

IT'S A WEIRDLY SUBTLE CONVERSATION. I almost don't notice I'm being blackmailed.

We're sitting in metal folding chairs backstage, and Martin Addison says, "I read your email."

"What?" I look up.

"Earlier. In the library. Not on purpose, obviously."

"You read my email?"

"Well, I used the computer right after you," he says, "and when I typed in Gmail, it pulled up your account. You probably should have logged out."

I stare at him, dumbfounded. He taps his foot against the leg of his chair.

"So, what's the point of the fake name?" he asks.

Well. I'd say the point of the fake name was to keep people

like Martin Addison from knowing my secret identity. So I guess that worked out brilliantly.

I guess he must have seen me sitting at the computer.

And I guess I'm a monumental idiot.

He actually smiles. "Anyway, I thought it might interest you that my brother is gay."

"Um. Not really."

He looks at me.

"What are you trying to say?" I ask.

"Nothing. Look, Spier, I don't have a problem with it. It's just not that big of a deal."

Except it's a little bit of a disaster, actually. Or possibly an epic fuckstorm of a disaster, depending on whether Martin can keep his mouth shut.

"This is really awkward," Martin says.

I don't even know how to reply.

"Anyway," he says, "it's pretty obvious that you don't want people to know."

I mean. I guess I don't. Except the whole coming out thing doesn't really scare me.

I don't think it scares me.

It's a giant holy box of awkwardness, and I won't pretend I'm looking forward to it. But it probably wouldn't be the end of the world. Not for me.

The problem is, I don't know what it would mean for Blue. If Martin were to tell anyone. The thing about Blue is that he's

kind of a private person. The kind of person who wouldn't forget to log out of his email. The kind of person who might never forgive me for being so totally careless.

So I guess what I'm trying to say is that I don't know what it would mean for us. For Blue and me.

But I seriously can't believe I'm having this conversation with Martin Addison. Of all the people who could have logged into Gmail after me. You have to understand that I never would have used the library computers in the first place, except they block the wireless here. And it was one of those days where I couldn't wait until I was home on my laptop. I mean, I couldn't even wait to check it on my phone in the parking lot.

Because I had written Blue from my secret account this morning. And it was sort of an important email.

I just wanted to see if he had written back.

"I actually think people would be cool about it," Martin says. "You should be who you are."

I don't even know where to begin with that. Some straight kid who barely knows me, advising me on coming out. I kind of have to roll my eyes.

"Okay, well, whatever. I'm not going to show anyone," he says.

For a minute, I'm stupidly relieved. But then it hits me.

"Show anyone?" I ask.

He blushes and fidgets with the hem of his sleeve. Something about his expression makes my stomach clench.

“Did you—did you take a screenshot or something?”

“Well,” he says, “I wanted to talk to you about that.”

“Sorry—you *took a fucking screenshot?*”

He purses his lips together and stares over my shoulder. “Anyway,” he says, “I know you’re friends with Abby Suso, so I wanted to ask—”

“Seriously? Or maybe we could go back to you telling me why you took a screenshot of my emails.”

He pauses. “I mean, I guess I’m wondering if you want to help me talk to Abby.”

I almost laugh. “So what—you want me to put in a good word for you?”

“Well, yeah,” he says.

“And why the hell should I do that?”

He looks at me, and it suddenly clicks. This Abby thing. This is what he wants from me. This, in exchange for not broadcasting my private fucking emails.

And Blue’s emails.

Jesus Christ. I mean, I guess I figured Martin was harmless. A little bit of a goobery nerd, to be honest, but it’s not like that’s a bad thing. And I’ve always thought he was kind of hilarious.

Except I’m not laughing now.

“You’re actually going to make me do this,” I say.

“Make you? Come on. It’s not like that.”

“Well, what’s it like?”

“It’s not like anything. I mean, I like this girl. I was just

thinking you would want to help me here. Invite me to stuff when she'll be there. I don't know."

"And what if I don't? You'll put the emails on Facebook? On the fucking Tumblr?"

Jesus. The creeksecrets Tumblr: ground zero for Creekwood High School gossip. The entire school would know within a day.

We're both quiet.

"I just think we're in a position to help each other out," Martin finally says.

I swallow, thickly.

"Paging Marty," Ms. Albright calls from the stage. "Act Two, Scene Three."

"So, just think about it." He dismounts his chair.

"Oh yeah. I mean, this is so goddamn awesome," I say.

He looks at me. And there's this silence.

"I don't know what the hell you want me to say," I add finally.

"Well, whatever." He shrugs. And I don't think I've ever been so ready for someone to leave. But as his fingers graze the curtains, he turns to me.

"Just curious," he says. "Who's Blue?"

"No one. He lives in California."

If Martin thinks I'm selling out Blue, he's fucking crazy.

Blue doesn't live in California. He lives in Shady Creek, and he goes to our school. Blue isn't his real name.

He's someone. He may even be someone I know. But I don't know who. And I'm not sure I want to know.

And I'm seriously not in the mood to deal with my family. I probably have about an hour until dinner, which means an hour of trying to spin my school day into a string of hilarious anecdotes. My parents are like that. It's like you can't just tell them about your French teacher's obvious wedgie, or Garrett dropping his tray in the cafeteria. You have to perform it. Talking to them is more exhausting than keeping a blog.

It's funny, though. I used to love the chatter and chaos before dinner. Now it seems like I can't get out the door fast enough. Today especially. I stop only long enough to click the leash onto Bieber's collar and get him out the door.

I'm trying to lose myself in Tegan and Sara on my iPod. But I can't stop thinking about Blue and Martin Addison and the holy awfulness of today's rehearsal.

So Martin is into Abby, just like every other geeky straight boy in Advanced Placement. And really, all he wants is for me to let him tag along when I hang out with her. It doesn't seem like a huge deal when I think about it that way.

Except for the fact that he's blackmailing me. And by extension, he's blackmailing Blue. That's the part that makes me want to kick something.

But Tegan and Sara help. Walking to Nick's helps. The air has that crisp, early fall feeling, and people are already lining

their steps with pumpkins. I love that. I've loved it since I was a kid.

Bieber and I cut around to Nick's backyard and through the basement. There's a massive TV facing the door, on which Templars are being brutalized. Nick and Leah have taken over a pair of rocking video game chairs. They look like they haven't moved all afternoon.

Nick pauses the game when I walk in. That's something about Nick. He won't put down a guitar for you, but he'll pause a video game.

"Bieber!" says Leah. Within seconds, he perches awkwardly with his butt in her lap, tongue out and leg thumping. He's so freaking shameless around Leah.

"No, it's cool. Just greet the dog. Pretend I'm not here."

"Aww, do you need me to scratch your ears, too?"

I crack a smile. This is good; things are normal. "Did you find the traitor?" I ask.

"Killed him." He pats the controller.

"Nice."

Seriously, there is no part of me that cares about the welfare of assassins or Templars or any game character ever. But I think I need this. I need the violence of video games and the smell of this basement and the familiarity of Nick and Leah. The rhythm of our speech and silences. The aimlessness of mid-October afternoons.

"Simon, Nick hasn't heard about le wedgie."

“Ohhhh. *Le wedgie. C’est une histoire touchante.*”

“English, please?” says Nick.

“Or pantomime,” Leah says.

As it turns out, I’m kind of awesome at reenacting epic wedgies.

So maybe I do like to perform. A little.

I think I’m getting that Nick-and-Leah sixth-grade field trip feeling. I don’t know how to explain it. But when it’s just the three of us, we have these perfect, stupid moments. Martin Addison doesn’t exist in this kind of moment. Secrets don’t exist.

Stupid. Perfect.

Leah rips up a paper straw wrapper, and they’re both holding giant Styrofoam cups of sweet tea from Chick-fil-A. I actually haven’t been to Chick-fil-A for a while. My sister heard they donate money to screw over gay people, and I guess it started to feel weird eating there. Even if their Oreo milk shakes are giant vessels of frothy deliciousness. Not that I can bring that up with Nick and Leah. I don’t exactly talk about gay stuff with anyone. Except Blue.

Nick takes a swig of his tea and yawns, and Leah immediately tries to launch a little paper wad into his mouth. But Nick clamps his mouth shut, blocking it.

She shrugs. “Just keep on yawning, sleepyhead.”

“Why are you so tired?”

“Because I party hard. All night. Every night,” Nick says.



“If by ‘party,’ you mean your calculus homework.”

“WHATEVER, LEAH.” He leans back, yawning again.

This time, Leah’s paper wad grazes the corner of his mouth.

He flicks it back toward her.

“So, I keep having these weird dreams,” he adds.

I raise my eyebrows. “Yikes. TMI?”

“Um. Not that kind of dream.”

Leah’s whole face goes red.

“No, just,” Nick says, “like actual weird dreams. Like I dreamed I was in the bathroom putting on my contacts, and I couldn’t figure out which lens went in which eye.”

“Okay. So then what?” Leah’s face is buried in the fur on the back of Bieber’s neck, and her voice is muffled.

“Nothing. I woke up, I put my contacts in like normal, and everything was fine.”

“That’s the most boring dream ever,” she says. And then, a moment later, “Isn’t that why they label the left and right sides of the containers?”

“Or why people should just wear glasses and stop touching their eyeballs.” I sink cross-legged onto the carpet. Bieber slides out of Leah’s lap to wander toward me.

“And because your glasses make you look like Harry Potter, right, Simon?”

One time. I said it once.

“Well, I think my unconscious is trying to tell me something.” Nick can be pretty single-minded when he’s feeling

intellectual. “Obviously, the theme of the dream is vision. What am I not seeing? What are my blind spots?”

“Your music collection,” I suggest.

Nick rocks backward in the video game chair and takes another swig of tea. “Did you know Freud interpreted his own dreams when he was developing his theory? And he believed that all dreams are a form of unconscious wish fulfillment?”

Leah and I look at each other, and I can tell we’re thinking the same thing. It doesn’t matter that he’s quite possibly talking complete bullshit, because Nick is a little bit irresistible when he’s in one of his philosophical moods.

Of course, I have a strict policy of not falling for straight guys. At least, not confirmed straight guys. Anyway, I have a policy of not falling for Nick. But Leah has fallen. And it’s caused all kinds of problems, especially now that Abby’s in the picture.

At first, I didn’t understand why Leah hated Abby, and asking about it directly got me nowhere.

“Oh, she’s the *best*. I mean, she’s a cheerleader. And she’s so cute and skinny. Doesn’t that just make her so amazing?”

You have to understand that no one has mastered the art of deadpan delivery like Leah.

But eventually I noticed Nick switching seats with Bram Greenfeld at lunch—calculated switching, designed to maximize his odds of sitting near Abby. And then the eyes. The famous Nick Eisner lingering, lovesick eyes. We’d been down

that vomit-inducing road before with Amy Everett at the end of freshman year. Though, I have to admit there's something fascinating about Nick's nervous intensity when he likes someone.

When Leah sees that look pass across Nick's face, she just shuts down.

Which means there's actually one good reason for being Martin Addison's wingman matchmaker bitch. If Martin and Abby hook up, maybe the Nick problem will just go away. Then Leah can chill the heck out, and equilibrium will be restored.

So it's not just about me and my secrets. It's hardly about me at all.