, who has been waiting for him outside. Nate brushes Powers off, despite Powers' offers to help Nate get the public's opinion on his side. Nate gets on his bike and starts it up, reversing past Mikhail Powers' crew and out of the lot.

It's not just his mother's help Nate doesn't want; Nate doesn't want to have to rely on anyone to help him, and when faced with Mikhail Powers' offer, again retreats further into himself.



CHAPTER 21

Wednesday afternoon at lunch, Bronwyn and Addy sit together and talk about nail polish—an “innocuous” conversation compared to yesterday's topic, when they discussed Bronwyn's police visit, Nate's mother, and the fact that Addy was called down to the station to answer even more questions about the missing epi-pens. In the midst of their simple, normal conversation, though, they hear other students talking about how Mikhail Powers' film crew is out front, interviewing anyone who will talk to them.

Bronwyn and Addy's lives—just so simple and dull a few weeks ago—have become intense and serious, with very high stakes. A boring conversation about nail polish is now a luxury—a luxury which both girls indulge in this passage, even though they both know they can only escape their “new normal” for so long.



Cooper comes over to say hello, and Bronwyn jokingly asks if Cooper has given Mikhail Powers an interview yet. Leah, one table over, interjects that all four should give interviews and declare themselves “the murder club everybody thinks [they] are.” Maeve jumps to her sister's defense, pointing out that no one is talking about the other angle—about how awful **About That** made Bayview. Maeve suggests Leah go talk to the press and tell them the other side of the story for once. Leah abruptly states that she just might before standing up and leaving.

Maeve knows that there is more to the story than the media is reporting—she wants to spread awareness about what's really going on, and re-center people's perspectives around the truth of what their high school was like before Simon died.



Maeve begins typing furiously on her **phone**, and tells Bronwyn that she's sending Simon's 4chan threads to Mikhail Powers's team. She has been reading the threads for days, and is disturbed by the way the posters discuss school shootings. Janae becomes upset, grabbing Maeve's wrist and proclaiming that no one really knew Simon before stomping away. Bronwyn briefly wonders why Janae even continues sitting with them when they all just provide daily reminders of Simon—it occurs to her that perhaps Janae *wants* to hear conversations like the one they've just had.

As Janae reveals that she's still allegiant to Simon—even after the revelations that have come to light about him in the form of the 4chan forum posts—everyone begins to wonder whether Janae is so broken up about Simon that she'd resort to copycat behavior or an attempt to infiltrate the “murder club” to make sure they're found guilty.



Friday morning, Addy is running track during gym when Vanessa intentionally trips her. Vanessa pretends to try to help Addy up, but then whispers in her ear that she is a “slut” as soon as she gets close. Addy's gym teacher comes over and inspects her scrapes, then instructs her to head to the nurse—with Janae's help. Addy heads to the locker room, however, instead of the nurse's office, insisting she just needs a shower. After cleaning up, Addy gets dressed while Janae helps her put Band-Aids on her cut.

Addy's new life is liberating but sometimes humiliating. The girls who were once her friends now hate her and actively try to harm her, as if her actions with TJ directly affected them. Addy just has to pick herself up and move on, though, when things like this happen.



Addy muses that she's getting what she deserves, just like Simon wanted—everyone's secrets are out in the open. Janae quietly says that though Simon went overboard with **About That**, he wasn't what everyone thought he was. When he was "himself," he "wouldn't have wanted" pain or humiliation for Addy.

Though Addy cynically states that Simon would have wanted her to suffer, Janae insists that there was more to Simon than there seemed to be—the Simon Janae knew wasn't cruel and calculating.



Addy heads off for the library, and asks Janae to cover for her and tell the gym teacher she's still at the nurse. Janae surprises Addy by asking if she wants to hang out this afternoon—Addy agrees, and Janae asks if she can come over to Addy's house after school. The two make a plan, and Addy gets excited at the thought of bringing home a friend like Janae after years of having only "pretty-perky" friends like Keely.

Addy, perhaps additionally spurred by how cruel Vanessa's attack on her was, leaps at the opportunity to hang out with Janae, even though Janae, a Goth girl on the social fringes, is the last person the old Addy ever would have been friends with—and even though Janae clearly still harbors a deep attachment to (and possibly wants revenge for) Simon.



Janae arrives at Addy's house shortly after Addy herself. The two girls make small talk with Addy's mother for a while before heading upstairs to watch **Netflix**. Looking around at Addy's princess-pink room, Janae asks Addy if she misses her life "before"; Addy replies that she sometimes does, but knows things are better now that she has friends who actually care about her.

In just the span of a few days, Addy has gone from longing for things to be the way they once were to embracing her new trajectory in life; she has welcomed Janae into her house, and yet Janae still seems wary about the authenticity of her connection with Addy.



Janae asks for something to drink, and Addy heads downstairs to get lemonade for the two of them. When she arrives back upstairs, Janae is standing in the doorway with her backpack on—she complains that she isn't feeling well and leaves. Addy **texts** Bronwyn, complaining about how weird the situation is, and Bronwyn writes back almost immediately: "Be careful. I don't trust her."

Addy has thought Janae's behavior to be slightly overeager but ultimately innocuous; after this weird exchange, though, and Bronwyn's admission that Janae doesn't seem entirely trustworthy, Addy is forced to question her own judgement—and her own eagerness to make new friends.



CHAPTER 22

Sunday evening, Cooper's father's phone rings; he takes the call, and afterwards informs Cooper that Detective Chang wants Cooper to come down to the station again. Cooper is agitated—he hasn't been questioned in a while, and was beginning to hope that the whole thing was going to soon blow over.

Cooper was lulled into a sense of false security, despite harboring a major secret that has not yet been exposed.



After dinner, Cooper and his father go to the station, where Cooper's lawyer Mary and Detective Chang beckon Cooper to the interrogation room. Mary asks if Cooper is comfortable having his father in the room; though Cooper's dad insists he should be there, Mary suggests they bring him in only if needed. In the interrogation room, Detective Chang pulls out a **laptop** and turns it around to face Cooper—he reveals that they “missed something” in their initial analysis of Simon's files, and have recovered a second encrypted entry for Cooper. Cooper and his lawyer lean forward to read it—it reveals that Cooper is having an affair with a male German underwear model.

Detective Chang asks Cooper if the rumor is true, but Mary insists he doesn't need to answer. Chang points out that because of the file being replaced with a false rumor, it appears as if someone accessed Simon's files, tampered with the last entry, and then “made sure” that Simon wouldn't be around to correct it. Detective Chang states that Cooper is now a “more significant person of interest”; Cooper is so stunned that he can't speak.

Though Mary claims that disclosing information about sexual orientation violates Cooper's rights to privacy, Chang insists that Cooper reveal everything he knows about the entry. Cooper knows they want him to confess to Simon's murder, even though Cooper's killing Simon makes no logical sense. Cooper knows that even if his lawyer tries to keep the information from getting out, it will leak soon; he realizes he will have to tell his father the truth. Chang leaves, telling Cooper they're going to do some digging over the next few days; Cooper knows they plan to make him “miserable” until he caves from the pressure of the investigation.

Mary urges Cooper to tell his father the truth—he will still love Cooper, she says. Cooper privately thinks that his father doesn't even know him. When Cooper and his lawyer emerge from the room, Cooper's father asks what transpired inside, but Cooper deflects his questions all the way to the parking lot. Once inside the car, Cooper confesses that he needs to talk to his father about something, but suggests they wait until they get home. Back at the house, Cooper tells his mother, his father, and his Nonny the truth by revealing what Simon was actually going to post about him. Cooper's father insists it has to be a joke, but Cooper tells his father that it isn't.

As Cooper confronts Detective Chang—and the very dangerous bombshell he has uncovered—it seems as if things are worse than ever. Not only is Cooper's worst, darkest secret out in the open at last, but the way in which it has been brought to light seems to indicate that there's some subterfuge going on—shady dealings that could easily implicate Cooper, who arguably had the most to lose of any of the Bayview Four.



Detective Chang adds to Cooper's misery by informing him that the investigation will be turning to him; though Cooper is distressed, his outward emotions convey only shock and awe.



Cooper is smart enough to realize that the investigation hasn't really been getting anywhere, and the detectives are grasping at straws now. He is too smart to implicate himself in Simon's murder, even though Chang has found a motive that works. Still, Cooper realizes that there will be other consequences; no matter what happens on the investigator's end, Cooper is still going to have to reveal the biggest secret of his life.



Cooper has spent his whole life striving to live up to his father's expectations. In doing so, Cooper has created an external image of himself which does not match up with who he really is inside; he has leaned into the stereotypical version of himself to avoid exposing the real Cooper within. As Cooper finally divulges his secret to his family, it is so unlikely to them that they can barely comprehend it; Cooper was right when he asserted that his father didn't know him enough to truly love him.



CHAPTER 23

Monday morning, Addy arrives at school to find police cars lining the front of Bayview High. Cooper, who looks as if he hasn't slept for days, pulls Addy aside before homeroom and asks if they can talk in private. He leads her out to the parking lot and confesses that the police are more than likely here to ask questions about him. He wants to tell Addy why, "before everything goes to hell." Cooper confesses that he is gay, and Addy is confused at first, but then realizes that the statement makes sense—it was obvious that Cooper was never that into Keely.

Cooper tells Addy that Simon had uncovered the fact that he was seeing someone and was going to post about it, but then switched it out for a fake entry about steroid use. Cooper tells Addy that because of the suspicious switch, the police are looking into him "hard-core," and soon the whole school will know. Addy insists that none of Cooper's friends will care, but Cooper tells Addy she knows this isn't true.

Cooper adds that he can't stop thinking about all the "weird stuff" Maeve mentioned Simon had gotten into—Addy says that Bronwyn wants for all of the Bayview Four to get together and compare notes. Addy fills Cooper in on the fact that Nate's mom is alive after all, and that Bronwyn left a threatening comment on an old post of Simon's. Cooper is incredulous, and seems momentarily distracted from his own problems. He tells Addy that if the three of them want to plan a get-together, he's "in."

The Bayview Police set themselves up in a conference room with a liaison and begin interviewing students. By the middle of the morning on Tuesday, "whispers" about Cooper's sexuality have started. That afternoon at lunch, Addy sits down with Bronwyn; when Cooper enters the cafeteria, a buzz goes through the room, and someone calls out a loud taunt. Cooper freezes in the doorway, and someone else throws a packet of condoms at him. Nate enters the cafeteria, sees what's going on, and calls out to everyone in the cafeteria, telling them to "get a life."

Nate walks over to Addy and Bronwyn's table and kisses Bronwyn in full view of everyone; the cafeteria erupts in catcalls and shouts, and Cooper is momentarily forgotten. Addy runs up to the doorway and grabs Cooper by the arm, inviting him to sit at her table with the rest of the "murder club." Cooper follows Addy and they settle in; Luis defects from the popular table and joins Cooper, Addy, Bronwyn, and Nate. Addy is happy that Cooper has some "real friends" from their old group, even though she herself does not.

Though Cooper's secret is something of a bombshell, Addy is quickly able to reconcile this new information with her prior assessment of Cooper. This shows how Addy—and all of the characters, in fact—are getting better at looking past stereotypes and seeing their friends' whole, nuanced selves.



Cooper knows that just a little while ago, Addy was forced to deal with the downfall of her reputation and exile from her social circle. Fearing the same thing is about to happen to him, he seeks her comfort and wisdom.



This passage shows Addy and Cooper flooding one another with information, theories, and desperate attempts to wrest control of their situation away from the media and the investigators. They decide to band together, knowing that they are stronger as a united force than they are apart, where they can be picked on by anyone.



The worst thing Cooper ever could have imagined happens—he is outed in front of the whole school, and the secret he's spent his life protecting is out in the open. Though Cooper's old friends don't defend him, his new ones do—Nate shatters stereotypes of himself as an apathetic loner in order to come to Cooper's aid.



By putting their own secrets out in the open—and refusing to back out of the public eye—the Bayview Four, or the "murder club," take back the narratives that have been constructed about them. They still have one another, and the healthy, bolstering new connections and friendships they're forming.



CHAPTER 24

Thursday night after midnight, Nate parks his motorcycle out front of a house in the half-finished Bayview Estates neighborhood, which is still under construction. Bronwyn climbs off the back of his bike, and then she and Nate walk together over to one of the houses. Nate finds an open window and crawls in; Bronwyn clumsily follows him, and then the two go over to the front door to unlock it for Addy and Cooper. They still have five minutes until the others arrive—Nate pushes Bronwyn up against a wall and kisses her.

After a minute or two, the front door creaks open and Addy walks in—she has dyed her hair purple. Nate and Bronwyn lead her to a corner of the living room, where they all sprawl out on the floor. Cooper soon joins them; they all ask how he's doing, and he admits that he's living in a "nightmare." His father won't talk to him, he's being "torn apart" **online**, and none of the teams scouting him will return his coach's calls. The others express their sympathy, but Cooper insists they get down to business.

Bronwyn leads the discussion, hoping they can all "compare notes" and get to the bottom of what's actually happening to them. She points out that "somebody" planted **phones** on them to get them all in the same room; meanwhile, Simon was mixed up in "creepy stuff" on the internet and had potentially angered someone from there. Addy adds that Janae told her Simon "hated being an outsider," and nursed an attraction to Keely. The others admit that Keely could be a common thread, but had no motive; Leah, and other students at school who'd been hurt by Simon's rumors, had more serious reasons to want something bad to happen to him.

Bronwyn insists she's more interested in Janae, who's been spending time with her and Addy; the details in all the **About This posts** have been very accurate, so they have to have been written by someone who has access to each of them. Addy admits that Janae has been skittish lately, and didn't seem very close with Simon right before he died. Bronwyn brings up the car accident again—Cooper remembers that one of the cars was a red Camaro, and offers to get Luis, whose brother works at a car repair place downtown, to look into it.

Though the conversation isn't really getting anywhere concrete, Nate notes, he is struck by two things while he and the other members of the Bayview Four talk; he really likes each of them, and knows for sure that none of them is responsible for Simon's death.

As Nate and Bronwyn prepare to get together with Cooper and Addy in order to look at their case with fresh eyes, their connection to one another is stronger than ever. They have been emboldened by their public coming-out as a couple and their refusal to deny what they feel for one another any longer.



Cooper's life is being dissected not just by his popular friends at his gossip-obsessed high school and not even just by the news media, but by the very institutions that stand to make or break his future. Cooper is dealing with something his friends can't imagine, and yet he doesn't want to center his individual pain above their collective struggle for the truth.



As the Bayview Four begin putting together the pieces of the puzzle which has consumed their lives, they search desperately for a common thread in their previously separate and distinct lives; they have trouble doing so, and instead wonder about whether anyone else might have had a motive to hurt or even kill Simon in order to stop his rumor-mongering.



Bronwyn is afraid that Janae is infiltrating their new friend group and attempting to spy on them, but they all know she isn't the only key to unraveling this puzzle; there are too many strange details, and they excitedly pounce upon each one and think of ways they can get to the bottom of what's going on.



Though Nate has been an outsider all his life, he finally has found a group of people that he likes and trusts.



The narrative switches to Bronwyn’s perspective. On Friday night, she and her family are sitting down to watch *Mikhail Powers Investigates*; as the program begins, she is struck by Powers’ changed tone. He excoriates the police for “revealing personal information” about the Bayview Four, and taking their investigation “too far.” Mikhail Powers himself, Bronwyn knows, is gay, and was outed by the media when Bronwyn was still in junior high—she realizes that he now has a personal investment in the case, and is suddenly flipping his reportage around so that the Bayview Police are the incompetent, bumbling “bad guys.” Eli Klienfelter makes an appearance on the show and wonders aloud why no one is looking at “the teacher,” Mr. Avery.

Most stunningly, Mikhail Powers airs interviews with students harmed by Simon’s **posts**—and then displays screen-grabs of the violent 4chan discussion threads to which Simon contributed; in one post, he urged school shooters to “surprise [him] when [they] take out a bunch of asshole lemmings.”

Over the next few days, Bronwyn notices how big an impact the most recent episode of *Mikhail Powers Investigates* has had on the investigation. The tone of the media coverage of the case shifts; someone starts an **online petition** on Change.org to drop the investigation; Major League Baseball and local colleges “get heat” online and in the press about whether they discriminate against gay players. By Monday, people are actually talking to Bronwyn again—even her onetime crush, Evan.

Friday night, Bronwyn and Nate stay up late flirting on the **phone**. Saturday morning, Bronwyn lets herself stay in bed a little bit later than usual, and then gets ready for her morning run. As she’s lacing her shoes there is a knock on the door, and she turns around to see Maeve standing in the doorway looking pale and ill. Bronwyn worries that something is wrong with Maeve, but Maeve just beckons Bronwyn downstairs. In the living room, the TV is on; the screen shows Nate, in handcuffs, being led away from his house. On the bottom of the screen are the words “Arrest in the Simon Kelleher Murder Case.”

CHAPTER 25

Bronwyn stares blankly at the news, unable to process what is happening. The news doesn’t offer any information as to why Nate is being arrested, other than the fact that new evidence made it clear that Nate was the murderer. As Bronwyn watches footage of Nate being guided into a police cruiser, she thinks that he looks different from the Nate she knows—the Nate she believes is the real Nate.

As Mikhail Powers *Investigates* begins, the tide of the media coverage of the Bayview Four at last begins to turn. Mikhail Powers has finally realized how unfair, destructive, and dehumanizing the coverage of the “murder club” has been, and decides to use his platform to do something about it rather than continuing to deal in stereotypes and gossip.



Mikhail Powers points out the obvious things that everyone is overlooking—that Simon himself had a shadowed past, and longed for retribution against his hated classmates.



Finally, the fickle winds of change begin blowing the right way; as social media and the internet seizes upon the Bayview Four now that they’ve been cast in this new light, Bronwyn at last has some hope that her future won’t be consumed by this confusing, damaging scandal.



Just when things seemed to be going well, however, a terrifying and devastating break is made when Nate is arrested. All of the positive internet and media attention was the calm before the storm; things seem orchestrated to bring the members of the Bayview Four to their knees again and again.



The circumstances surrounding Nate’s arrest are murky and suspicious—Bronwyn refuses to believe that his arrest is warranted, given how well she’s come to know the “real” Nate.



Maeve wonders what the police have found that makes them think Nate is guilty, but Bronwyn can barely think straight. When the news plays footage from *Mikhail Powers Investigates*, though, Bronwyn is struck by an idea; she picks up her phone and searches the **internet** for Eli Kleinfelter's number, then calls him. He answers on the first ring, and begs him to take on Nate's case. Eli says that though he's interested, he has an impossible workload as it is—Bronwyn begins begging Eli outright, unloading Nate's "heart-wrenching" stories from his childhood. Eli agrees to meet with Bronwyn and Nate's mom at ten the next morning; Bronwyn hangs up, grabs her parents' car keys, and asks Maeve to come with her to track down Nate's mother.

As the girls get into the car and start driving towards the police station, Bronwyn notices that her phone is blowing up with texts, calls, and other **social media** notifications, but she ignores them all. Nate's mother is not at the station, and so the girls get back in the car—Maeve drives while Bronwyn calls Addy, who accuses the police department of playing "musical chairs" with the four of them and landing arbitrarily on Nate.

When Maeve and Bronwyn pull back into their driveway, the lawn is swarming with reporters, who shove microphones in Bronwyn's face and ask her questions about her relationship with Nate. Maeve and Bronwyn fight their way inside, where their parents are waiting. Bronwyn's mother demands to know what is going on between her and Nate, and Bronwyn, remembering how painful things have been since she started keeping things from her parents, decides to tell her everything. Bronwyn apologizes for keeping the relationship from her mother, but insists that Nate is innocent—and that she needs to work on connecting Mrs. Macauley and Eli. Bronwyn's mother agrees to let Bronwyn do whatever it is she needs to do; as Bronwyn heads upstairs, her **phone** rings, and Mrs. Macauley is on the other end.

The narrative switches over to Cooper's perspective. Saturday afternoon, Cooper has just finished playing an exhibition game—he did well, and a scout from Cal State even approached him afterwards. Cooper's coach has started hearing from teams again, but Cooper suspects it is more a PR move than genuine interest—only Cal State is still talking about offering Cooper a scholarship.

Bronwyn is desperate to save Nate and help him clear his name. Though she doesn't quite know what's going on, her trust in Nate is complete; she loves him, and, having come to see what he's really like over the last several weeks, knows he isn't capable of doing the things he's being accused of. She wants everyone else to understand the "real" Nate, too, and look past the stereotypes and easy tropes that have been thrust upon him.



Bronwyn resists the pull of social media and connection in order to pursue justice for Nate—the only person she involves is Addy, whom she knows has developed the same attitude towards stereotypes and false accusations that she has.



Bronwyn has been keeping her relationship with Nate secret from her mother, even though she's brought it into the light with Maeve and at school. Now, Bronwyn realizes the capacity secrets have to hurt not just the people they're kept from, but their keepers as well. She decides to be honest with her mother, and her transparency is rewarded.



The ways in which Cooper has been mistreated by the media and rejected by schools who previously loved him has led him to doubt the authenticity of new offers—he knows how fickle and unpredictable public opinion is, and at last understands how little it really signifies.



As Cooper and Luis head to the car after the game, Cooper dodges questions from reporters, as usual, until one of them asks him what he thinks about Nate's arrest—Cooper is confused, as this is the first he's heard about it. As the boys duck into Cooper's father's car, Luis comments that Cooper is "off the hook" at last—Luis admits he always figured Nate was responsible.

After Cooper and his dad drop Luis off at his house, they are alone in the car. Cooper tries to talk to his dad about Cal State, but his father insists that Cal State isn't even a top ten team. As they pull onto their street and spot the reporters, Cooper's father tells his son that he hopes his "choice" was "worth it."

Inside, Cooper's father turns on the TV while Cooper talks to his Nonny in the kitchen. She reminds Cooper that things always get worse before they get better, and suggests he bring Kris over for dinner sometime. Soon, Cooper's phone buzzes—it's Bronwyn. She tells him that she's trying to set up a meeting between Nate's mom and Eli Kleinfelter, and wants to know if Cooper ever talked to Luis about the red Camaro. Cooper says he hasn't heard anything, but promises to check in with him soon. As Cooper hangs up, his feelings of relief are tinged with feelings of worry for Nate.

CHAPTER 26

Sunday morning, Bronwyn arrives at the Until Proven offices with her mother and Mrs. Macauley. The office is busy, underfurnished, and understaffed; Eli quickly explains that though he can't take the case on, he's willing to hear what Mrs. Macauley has to say and help advise her. Mrs. Macauley launches into what she's been told—the school received a call from an anonymous source stating that Nate had drugs in his locker. When they removed his lock to check it out, they found no drugs—but did find a bag containing Simon's water bottle, epi-pen, and all of the missing epi-pens from the nurse's office. Bronwyn knows that given how many times they've all been questioned about the pens over the last month, Nate—even if guilty—would never be stupid enough to leave them in his locker.

Cooper has no idea what to think about Nate's arrest, or the idea that he himself is absolved by Nate's supposed guilt—even though Nate is a "criminal," Nate was the only person who stood up for him last week in the cafeteria.



Cooper's father still refuses to see his son for who he really is, and instead believes that Cooper has deliberately made a "choice" that harms his reputation and his appearance.



This passage shows the many conflicting feelings Cooper continues to have about the entirety of his situation. He longs for his father's approval, but knows that with all the support he's getting from his new friends and his grandmother, he can't hinge his whole life on one person's opinion. At the same time, he's unsure of whether he should feel happy or guilty—he knows deep down that Nate didn't murder Simon, but is too afraid to further risk his own life and reputation to stand up for what's right, even though Nate did just that for him.



As Mrs. Macauley reveals the truth of the accusations being leveled against Nate, Bronwyn at last has hard confirmation: there is no way that Nate was responsible for the things he's being framed for. It's difficult to believe how the authorities couldn't see this glaring inconsistency, but in such a volatile case that's gotten so much attention, it's easier for the investigators to fall back on the public's ability to believe easy stereotypes rather than thoroughly question oddities and inconsistencies.



Mrs. Macauley continues: the police obtained a warrant to search Nate's house Saturday morning, and in Nate's closet found a computer with access to the **About This blog** on it. Mrs. Macauley says that Nate doesn't know how any of the evidence got into his locker or his house; moreover, the house, having fallen into such disrepair, is usually unlocked. Eli writes this all down with interest, but when Mrs. Macauley mentions that the district attorney wants to move Nate from juvenile hall to a regular prison, Eli sits bolt upright and replies that such a thing cannot, under any circumstances, be allowed to happen.

As he reviews what Mrs. Macauley has just told him, Eli realizes that he has to take on the case, even though he doesn't have the time. Bronwyn is deeply relieved, and tries to get a word in about the Camaro—but Eli stops her, stating that it would be a conflict of interest from him to speak with other people represented in the case. He tells Bronwyn and her mother to leave so that he can get down to business with Mrs. Macauley, and she stands to go—but worries that if Eli doesn't know even half of what she, Addy, Cooper, and Nate do, he won't be able to help Nate clear his name.

By Monday, Addy is surprised to realize that there are no vans or camera crews following her or her family around. Things are “oddly normal” as Addy, her mother, and Ashton sit down to dinner. Addy's mother refuses to eat, though—she is on a cleanse. As Addy looks at her mother with her plumped lips, dyed blonde hair, and skintight dress, she pities her. After a minute, the doorbell rings. Ashton gets up to answer it, revealing TJ standing in the doorway. He mistakenly took Addy's book with him after science, and is returning it to her so that she can study for their quiz tomorrow. TJ introduces himself to Addy's mother, and then asks Addy if she wants to study; Addy says she can't.

After TJ leaves, Addy's mother is disappointed in Addy for “being so rude to [such] a handsome boy”—she points out that no other guys are “beating down [Addy's] door anymore.” Addy insists she isn't looking for another boyfriend, but her mother says it's time for her to move on—she and Jake broke up “ages” ago. She warns Addy that if she doesn't date around, she'll “end up on a shelf.” When Addy insists she doesn't need a man to be happy, her mother points out that Addy has been “miserable” for the last month. Addy replies that she's been miserable because she's being investigated for murder. Addy's mother warns her that because she isn't “college material,” high school is her last chance to find a decent boy with a good future, but Ashton cuts her off.

Despite the flimsy and unexplainable evidence that has been gathered against Nate, the investigators and officials holding him want to punish him to the full extent of the law—this injustice riles Eli, who believes his clients and knows there's no way Nate is deserving of the punishments being thrown at him.



Bronwyn has done a whole lot to help Nate already—but when a conflict of interest keeps her from contributing more to the investigation, she becomes frustrated, and knows that there has to be more that she can do in order to ensure that Nate is exonerated.



McManus uses this passage to show how Addy is in a remarkably similar logistical and emotional space to Cooper. She feels grateful that things are going back to “normal”—but now that she has her old life back, all she can see is the ways in which it's insufficient, and the problems that remain to be solved.



Addy's mother continues spouting vicious and harmful falsehoods at Addy. Addy's weakened sense of self-esteem and overvaluing of romantic relationships all stems from her mother's toxic influence. Her mother is so devoted to following a simple, exhausting blueprint through life that she can't even begin to see the pain and suffering her daughter has been through—only Ashton sticks up for Addy and understands the pain she's endured.



Addy's **phone** rings—it's Bronwyn, who sounds if she's been crying. She asks Addy to stop by later tonight to help her out with something—she's inviting Cooper, too. Addy quickly agrees to meet up; she heads out as fast as she can, calling a goodbye over her shoulder and hopping on her bike. When Bronwyn answers the front door, she looks terrible; Addy feels badly that the boy Bronwyn loves is in jail for murder.

Inside, Maeve is on her laptop and Cooper is sprawled out in an armchair. Addy asks Bronwyn if she's seen Nate, but Bronwyn replies that Nate doesn't want her to come visit him in juvy. Bronwyn switches the subject—she wants to finish what they started, and finally make sense of Simon's murder. She wants to take another look at the **About This posts**—since the police are saying Nate wrote them, she figures they can comb through and find irregularities, or things Nate never would have written.

Maeve pulls up the blog on her laptop and they all begin reading. When they reach a certain **post**, Cooper points to a line which he says “never happened”—a post dated October twentieth states that the investigation is turning into “such a cliché” that the Bayview Four even caught one of the detectives eating a pile of donuts. Addy feels a coldness rush over her—she remembers rattling this false detail off to Jake weeks ago.

CHAPTER 27

It is Tuesday night, and Bronwyn is in her room with Maeve and Addy, working on the case. After she texted Mrs. Macauley a link to the **About This post** she, Addy, and Cooper had flagged as odd—and the fact that Jake, of all people, seems to be involved in making it—Mrs. Macauley texted back to say thank you, but also to ask Bronwyn not to get involved any further.

Bronwyn, Maeve, and Addy tack up colorful sticky notes on the wall, pointing out the many disparate details of the case. Cooper arrives to help—he can't stay long, but wanted to tell everyone that Luis's brother may have found the red Camaro. He hands Bronwyn a piece of paper with the license plate and phone number on the back. As the three of them plus Maeve examine the collection of seemingly random facts on the wall, they grow frustrated by how nothing seems to make sense.

Addy, spurred by her desire to get out of her house, returns to the “murder club” to help try and set things right with Nate—even though doing so takes her away from a return to normalcy and places her back in the midst of a seemingly unsolvable puzzle.



The “murder club” has been motivated throughout the novel to band together and try to solve the crime; but now that Nate has been arrested, the stakes are even higher, and Bronwyn knows they don't have much time left to clear his name. They'll need to make a greater effort than ever before and leave no stone unturned as they look at the connections between seemingly unrelated people at their school.



The Bayview Four attempt to use the very technology that's been weaponized against them to their advantage, combing through posts until an unmistakable but heartbreaking truth emerges: their enemies are much closer to home than they realized.



Bronwyn is desperate to help, but now even Nate's mother is trying to shut her out. Even though she's just trying to preserve the integrity of the investigation, Mrs. Macauley frustrates Bronwyn, who is working around the clock to uncover new bombshells and clear Nate's name.



The Bayview Four have been thrown together by a series of unlikely circumstances, and the connections they've fostered with one another have grown and flourished. Now, they have to look beyond their own unlikely connections and try to point out the coincidences, oddities, and correlations in the rest of their class—which is hard, because of the thriving environment of secrets, lies, divisions, and stereotypes which still pervades Bayview.



Cooper leaves, and Maeve gets up to shuffle the sticky notes around. She groups together the notes bearing information about people who “hate” Simon, but as the girls stare at the names and facts on the wall, they all have the feeling they’re missing something.

Bronwyn finds out the name—and high school—of the owner of the Camaro. Rather than handing the information over to Eli, who may not even pay attention to her anymore, she decides to track the car’s owner down on her own. Bronwyn pulls into the parking lot of Eastland High before classes start, and waits for the red Camaro. She rolls down her window and calls out a hello as the guy gets out of his car—her recognizes her from the investigation, and asks what she’s doing here. She answers that she’s waiting for somebody, but when the guy asks who, she confesses that she’s waiting for him; she mentions the car accident on the day of Simon’s death, and asks if he can give her any information.

The guy hesitates before introducing himself as Sam Barron. He confesses he’s been wondering if he should speak up about the accident—as far as he knows, he didn’t do anything illegal. He and one of his friends accepted a thousand dollars each from a Bayview student to stage a car crash in the parking lot. Bronwyn pulls up a picture of Jake on her phone and asks if that’s who paid him; Sam gravely replies that he was paid off by Simon Kelleher himself.

CHAPTER 28

Wednesday night, Cooper and the rest of the “murder club” are at a coffee shop in downtown San Diego. Kris, Maeve, and Ashton are there too; Addy asks why Bronwyn picked the location, which is a little bit out of the way, but Bronwyn insists there’s no special reason. Cooper, who has only been out in public with Kris a few times, is still struggling with how to carry himself now that he’s out; he is afraid to be affectionate in public.

Bronwyn lays out a folder containing information about Simon—he was depressed, he paid two kids to stage an accident, he had a “creepy online persona,” he was fighting with Janae, he had a thing for Keely, and used to be friends with Jake. Cooper adds that Simon deleted Cooper’s original **About That post**, but Bronwyn corrects him, stating that they don’t yet know for sure that Simon was the one who did that.

Everyone is working hard, but there’s still a major piece of the puzzle missing—still, they’re determined to find it and put it in place.



Bronwyn knows that she’s hit a wall with both Mrs. Macauley and Eli—she has to depend on herself, now, and take matters firmly into her own hands. She does just that in this passage, risking her own well-being—and her entire mini-investigation—as she heads out to try and secure a major breakthrough in the case.



Though Bronwyn had started to believe that Jake was responsible for the entire plot, Sam’s bombshell of a revelation shows that an earlier instinct was correct—Simon orchestrated the circumstances surrounding his death, and now Bronwyn has hard, definitive proof.



The “murder club” is broadening their horizons and deepening their connections as they bring siblings and lovers into the mix in order to gain some camaraderie—and some outsiders’ perspectives.



There are many things that the Bayview Four have learned about Simon in the weeks since his death, but there are still huge chunks of the puzzle they don’t yet understand. As they work together, though, they get closer and close to uncovering the truth.



The group turns to a folder about Jake next—when they’re adding information about him, Ashton speaks up to explain that Jake is a total control freak who ruled Addy’s life for years. As Bronwyn writes this down, the front door opens and Eli enters the shop. He intentionally walks past the “murder club,” but when he catches sight of the beautiful Ashton, he stops to introduce himself. He tells the rest of the group he can’t talk to them and heads up to the counter.

Bronwyn asks Ashton to take Sam Barron’s contact information up to the counter, where Eli is ordering a drink; she does so, but comes back with the envelope still in hand, explaining that Eli said Sam already called him—and the kids should mind their business. As the group turns back to the files in front of them, Kris speaks up. He points out that it would be pretty much impossible for anyone who wasn’t in the room to have killed Simon. If none of the Bayview Four or Mr. Avery did it, that only leaves Simon himself; Kris points to the notes in the folder which indicate that Simon was, according to Janae, depressed. Everyone realizes the possibility that Simon committed suicide.

Bronwyn follows this line of thought—Simon wanted to be at the center of everything, but was hugely unpopular. He was “obsessed” with making a “huge, violent splash at school,” and she speculates that perhaps framing them all for murder was “his version of a school shooting.” Kris speaks up again—if Jake wasn’t Simon’s killer, he must be his accomplice. Cooper marvels at Kris and Bronwyn, the “brains of this operation.”

Addy emotionally protests that Jake wouldn’t try to hurt her—or any of them—and Ashton tells everyone else that the two of them have had enough for the night. She gathers her things to take Addy home, and Addy apologizes for getting emotional. As Addy and Ashton leave, Maeve laments that Addy’s right—what their group is speculating about does sound kind of impossible. Kris points out one more sticky note, about Janae, suggesting that she might be a way to get proof.

After Bronwyn and Maeve leave, Kris and Cooper finish their drinks and gather up their things to leave. Outside the coffee shop, Cooper envelops Kris in a deep embrace and kisses him; he apologizes for not being more affectionate, and the two hold hands as they walk down the sidewalk.

In jail, Nate reflects on how hard he’s trying to make himself invisible and keep his mind off the world outside—and the people in it—who are “better off forgetting [he] exist[s].”

Bronwyn has brought the group to this coffee shop in hopes of catching Eli—her motivation is revealed when he walks through the door, and yet he insists he can’t have any part in helping them or even acknowledging them.



When instructed to mind their own business and turn their thoughts inward, the “murder club” complies—and quickly, with Kris’s help, comes to a major breakthrough. As they begin to understand that perhaps a simple but unlikely solution is the answer to their mess of problems, their collective wisdom—achieved through the ability to look past stereotypes and make important connections—is on full display.



As the pieces of the puzzle begin to come together, everyone understands that Simon’s impulses were darker than they ever could have imagined. He wanted to center himself as a victim and a martyr, despite all the cruelty he’d perpetuated in his lifetime, and all the hateful things he really thought about his peers.



Though Addy has seen just how vengeful and cruel Jake is, she still doesn’t want to admit to herself that he’s capable of such horrible things. Addy would rather deceive herself and rely on stereotypes—at least where this one person is concerned, as the alternative to applying her new knowledge to Jake is too terrifying.



Cooper has at last decided to throw caution to the wind and fully embrace his and Kris’s relationship—he is no longer afraid of being judged, and just wants to live an authentic life.



Nate has been forced to hide away from the world, but continues to retreat further into himself the longer he’s imprisoned.



CHAPTER 29

Thursday evening, Addy sits at home, reading through the **About This blog** and wondering whether Jake could really be responsible for it. She remembers an odd detail from the day of Simon’s murder—Jake offered to carry her backpack to class for her, though he’d never done something like that before. She wonders whether he put the phone into her bag then. She is sickened by the idea that Jake has done something awful, that she drove him to it, and that he’s been “putting on an act for weeks.”

Addy has been trying to get in touch with Janae all week, but Janae has been avoiding her **texts** and calls. Addy has finally decided just to show up at Janae’s house—Cooper has offered to drive her and wait in the car, just in case things “turn weird.” At Janae’s house, Addy rings the doorbell; when Janae answers, she looks miserable and frighteningly thin; her skin has broken out in hives. She lets Addy in, but tells her she’s not feeling well. Addy asks if anyone else is home; Janae replies that her parents are out to dinner, and then asks what Addy’s reason for coming over is.

Though Bronwyn has coached Addy about what to say to Janae in order to slowly and carefully get information out of her, that all goes out the window—Addy suddenly wraps Janae in a big hug. Janae begins crying, and tells Addy that things have gotten “massively fucked up.” Addy and Janae sit on the living room sofa, and Addy holds Janae while she cries. After a while, Addy asks whether Simon “did this to himself”; Janae, shocked, asks how Addy figured it out. Though Addy isn’t “supposed” to tell Janae anything, she spills everything the Bayview Four have figured out.

When Addy finishes speaking, Janae gets up and goes into the other room; Addy worries that Janae is about to do something drastic, but Janae returns with a sheaf of papers; she hands them to Addy, calling them “Simon’s manifesto”; the papers are supposed to be sent to police a year from now, “after all [of the Bayview Four’s] lives are completely screwed.”

The manifesto, written by Simon, reveals how much he hated his life, and how desperate he was to “get the hell out” of it—but not go quietly. Rather than buying a gun and shooting up his school “like pretty much any asshole in America,” which wouldn’t have enough of an “impact,” Simon has devised a plan that would keep people talking about his suicide for years to come.

In this passage, Addy is forced to reckon with the fact that her ex-boyfriend Jake may have had some seriously dark secrets and motivations that led him to try and actively destroy her life. The idea that Jake was hiding such a dark secret—and not to mention lying to Addy’s face every day for months—frightens her, as she realizes just how terrifying and well-concealed dark secrets can be.



When Addy finally lays eyes on the emaciated Janae, though, she realizes that whatever is going on with her new friend is just as dark as whatever is possibly going on with Jake. The web of secrets and lies across Bayview grows more serious—and more frightening—seemingly by the minute.



Addy has been told that there’s a very specific way she needs to approach and talk to Janae—but the connection between them has grown so strong that she can’t treat Janae like an idea of a girl, or a stereotype of a Goth loner. Addy’s leap towards genuine connection works, and soon Janae and Addy are sharing their deepest, darkest secrets—information that could either tear them apart or bring them even closer together.



Addy and the rest of the “murder club” had more or less already figured out that Simon was responsible for his own death, but the introduction of the “manifesto” makes their hunch real—and shows that Simon’s true motivations were even darker than they suspected.



Simon’s dark desire for popularity and renown morphed over the years from a desire to fit in, to a desire to rule the school, to a desire to ruin the lives of anyone who kept him from his unrealized dreams.



Addy looks up from the papers, shocked, and asks Janae how Simon reached this point. Janae reveals that Simon was depressed for a while—he always thought he should get more respect than he did, but became especially bitter in the past year. Janae speculates that all the time Simon spent on creepy **web forums** resulted in his having trouble telling “what was real”; his moods became volatile and desperate, and he started talking about suicide and using the app to frame everyone he hated for his murder.

Janae reveals that Simon was angry at Bronwyn for cheating her way to valedictorian, an honor that would have brought Simon glory; he was angry with Nate for secretly hooking up with Keely; he was angry with Cooper after Cooper had him blacklisted from his clique’s after-prom party. Simon originally planned only those three as his targets—but then Jake found out that Simon had rigged the votes so he’d be on the prom court. Simon, for once, was at the risk of being the subject of terrible gossip and drama—and so Simon decided to put his plan in motion. He had known about Addy and TJ, and used the rumor to “shut Jake up and bring him in” to the operation; Simon needed someone to keep things going after he died, and Janae had refused.

Janae reveals that Simon and Jake were excited about working together because no one would ever realize what they were doing, since they hadn’t been friends for years. As Addy takes all of this information in, she feels like she might faint—and almost wishes she would. The realization that Jake had known about TJ for months and was simply biding his time, waiting to get revenge on her, frightens her.

Janae reveals that while Jake kept posting to the new **About This blog**, Janae urged Jake to stop before things went too far—but he got more and more into the “power trip” of watching the Bayview Four get hauled into the station every time new “evidence” came to light. Addy chastises Janae for not telling anyone about what was going on, but Janae reveals that Jake was blackmailing her—he had recorded Janae and Simon secretly during one of their trio’s “meetings,” and edited the audio to make it sound as if the whole thing was Janae’s mater plan.

Simon’s social media addiction—and his attraction to dark methods of gaining control over others—eventually spiraled out of control. The uniquely millennial problem of placing impossible stakes in one’s online persona wrecked Simon’s mind, and he retreated into a world where reality became dark, messy, and confusing.



In this passage, Janae reveals all of Simon’s specific motivations one by one. She paints a portrait of someone who felt so threatened by the success of his peers that he needed to take control over their lives and bring them down in order to feel empowered. Moreover, Simon’s need to get back into Jake’s good graces materialized in a perverse, warped version of events which saw Simon entirely beholden to Jake, and not the other way around—not the way he’d been dreaming of for years.



In this passage, McManus shows how her characters actually used the fact that their classmates never would have believed an unlikely connection between them possible in order to wreak havoc on them.



As it becomes clear that Simon’s cruel machinations paved the way for Jake’s dark desire for revenge, Addy comes to understand even more deeply that she didn’t truly know anyone at her school.



Janae reveals that she was supposed to plant all the evidence not on Nate, but on Addy. The afternoon they hung out at Addy's house she was supposed to plant the laptop, but couldn't make herself do it after Addy had started being so nice to her. As a last resort, she dumped everything on Nate—it was easy, because he never keeps anything locked. When Addy asks about why Cooper's entry was changed, Janae reveals that Jake made Simon change it, purportedly to spare Cooper's reputation. Janae thinks, though, that Jake did that more out of personal interest, not wanting everyone in school to know his best friend was gay.

As all of this sinks in, Addy begs Janae to tell the truth—she can't let Nate go to prison for murder. Janae laments having no evidence other than the manifesto—she worries that even if she went to the police, she herself would be in trouble for “aiding and abetting.” She reveals that Jake has been reminding her of all she stands to lose. At that moment, the doorbell rings. Janae thinks that Jake is here, as he often comes by to taunt and intimidate her whenever her parents aren't home.

Addy tells Janae to let Jake in and do to him exactly what he did to Janae. She offers to hide in the dining room while Janae and Jake talk, recording their conversation and incriminating Jake. Addy, trembling, runs into the dining room while Janae answers the door. She starts up the **voice recording app** on her phone and overhears Jake telling Janae that she needs to start showing up at school and making everything look like “business as usual.” As Jake and Janae argue, Addy's phone beeps—a text message from Cooper has come in.

Jake enters the dining room and flips on the lights; he is enraged at the sight of Addy. Addy runs out Janae's kitchen through the back door, heading for the woods behind Janae's house. She runs and runs but eventually trips on a tree root and twists her ankle. She hears Jake pursuing her, and forces herself to run on despite the pain in her ankle. Soon, Jake catches up to her. He grabs Addy, calling her a “little bitch” and telling her she “brought this on herself.” Addy tries to get away, but Jake shoves her to the ground and slams her head against a rock, sending Addy's vision blank.

Addy can hear Janae somewhere in the woods, begging for Jake to stop, but Jake doesn't listen and begins choking Addy. Addy feels around desperately for something to hit Jake with; as she looks up into his face, she sees the raw fury in his eyes, and wonders how she didn't see this coming. Suddenly, Jake flies backwards—Cooper has come to Addy's rescue. He folds Addy into his arms and she relaxes as sirens wail their approach.

Addy realizes in this passage that Jake is truly a monster; he wanted to literally put Addy in jail for murder as revenge for cheating on him, kept Janae beholden to his whims through blackmail, and only saved Cooper's reputation for a time because he was so homophobic that he thought Cooper's being gay would reflect badly on him. Jake's narcissistic actions are even worse than Addy thought, and she finally understands just how dangerous he really is.



It seems as if Jake's showing up is a narrative convenience at first, but then Janae reveals that Jake has been systematically torturing her showing up when no one's home in order to blackmail her further. Janae has become a tool in yet another narcissist's twisted revenge fantasy, but her role in Simon's game has made her appear untrustworthy and unbelievable to anyone who could help her.



Addy wants to help Janae, even after learning the role Janae has played in Addy's misery over the last several weeks. Addy wants to set things right, and as she tries to outsmart Jake once and for all, she falls victim to the very thing that could have saved her and Janae and indicted Jake: technology.



As Jake chases Addy through the woods, she realizes just how badly he wants to hurt her. When he catches up with her and tells her she brought everything on herself, his speech echoes one of the first things Simon said to Bronwyn at the start of the novel, showing how intensely Jake has glommed onto Simon's logic—that everyone else in school deserves all the misery Simon and Jake have inflicted upon them.



This passage captures how virulent and intense Jake's hatred of Addy is—he literally wants her to die for what she's done to him. Jake felt entitled to Addy when they were together—and now that they're not, he feels entitled to determining her fate, even if it means framing her for murder and then actually murdering her.



CHAPTER 30

Friday afternoon, a guard comes to Nate's cell; Nate can tell that something has happened. The guard instructs Nate to follow him, and bring his things; Eli is in the warden's office, and informs Nate that the "whole thing" has "blown wide open." Nate is free. As Eli fills Nate in on Jake's arrest and Addy's hospitalization—due to a concussion and a fractured skull—Nate grows numb with the knowledge that so many people have sacrificed their health and safety to help him.

As Nate heads out of the facility, he finds his mother and Bronwyn waiting for him. Bronwyn throws her arms around Nate, and for a moment, things are all right—until the reporters start shoving microphones into his face. Eli handles the media as Nate contemplates everything Eli told him back inside—about how Bronwyn, Kris, Addy, and Cooper all worked together to clear Nate's name. Nate feels useless and dejected as he, Eli, Bronwyn, and his mother pile into a car and drive away.

As they drive down the highway, Eli talks rapid-fire about getting Nate's drug charges dropped and making a statement to the media; Nate can hardly absorb anything. Bronwyn asks if Nate is all right, and he can barely meet her eyes. He worries that he will only disappoint her. He looks away from Bronwyn and tells her he just wants to go home and sleep; out of the corner of his eye he sees her dejected face and realizes he is "disappointing her right on schedule," and that this is the first thing that has made sense in a long time.

Saturday morning, Cooper goes downstairs for breakfast to find Nonny reading an issue of a gossip magazine with his face on the cover—it is a candid shot of Cooper and Kris leaving the station after Cooper gave his statement to the police. Cooper considers how strange and fickle fame is—he has been hated and loved in the span of just a few weeks. Cooper's little brother tells him that his **Facebook fan page** is up to a hundred thousand "likes," but Cooper's grandma looks forward to Cooper being able to go back to "normal" life.

In the week since Jake was arrested, he has been charged with numerous counts of assault, obstruction of justice, and other crimes. He is being held in the same detention center Nate recently got out of. Though this is some kind of "poetic justice," it doesn't feel right to Cooper, who mourns the fact that one of his best friends turned out to be such a monster. Janae, meanwhile, is cooperating the police and will receive a plea bargain; she and Addy are "thick as thieves," though Cooper still has mixed feelings about Janae's involvement in the whole ordeal.

One of Nate's indictments of Addy early on was that she was "useless" in detention while Simon was choking—Nate, who has had to work his whole life just to make ends meet, sees uselessness as one of the worst traits one can have. When he's sprung from jail, then, he's full of feelings of impotence and uselessness, having had to sit in a cell while his friends and family worked hard on his behalf.



Though Nate should be happy and relieved to have his name cleared, he is so traumatized by all he has been through, shocked by how fast things are happening, and ashamed of his own "uselessness" that he can barely muster any reaction to the chaos around him at all.



It's possible that while he was sitting in jail, Nate worried that his future as he knew it was over—now, as all that potential for positive change and a new start floods in, he feels overwhelmed, and begins reverting to stereotypes of his old ways in order to push everyone who wants to love and help him away.



This passage shows how the tides of fame have turned over and over on Cooper, leaving him breathless and half-drowned. His all-American jock reputation was tarnished, threatened, and dragged through the mud, and he was reviled by the press for weeks; now, he is a hero again, and though the support flooding in from the press and the media is ubiquitous, Cooper barely registers it as real.



Cooper was close friends with Jake for years, and is nearly as traumatized by the revelations about him as Addy herself is. Still, Addy wants to continue her friendship with Janae and look past the ways in which Janae hurt her; Cooper doesn't know if he's ready to do that, and is still obsessed with the secrets and lies which were just beneath the surface of his friend's spotless exterior.



Cooper's father comes into the kitchen and begins talking to him about baseball. Cooper has received scholarship offers from all of the top-five college teams except for LSU, and Cooper is excited to play college ball—though he thinks he'll attend Cal State, the only place who didn't rescind his offer when he was outed.

Addy is out of the hospital and recovering well physically; the "emotional stuff," however, is taking longer to process. She is both angry at Jake and in mourning for the person she thought he was; her heart has been hurt as badly as her head by the realization that he hated her and wanted her dead. Addy has been fielding calls from TJ, who she can tell wants to ask her out; she laments that she can't accept, though, because of their checkered past. Some things, Addy muses, just can't be undone.

Ashton and Eli are practically dating, and though they are an odd couple, they seem to really like one another. Now, after picking Addy up from her follow-up doctor's appointment, Ashton drives Addy to an apartment complex, offering to show her something "good"; the girls take the elevator up to the third floor, where Ashton unlocks the door to a trendy two-bedroom she's rented. She invites Addy to come live with her—it will be a fresh start for the both of them. Addy happily accepts.

Bronwyn, meanwhile, has given only one interview to the media in the week since the truth was revealed—she spoke to Mikhail Powers after he ambushed her outside her house. She said she had only one thing to say; on-camera, she revealed that the rumors about her cheating were true. She apologized for her mistake and promised she would never do something like it again.

Bronwyn is on her way to Nate's—he has been avoiding her all week, but has finally agreed to let her stop by. As they greet one another, things are awkward, and Nate says he doesn't have much time; he has to go meet with Officer Lopez, who is setting him up with a job. Bronwyn tells Nate that she still cares about him, but Nate replies that it's time to get back to "normal"; he points out that they are "not each other's normal." Bronwyn insists this doesn't matter to her, but Nate says he doesn't see the point in pursuing a relationship when their lives and futures are so different.

Though Cooper has gotten a lot of tempting, shiny offers from great schools, he wants to choose the one that never stopped celebrating the real him, and never wavered even when things got tough.



The traumas that Addy have suffered have reoriented her life; she believed certain things about herself and about Jake, and over the course of the last several weeks has had it all come crashing down. She rejects TJ because she knows that even if they'd be good for one another, their past is too rooted in pain and deception. She wants to live her life in the light, and distance herself from anything that reminds her of the way secrets, lies, and subterfuge once ruled—and nearly ended—her life.



Addy wants a fresh start, and her sister Ashton is prepared to help her make one—together, they are going to escape the harmful ways in which they've been raised and make a new family together, one based not on marketing themselves as desirable to men, but on working to discover who they truly are and what they want and deserve as independent women.



Bronwyn, too, wants to live her life in the open; she owns up to her cheating accusations, admitting that she made a grave mistake and promising to learn and grow from it and never repeat it. She is no longer covering beneath a web of secrets; she is stepping into the light.



The one good thing that came out of all this mess, for Bronwyn, was her unlikely connection to and meaningful relationship with Nate. However, now that everything has blown over and they're at last free to be together, Nate is pushing her away—he is afraid of breaking free of the painful but familiar stereotypes and patterns he's fallen into in his own life, and in the process rejects Bronwyn and the chance at a new start.



Bronwyn accepts Nate’s rejection and keeps it together until she gets home. When she reaches her room, she collapses on her bed in tears; Maeve comes into comfort her. Though she can’t make Bronwyn’s pain go away, she says, she has something exciting to show her; Maeve pulls out her phone and navigates to **Twitter**, where Yale University has tweeted, in response to her Mikhail Powers interview, “To err is human @BronwynRojas. We look forward to receiving your application.”

This passage represents the first healthy, positive use of social media as a tool for connection throughout the entire novel. The internet, apps, and phones have been broken or ineffective tools for connection up to this point; but Yale’s tweet shows Bronwyn that bridges can still be built and connections can still be fostered, even though her relationship with Nate didn’t work out how she wanted to.



EPILOGUE: THREE MONTHS LATER

It is the middle of February; Bronwyn has been dating Evan for three months. She is unenthusiastic about their relationship; she feels hardly anything for him, and knows they will break up when she goes to college. Next month, she will find out whether or not she’s gotten into Yale, but over the last few months she’s been interning for Eli and coming to realize that one university does not make or break her future. Bronwyn still thinks a lot about the ordeal she’s been through, and about Simon, too—she wonders about his belief that he was owed something he didn’t get. Though she wants to think this line of thought is far from her own brain, she concedes that the impulse that drove her to cheat came from the same desire; she is working hard, though, not to be that person anymore.

All of the things Bronwyn thought she wanted at the start of the novel—a connection with the cute mathlete, a letter of acceptance to Yale, popularity—are now hers or at least within her reach, but the events of the novel have so changed her that she has reframed who she is and what she wants. She knows now that she doesn’t have to follow a predetermined path. As Bronwyn strives to become a better, more well-rounded person, she reflects on her old desires—and the dark ways they motivated her to do things she never thought she’d do.



Tonight, Bronwyn is on her way to play a piano solo at the San Diego Symphony as part of their High School Spotlight concert series. She is nervous as she and Maeve prepare to leave, and texts last-minute directions to Kate, Yumiko, Addy, and Cooper—who is coming to the concert after dinner with Kris’s parents. As she heads out the door, Bronwyn realizes she forgot to invite Evan, but is unfazed by this realization.

The friendships most important to Bronwyn are both the old ones with Kate and Yumiko and the new ones she’s forged with the “murder club”—the connections she thought she wanted, like her relationship with Evan, hardly matter to her now that she’s truly found her tribe.



At the concert, Bronwyn pours every ounce of emotion she’s felt over the last several months into her piece, and receives an enthusiastic ovation from the audience. After the performance, she catches up with her friends, who gush over her and present her with flowers. Ashton and Eli are there, too, and congratulate her on doing so well. Addy cranes her neck as if she’s looking for someone, but when Bronwyn asks her what’s up, she insists she’s just admiring the building’s lavish décor.

Music has been Bronwyn’s way of expressing herself for a long time, and now, as she takes center stage, she unleashes all the feelings she’s had pent up over the last several months. The horrible things that have happened to her have made her a stronger, wiser, better person.



After a little while, Bronwyn and her family make their way outside. Her father goes to get the car while Maeve, Bronwyn, and their mother wait at the front; Bronwyn is shocked when a motorcycle suddenly pulls up. Maeve, spotting Nate’s approach, hurries their mother closer to the parking lot while Bronwyn stands rooted to the spot.

Bronwyn has been pining for Nate—he is the one thing missing from her new life. Now, in an unlikely and unexpected encounter, he shows up—perhaps in order to make amends.



Bronwyn greets Nate coolly, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of knowing how badly she's been pining for him. They catch up for a moment, and Nate reveals that while his father is back in rehab, his mother is still sober and living in Bayview, taking care of him. Nate admits that he saw Bronwyn's solo, and congratulates her on an amazing job. Bronwyn asks why Nate showed up and begins crying. Nate admits he's been an idiot and apologizes for allowing getting arrested to mess with his head and convince him that Bronwyn's life would be better off without him in it.

Nate reveals that Addy convinced him to come tonight and explain himself to Bronwyn. Bronwyn pulls herself together and admits that what hurt most about losing Nate was not just losing their romantic connection, but their deep friendship. Bronwyn tells Nate that just showing up doesn't make things all right, and Nate says he understands. Still, he invites her to a movie as friends, and confesses he misses her "like crazy." Bronwyn agrees to go, secretly excited but afraid to betray her emotions to Nate. He tells her he'll call her on her burner phone before squeezing her hand in a goodbye. As Bronwyn walks towards her parents' car, she can't stop smiling; she turns around to look at Nate one last time and sees that he can't stop smiling either.

In this passage, Nate admits to the personal demons and self-defense mechanisms that forced him to push Bronwyn away. He apologizes for hurting her—it's not quite enough, but he's still proving to himself and to Bronwyn that he's capable of surprising moves and remarkable feats of introspection and self-awareness.



Though Nate and Bronwyn haven't fully repaired their relationship, they have both realized that what they carved out with one another is something too special to throw away. Their relationship, in many ways the emotional crux of the novel, is on the road to repair—the unlikely connection these two forged possibly saved both their lives, and helped their whole school and community to become a better, less judgmental, more open place to be.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Tanner, Alexandra. "One of Us is Lying." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 15 Nov 2018. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Tanner, Alexandra. "One of Us is Lying." LitCharts LLC, November 15, 2018. Retrieved April 21, 2020. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/one-of-us-is-lying>.

To cite any of the quotes from *One of Us is Lying* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

McManus, Karen. *One of Us is Lying*. Random House. 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

McManus, Karen. *One of Us is Lying*. New York: Random House. 2017.