

Lie Like A Dog

It was around the third right turn when Emily realized how old-fashioned it was to try to follow someone in a car, with a car. David had the Life360 tracking app on his phone, having installed it two years ago when they were at Disney World with her cousins, and it was now buried in a wilderness of unused apps on his phone, but still regularly broadcasting his location, like Voyager, pinging home from the dark reaches of interstellar space. Emily pulled out of traffic into the Walgreens' lot on the corner. She got out her phone and swiped over to the app. A small circular photo of David, in his tux at Mark and Tiffani's wedding last June, appeared on top of a map of Southside. He was .32 miles away and his little tux thumbnail pic was moving down University Boulevard towards Hwy. 280.

Emily ran through the list of possible destinations in that direction. There was the McDonald's right there at the hospital, but it was a bit early for lunch, even for David. A couple of gas stations were also in that direction, along with a nicer BBQ place that David liked, but the area was mostly housing and apartment complexes where faculty and students from the university and doctors and nurses working at the hospital lived. Emily watched David's avatar move along University Boulevard, getting stopped by every red light, which frustrated Emily.

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Wherever he was going, she wanted him to get there, so she'd know. It took him forever to get to the Hwy 280 intersection, and then his tiny tux circle crawled across the wide line marking 280 on the map. The thumbnail seemed to hesitate a moment as it neared the corner at St. Vincent's Hospital where the McDonald's was located, as if he was contemplating a turn into the drive-thru lane, but after a few seconds, the thumbnail jumped through the intersection into the residential area of Southside, a cross hatch of short and long streets cut by winding alleys through the residential blocks flowing down the side of Red Mountain.

Emily's concentration on the moving circle was broken as the woman getting into her car next to Emily's bumped Emily's car with her door. She looked up from her phone into the traffic passing in front of her on University Boulevard. She didn't have time for this. The cleaning needed to be picked up today because they had Katie and Brandon's party. Her birth control pills were ready to be picked up right inside this Walgreens. Bills needed to be dropped into the mail. The little things behind the scenes that she did, that she always did, to keep their life moving along without any hiccups.

But she needed to find out some things. When David got ready for work this morning, he took an extra moment to pick out his shirt and chose his best tie out of the closet. He opened the new package of t-shirts in the dresser to get a new one to wear. A few extra seconds spent with his razor getting the little bit of mustache under his nose that he usually missed. There was nothing said but it was all unusual, all slightly different in the same way, like a stand of trees all bent in the same direction by a steady breeze. So, at lunch, Emily left a few minutes early to drive over near David's office and waited to see if he left for lunch. He bounced out of the side entrance of the dull grey concrete box that served as the corporate offices of Jalbert and Company right at noon, pulled his Accord out of the parking lot and made a couple of quick

turns to get on University Boulevard. Emily tried to keep up for a few blocks before she realized that she could track him on an app far easier and pulled into the Walgreens' lot.

David's tux avatar turned and slipped slowly up 27th Street. Their friends Diane and Chris had lived on that street for a while, before moving out to suburban Vestavia for the schools once they had decided to have kids. Before Diane and Chris had sold their house, David had tried to talk Emily into buying a house down from Diane and Chris on the same street, but Diane had talked Emily out of it, sharing her frustration with the neighborhood's transition from young homeowners to rowdy student renters.

David's thumbnail moved to the end of the street, where it dead ended in the parking lot for Cliffside Terrace Apartments, a complex filled mostly with students. Before they moved, Diane and Chris would regale them with stories of the police coming in to break up and quieten down weekend parties at Cliffside's pool. This time of day, given the clear blue sky and temps close to 90, there would be a bunch of co-eds in swimsuits laying by the pool. His avatar stopped in the shaded area on the map noting the parking lot for the complex. Emily tried to figure out a connection. David didn't work at the university, but his office had a few interns every semester. Maybe one of them lived at the complex.

Emily jumped at a sharp *TAP, TAP, TAP* on the passenger window of her car, breaking her concentration and causing her to fling her hands around her face as if she had flushed a covey of birds from a bush. A man in his late 20s, wearing a long sleeve blue dress shirt with the sleeves rolled up, was looking in at her. She unlocked the door and he opened the door and Chris dropped into the passenger seat.

"What are you doing here?" Emily asked.

“Diane had me stop by here to pick up her prescription. She likes the pharmacist here, so we haven’t moved any of our prescriptions to a drugstore closer to the house,” Chris said.

“So, did you decide to follow him?” he asked.

Emily nodded at her phone, sitting on the console between the two front seats. Chris bent over and squinted at the screen.

“So, he’s at Cliffside Terrace? That’s less than a mile away. Are you going to head that way?” he asked, goading in his tone. Chris had been pushing her for weeks to confront David with her suspicions, in both subtle and obvious ways. It was beginning to wear on Emily. It wasn’t easy to push that first domino, to start that chain reaction.

“I just need you to get up off my ass on this,” Emily snapped at Chris, “I’m still figuring out how I want to handle things.”

Chris put his hand on her bare knee and rubbed the top bit of her thigh below the hem of her dress. “I’m sorry,” he said, “I don’t mean to push you, but you did say you wanted me to keep you from chickening out”

“There’s a difference between chickening out and taking the time to do things right,” Emily said. She felt Chris squeeze her thigh and slide his hand a bit further, pulling the hem of her dress up to about mid-thigh before she pushed his hand away and pulled the hem down in the direction of her knee.

“We’re in a downtown parking lot at lunchtime,” Emily said, with an edge to her voice, “Someone is going to walk up on us, and I’m not ready to flash a stranger in the Walgreens’ parking lot,”

“And that’s so much different than flashing someone in the Sea ‘N Suds parking lot?”

Chris asked with a smile.

She winced at the mention of their beach trip. She had had to travel for work, and David decided not to go with her, so Chris snuck away from Diane and stayed with Emily for two days at the beach hotel. All of it had been reckless, the trip, going out to the Sea ‘N Suds, having too many daiquiris. When they were leaving the restaurant, two guys who had been drinking beer and leering at her from a table across the restaurant were outside smoking. They both stared at her as she unsteadily walked down the sidewalk to the parking lot, and as she got closer the fat one leaned over and whispered something to the other which made him drop his head and slap his thigh a few times as he laughed. Pissed off, Emily pulled her shirt up and flashed them, then flipped them off. One of them turned out to be an off-duty Gulf Shores police officer.

“Yeah, it’s different, mostly because the police here are probably not as forgiving as the Gulf Shores police department.”

“Probably,” Chris said, sliding his hand back towards her knee. “So, what are you going to do?”

Emily stared at her phone and David’s avatar smiled back at her. This was one of her favorite pictures of him and she used it anytime she had to upload a head shot for him. His boyish smile still sat, not moving, in the Cliffside Terrace parking lot. The message below his picture said *0 miles an hour for 12 minutes*. She smiled back a little at his smiling face. The baby blue color of the bow tie was the least unfortunate of the four – four! - colors that Tiffani had picked out for her wedding, and David wore it well. Emily had picked forest green ties to go with the black tuxedos in her own wedding, and David had worn that color well also. David seemed to

go with a lot of colors – Emily could mix and match his shirts and ties in any number of ways and it always seemed to work. David was a color that went with everything.

Chris, on the other hand, never seemed to be a good match for any color. She looked at him sitting in the passenger seat across from her, in a perfectly fine blue dress shirt, a color that 25 million different men wore to work this morning, and he looked terrible in it, his skin washed out, too white and pale, a slight hint of red left from the sunburn he got at the beach. David tanned beautifully and easily, which expanded his repertoire of colors for the summer.

Chris slid his hand back up her thigh a bit and squeezed it again in the silence, which snapped Emily's focus back to the car and David's avatar, which had gone *0 miles an hour for 17 minutes*.

“Get out,” Emily said, “I’m going to drive over there and take a look.”

“Want me to follow along?” Chris asked.

“No. I don’t want you anywhere around this,” Emily said. “It would just confuse me more.”

“Ok,” he said, squeezing her thigh one more time as he got out. Emily pushed his hand away as she pulled the hem of her dress down again.

“I’ll call you later and let you know how things went,” she said.

“Ok,” Chris said, leaving in a way that indicated he understood he shouldn’t say anything more. Emily noted he correctly read her mood for once and credited something positive to his account, a rare positive point for him lately. She had enjoyed nothing about the last five minutes; not his voice, his thigh squeezes, his ugly blue shirt or his pale red sunburn. As far as she was concerned, things had gone downhill since the morning of their last day at the beach when he had

gotten out of bed to take a shower. There was a tiny bit of light coming in the room around the curtains, and she watched him walk away from the bed, realizing that she found nothing romantic or sensual or even interesting in the sight of his nude body going into the bathroom. She lay there in the dark, listening to the shower, disappointed that she had to be there when he came out, disappointed about how boring this all was, disappointed about how much of a waste of her time he had been. By the time Chris finished his shower and came back into the room, she gave him no hint where her thoughts had been. He got dressed in a different ugly blue shirt and annoyed her by saying more sweet things and left her lying in bed and headed back to Birmingham with the smug swagger of a man congratulating himself on getting away with something. But he left Gulf Shores with nothing other than Emily's relief that he was gone. Yet three weeks later he was still on the scene, intruding on moments that were her moments, not their moments. Emily knew she needed to do something about that, to tell him something, to get him out of her hair. Maybe next week, she thought.

Emily checked her phone again. *0 miles an hour for 22 minutes. 0.31 miles away.*

Do you want directions to David? asked a pop-up text box in the app.

Emily backed out of the parking spot at the Walgreens and got in line to turn back onto University Boulevard. Chris's car was two cars ahead, and he turned left, back towards his office downtown. Emily turned right.

She knew where she was going, but she had no idea of how she was going to manage her arrival at the destination. Yelling could happen, but she wasn't one to make a scene, so she was steeling herself to be more stoic, but she wanted to say something. She wanted to be able to tell people how she stood up for herself in the moment. That would go a long way towards washing away the way she felt about her time with Chris, which she decided was over, now, at this very

minute. She wasn't going to wait until next week. It was all too much. She wanted some clear air to live in, to be free of all this stuff. She needed a moment to be proud of to help wipe the slate clean. So, no yelling, she resolved. Her vision was for a firm conversation, a piercing confident stare, a controlled exit back to her car.

0 miles an hour for 24 minutes.

She turned onto 27th Street, and drove down the block, past Diane and Chris's old house, which had a sorority flag hanging from the front of the screened-in porch. Four small new SUVs were crammed into the driveway next to the house, each a different color, each with a license plate from a different state. Illinois. Texas. Colorado. California. All the way up 27th Street to Cliffside Terrace were rental houses, save for the few holdouts here and there, marked by their closely cropped lawns and trim front porches and one car per driveway.

Emily's phone dinged. It was Chris.

You OK? he had texted.

She highlighted his number and blocked him. Emily could not remember why in the world she had ever given him the time of day. Passing his old house brought back no other memory other than Diane meeting her at the front door on a sunny October football Saturday as Emily carried in a foil-covered bowl of tiny cocktail smoked sausages in a thin BBQ sauce for some party a few years ago. It was cold, and David walked ahead of her in his black leather jacket that set off well against his brown hair. Emily followed him into the house, where he faded into the crowded living room while she was redirected to the kitchen to unload and unwrap her contribution to the menu. That moment was all she could recall of the house. Nothing of Chris, nothing of Diane, nothing of that party or any other party they had been to there.

But Emily had made an impression on Chris that day. At every event after that day, he would hang around her, which she tolerated for the most part. Diane didn't seem to notice or mind. Thinking about it now, Emily could see that Diane was as tired of him after six years of marriage as Emily already was after one trip to the beach. He didn't even have a proper pair of swim trunks, only some gym shorts and a muscle tee, neither of which were flattering. How could someone be so clueless?

Her phone dinged again.

Call Blocked said the screen.

Emily swiped back to the tracking app. Tiny round avatar David smiled at her from his tux and the bow tie. He looked good in a bow tie, she thought. On the day of Tiffani's wedding, he was determined to tie it himself, but finally after about twenty unsuccessful attempts, he had to get her help, and they fumbled and fussed with it until she finally got it right. They raced into the back of the church, just in time for David to join the wedding procession. He had missed the picture taking before the wedding, but Emily cropped this headshot from the photo of the full wedding party.

0 miles an hour for 26 minutes. Emily looked up from the phone as she pulled into the Cliffside Terrace parking lot. She saw David's car right away, pulled into the loading zone with his blinkers going. She turned back to the right and parked at the end of a row of cars, out of direct view of David's car. She could still see any coming or going in her rear view and side mirrors. She slipped her shoes back on, which she had taken off while driving. She wanted to be ready to jump out of her car and have her moment.

Her phone screen brightened. *Call Blocked*. Chris will figure things out in a few days, she thought. He should be smart enough, but maybe not. He sometimes didn't even wear a t-shirt, which surprised her when she unbuttoned his shirt at the beach. "You don't wear a t-shirt?" she had asked, unexpectedly finding bare skin beneath his dress shirt. "Nope, never have," Chris said, "Too hot for me."

"Hmmm," Emily replied, which she could tell Chris heard as a satisfied purr, rather than Emily making a mental note on a list growing longer every hour of their stay at the beach. The list was long past the break-it-off point, and so Emily felt no guilt about moving into full ghost mode today.

Emily noticed some movement in the mirror and shifted her head so she could get a good angle to see what was moving. It was David, walking in the grassy area near where his car was parked. He was fidgeting with something in his hand that Emily made out as a dog leash. She couldn't get the full picture from the mirror, so she turned around and looked out the back window. There were enough visual distractions between her car and David to keep anyone from noticing her. David was holding a pink retractable leash attached to a pink collar around the neck of a small, dark black Labrador puppy that was frolicking in the grass. David was by himself, holding the leash with one hand and texting with his other. Emily's phone pinged twice. It was two texts from David. A picture of the happy chocolate Labrador puppy came through first, followed by a text from David.

Look at this cutie! David's text read. *We had a chance at work to foster a puppy from the Humane Society for the weekend.*

Emily's phone pinged again.

Since we had been thinking about a dog, I thought I'd bring her home just to see.

Another ping.

I'm about to leave the shelter right now & head home.

Emily looked back at David. He put his phone in his pocket and stood there for a moment with the dog. The chocolate lab was a good accessory for David, Emily thought, and would be a good match for his leather coat. David's head turned upwards, and a young girl, maybe 20 years old, skipped down the stairs from one of the second-floor apartments. She was dressed in a red college t-shirt, stretchy tight-fitting black yoga pants and a pair of red and silver Nike running shoes. She was carrying a small blue, hard-sided carry-on suitcase. She hurried down the steps as the puppy recognized her and ran to her, straining at the end of the leash David was holding. The girl bent down and fluffed the puppy's ears then walked over and put her suitcase in the white BMW SUV parked next to David's Accord. The SUV had California plates. Probably a student, Emily thought. The girl brought out two Ziploc bags of dog food from the back of her SUV and set it on the hood of David's car, then walked back to the puppy and stooped to play with it a bit more, scratching its happy belly and holding her hands out to let the puppy nibble at her hand. David held the leash and kept the puppy from running too far away. After a moment the girl stood up and walked to David, put her arm around his waist, and kissed him on the cheek, while David used his free hand to squeeze her ass a bit, a move Emily was familiar with. Emily's toes toyed with her shoes as she watched, slipping them off and on as she processed what she was watching.

The girl let go of David's waist, scuffed the puppy's head and ears one more time before she got in her car, backed out of the spot and drove away. David stood in the grass with the puppy, holding the leash as the puppy strained to follow the departing SUV. Emily had a clear

path to David as he stood there. She toyed with her shoes, thinking about whether she should slam the door or not when she got out. *How would that play?* she wondered.

David started to shorten up the leash, bit by bit, reeling in the puppy until he could pick it up, trying to hold the puppy away from his suit. David was wearing Emily's favorite shirt, a robin-egg blue shirt she had picked out for him at a men's store on Canal Street in New Orleans last summer. He had pushed back on that color, but she insisted that he'd look good in that color, and Emily could tell he came around to knowing that she was right. The puppy squirmed in David's arms, and David had to press him close to his body to keep ahold of him. The puppy had wet feet from the grass and got a bit of mud on the shirt. That will come out, Emily thought, but she cringed about the chance that one of the puppy's toenails would catch and tear the shirt. Emily was watching David try to wrangle the puppy into the car when her phone pinged.

Call Blocked.

She flipped her phone over. Chris didn't like dogs she had learned at the beach. They had been walking along the road from the Sea N' Suds, still tipsy from dinner and stressed out about the run-in with the police, walking on the sidewalk along Beach Boulevard, when they passed an older couple walking their dogs. When the dogs showed some interest in Chris, sniffing at his bare legs, he had scampered away, hiding behind Emily like a child. Chris explained away his skittishness by telling Emily that when he was six years old, he played too rough with one of his family's dogs, and the dog bit him badly on his butt and the back of his legs as he tried to run away. She thought nothing about it until the next morning as she lay in bed and watched his smooth, pale ass pass in front of her in the early morning darkness.

David pulled out of his parking spot and headed out of the parking lot along 27th Street. Emily picked up her phone and swiped to the tracking app. There was David's picture again,

bow tie and tux and smile. Blue really is his color, she thought. I wonder why he doesn't see that. She waited until the tracking app showed him well down the block. She slipped her shoes on, got out of her car and walked a few feet across the parking lot and faced the apartment building. She swiped to get to her phone camera and took a picture of the building and the stairs and the grassy area where David had walked the dog, and then walked back to her car. She opened the tracking app again.

25 miles an hour for 3 minutes, the caption on his avatar read. *You are 0.4 miles from David. Would you like directions?* She slipped off her shoes and kicked them away from the gas and brake pedals. Emily backed out of her parking spot and headed down 27th Street, watching David's progress in the app. She took her fingers to the screen and swiped to widen it to a view that included the avatars for both of them on the map – David, smiling, in his baby blue bow tie and tux, and hers, a color picture of her as a young girl at the beach, sitting on her knees close to the water, her hands raised to her freckled face, eyes closed tight, waiting forever for the blue-green wave about to crash over her.