

THE TELL

Written by

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INT. AN OFFICE CORRIDOR - TUESDAY MORNING

CHARLIE BENNETT, a 20-something girl with a cup of hot coffee in her hand and her bag dangling precariously from her elbow, dashes down an office hallway, gracelessly swerving around a group of men in suits. She skids to a halt as her coffee sloshes around the mug. A few droplets land on the floor.

She looks back at the men disappearing down the hallway, blows a strand of flyaway hair out of her face, and proceeds, taking a bit more care this time. She's doing really well. At least, until -

SPLAT! She runs into LIAM while she's trying to avoid someone else. Her coffee goes flying, narrowly missing Liam as he immediately ducks.

CHARLIE

Oh, God. I'm sorry. Are you okay?

LIAM

I'm fine. Charlie, why d'you walk down this hall like you're blindfolded?

Charlie bites her thumb. Liam notices the action.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Oh, don't worry about it. You single-handedly keep the janitors in business.

(checking his watch)

Aren't you late?

CHARLIE

(muffled)

There was an accident on the highway. I got stuck.

LIAM

(teasingly)

So you're late, and you've spilled your coffee. You've been here five minutes and you're already zero for two.

Liam pats her comfortingly on the back and heads for the nearest bathroom. Charlie watches him go guiltily, thumb still in her mouth, and then bursts into action, all but throwing herself in the direction of her desk.

INT. AN EDITING SUITE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Charlie sits at her desk with the door open, scrolling through her e-mail while she gnaws on her thumb. There is a knock at the door and KATE HUNTER appears in the frame, holding a cup of coffee. Kate is easy-going, drinks coffee like it's a religion, and wears jeans, a T-shirt, and a permanent messy bun.

KATE  
Hey, Charlie. What's up?

CHARLIE  
(distracted by her  
computer)  
Oh, hey.

Kate notices Charlie's stance and cocks her head.

KATE  
So, what happened to you?

CHARLIE  
What d'you mean?

KATE  
Did you trip on that exposed pipe  
in the third suite? Kill the office  
fish? Mispronounce entrepreneur?  
'Cause I'll admit, that's not as  
easy to say as people -

CHARLIE  
What? No. No, I almost spilled my  
coffee on Liam.  
(a beat)  
Again. But this time he knew to  
duck, so I guess there's that.

KATE  
Ooooh. Well, not your shining  
moment, but I've seen worse.

CHARLIE  
From me?

KATE  
Of course from you. You should wear  
a CAUTION sandwich board when  
you're out in public.

Charlie glares at her for a second and then chuckles, shrugging and returning to her computer.

She opens her editing program to reveal a complex layout of audio, footage, and photography.

KATE (CONT'D)  
Whoa, is that the Baines Art  
Gallery project?

CHARLIE  
Yeah, it's starting to come  
together.

KATE  
Can I see it?

CHARLIE  
No, because if you say anything  
sarcastic about it, I'll kill you,  
and I value your friendship too  
much to let that happen.

KATE  
(solemnly)  
That is the nicest thing anyone's  
ever said to me.

They sit in silence for a few seconds, Kate drinking her coffee while Charlie re-sizes a photo on Lightroom. As Kate stands to leave, Charlie suddenly stops.

CHARLIE  
Hey, Kate.

KATE  
Yeah?

CHARLIE  
How did - how did you know  
something happened?

KATE  
What d'you mean?

CHARLIE  
Well, the first thing you said when  
you walked in was 'what happened to  
you?' How did you know anything  
happened?

KATE  
Oh. You have a tell.

CHARLIE  
(a beat of silence)  
I'm sorry, a what?

KATE

A tell. Like in poker, you know, when the guy twiddles his fingers when he's got a good hand. You have one.

CHARLIE

What kind of tell?

KATE

Uh, you bite your thumb. When you're embarrassed. Or nervous or guilty about something, or whatever. How d'you think your parents can tell when you lie?

CHARLIE

My parents are lawyers, they can tell when either of us lie!

KATE

Too true. But you do have a tell.

CHARLIE

(incredulously laughing)  
I do *not*.

The two stare at each other for a moment, Charlie disbelieving.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And - and even if I did, why didn't you ever tell me?

KATE

Well, you never... asked. I kinda figured you knew.

CHARLIE

Kate, the point of a tell is that the person who *has* the tell doesn't *know* they have a tell!

KATE

(a beat)  
Nope, you've lost me.

Charlie groans.

CHARLIE

It doesn't matter, anyway.

KATE

Why not?

CHARLIE

Because I don't have a tell, so the point's moot.

KATE

Charlie, darling, I've known you since we were three. It's definitely a tell.

(a beat)

Why d'you care so much?

Charlie ignores her, biting her thumb while she taps the desk with her other hand. Kate rolls her eyes, but says nothing.

CHARLIE

Okay, I have an idea.

KATE

A good idea?

CHARLIE

Let's make a bet.

KATE

Not a good idea, then.

CHARLIE

Yes, it is! I won't bite my thumb for the rest of the week. If I win, you have to bring me coffee every day for the rest of the month.

KATE

No way, man. I remember the last time you made a bet. Jonathan Swarsky never did regrow that patch of hair.

Kate stands up and begins to walk away.

CHARLIE

(desperate)

And if I lose, I'll - I'll clean your apartment every weekend for a month.

Silence falls. Kate turns back and stares, horrified, at Charlie.

KATE

You, Charlotte Bennett, would clean my apartment every weekend for month... to prove you *don't* have a tell.

CHARLIE  
 (no going back now)  
 Yes.

This is serious business now. The two friends lock eyes.

KATE  
 And you won't get... persnickety  
 when you lose.

CHARLIE  
 No, obviously not.  
 (with the air of one who  
 thinks she's better at  
 comebacks than she is)  
 Because I'm not gonna lose.

Charlie offers her hand to Kate. Kate eyes the outstretched hand reluctantly. She looks up at Charlie's challenging expression and sighs, cautiously shaking the girl's hand. The bet has been made.

INT. THE OFFICE BREAK ROOM - TUESDAY AFTERNOON

Charlie sits on the counter next to the coffee maker as it brews a pot of coffee. She's reading through a small notebook with a pen in her hand, making notes in the margins. EVAN MATTHEWS, a tall-ish guy with glasses and an easy smile, pokes his head in.

EVAN  
 Oh, good, you are here.

CHARLIE  
 (distracted)  
 Where else would I be?

EVAN  
 I dunno, your desk?

CHARLIE  
 I'm making coffee.

EVAN  
 (in slight awe)  
 You must spend half your paycheck  
 on coffee at this rate.

CHARLIE  
 Mm-hmm. Kate's, too.

Evan laughs, but Charlie ignores him, biting her lip as she stares blankly at the pages. Evan awkwardly stops, unsure of what to do.

EVAN

Oh, is that for the Baines project?

CHARLIE

Uh, no.

(pointing her finger at  
him without looking up)

But the pictures you sent me were  
really good. Thank you.

EVAN

Uh, no problem. I just want  
everything to be perfect, this is,  
like, really important.

CHARLIE

Hm.

An uncomfortable silence falls as Evan stares uncomprehendingly at Charlie. He slowly sidesteps over to where she's sitting and slides next to her, leaning over her shoulder to see what she's doing.

The page is a list, titled 'How To Get Rid Of Tell,' followed by various suggestions with varying degrees of plausibility.

EVAN

...Does that say, 'drug everyone  
until the week is over?'

Charlie starts, notices how close Evan is, and falls off the counter, crashing to the floor with a pained groan.

EVAN (CONT'D)

Sorry. Want some help?

As Evan moves to help her, Charlie sits up. Her thumb makes its way towards her mouth, until at the last second she realizes what she's doing and slams her hand into her chest.

CHARLIE

Um, no. Thanks.

EVAN

Are you okay?

There's a tense pause, as Charlie looks down at her notes and back up at Evan.



CHARLIE

Um, I have a question, actually.  
Have you ever noticed me... uh, you  
know what a tell is, right? Well, I  
was just wondering -

EVAN

Oh, you mean that thing you do with  
your thumb?

Charlie's mouth opens and closes.

CHARLIE

(obviously unhappy)  
Oh, so you've... um, noticed it?

EVAN

(oblivious)  
Sure, the whole office has.

Charlie, not expecting this response, makes an involuntary  
choking sound and throws the notebook down on the counter.

CHARLIE

*What?*

EVAN

You, uh, dropped your...  
(noticing Charlie's  
expression)  
Um, yeah. I mean, you do it all the  
time, like, when you're nervous or  
embarrassed or whatever. Why, is  
that bad?

CHARLIE

I have to go.

She immediately turns and leaves the room. Evan, standing in  
the break room, gingerly picks up the notebook and looks  
after Charlie's retreating figure uncertainly.

EVAN

Charlie! You forgot your coffee!  
And your notes!  
(he looks down at the  
notes again)  
Although, that might be for the  
better.

INT. THE OFFICE CORRIDOR - WEDNESDAY MORNING

Charlie walks through the hall towards her office carefully, watching with hawk-like alertness as people pass her. She is almost paranoid in her actions, her fingers tightly gripping her bag.

LIAM

Charlie! Hey, Charlie!

CHARLIE

Oh, hi, Liam. How're you?

LIAM

(jokingly)

Well, nothing's flying at my head today, so... pretty good.

CHARLIE

(suddenly very sour)

D'you need something?

Liam pauses a few feet away, confused.

LIAM

Uh, no. Just wanted to tell you that the guy from the art gallery is here. He's with Simmons in his office.

CHARLIE

Yeah, okay. Fine.

LIAM

They want to see you.

Charlie looks up, alarmed, as if she's seeing him for the first time.

CHARLIE

Is it the big scary guy? The one who looks like he enjoys taking candy from children?

LIAM

Yep.

CHARLIE

(eyes shifting towards the basement sign)

'Kay. I'll get right on that.

Liam watches Charlie scuttle off.

LIAM

Charlie? The office is... not that way.

INT. CHARLIE'S EDITING SUITE - THURSDAY AFTERNOON

Evan and Kate are sitting on an badly-made table, chatting loudly as Charlie sifts through and cuts together footage. It's clear that Charlie is very stressed and incredibly nervous - her hands fidget incessantly.

EVAN

So, she's gonna clean your apartment? Repeatedly?

KATE

The stuff of sci-fi, isn't it? Who knows what unearthly goo she'll uncover. New species, perhaps, or radioactive spiders. I've been wondering about some of the smells, to be honest. This is my chance to find out.

EVAN

(to Charlie)

And you *offer*ed to clean it?

CHARLIE

No.

They wait for Charlie to continue - she says nothing.

KATE

(after a moment)

Who knows? She's only gotta make it another...

(checking her non-existent watch)

24 hours. Maybe she'll pull it off. And miss her chance to have spidey-senses.

EVAN

And you'll clean her apartment if you lose?

KATE

Oh, no, no, no. Cleaning is not my superpower. All I have to do is feed her coffee addiction.

EVAN

So you've got an offshore bank account you can tap into to keep the two of you in caffeine for a month?

KATE

Nope. I might have to get a second job.

Suddenly, Evan leans forward on the desk and stares curiously at Charlie's work.

EVAN

Charlie, are you *still* trying to figure out which shot of Owen Baines to use? There's not really much to pick from... the man is not photogenic.

CHARLIE

(wasppishly)

Well, it's very hard to concentrate with you two here *talking* about me.

EVAN

You asked me to be here.

CHARLIE

Yeah, you, not that one.

KATE

That one... as in your best friend since before you learned what a best friend was?

CHARLIE

Yes, *that one*.

KATE

(secretly a bit hurt)

Well, I can see when I'm not wanted. Come on, Evan, we should go. Then she won't be able to blame all of her personal issues on us.

CHARLIE

I *do not* do that. I don't bite my thumb, I don't have a tell, and I *am not stressed*, now leave!

Evan and Kate share a look - that was telling. As soon as the door shuts behind Evan, Charlie begins tapping nervously on the desk.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I just need to get rid of it,  
that's all. That's all that  
matters. Everything's fine. Just  
don't get embarrassed. Don't get  
nervous. I'm fine, this is fine.

INT. SIMMONS' OFFICE - FRIDAY AFTERNOON

Evan and Kate are standing quietly in the office of JOHN SIMMONS, their and Charlie's boss. Simmons is a good man, but not at his best in stressful situations, especially since his NYC accent comes out in full force.

SIMMONS

All right, you guys. Spill. What's  
in the ever-lovin' fuck has gotten  
into everyone around here?

KATE

(more sour than usual)  
Everything's fine.

SIMMONS

Matthews?

EVAN

Just been another week in paradise.

SIMMONS

Yeah, that's what everyone's been  
saying.

(a beat)

You know, your sarcasm isn't  
helping. Morale is in the sewer.

EVAN

Well, have you talked to Charlie?

Kate elbows Evan harshly in the side. Evan takes the blow quietly, but painfully.

SIMMONS

I can't *find* Charlie, let alone  
talk to her. She skipped out on the  
meeting with the art gallery  
representative Wednesday, she's  
never in her office when I'm  
looking for her, and she won't  
answer her phone. Your friend's  
lost her goddamn mind.

KATE

Well, if it makes you feel any better, we haven't seen her since yesterday either.

EVAN

I don't think anyone's really talked to her since...  
(a dawning realization)  
Tuesday.

SIMMONS

I don't know what's wrong with her - if she wasn't my best editor, I'd have fired her already. She's on very, very thin ice.

KATE

(rubbing her face with her hands)  
Oh, no.

EVAN

Uh, we'll find her. And talk some sense into her.

SIMMONS

You better. That art gallery project is due in less than an hour, so she better -

There is a musical noise on Simmons' computer, stopping him mid-rant. He sits in the chair, looking at his computer for a minute.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

It's the project.

EVAN

Charlie's project?

KATE

So it's done.

SIMMONS

Wherever that girl is, she'd better be prayin' it's good, because we were supposed to sit down and go over it together before she sent it as a finished product. If she ever pulls a stunt like this again...

The threat hangs in the air. Kate and Evan glance at each other nervously.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

Look, Charlie's not just a good editor. She's a lot of fun around the office. I'd bet her going AWOL has something to do with everyone being so depressed. So whatever the hell is going on, you two had better pull her together.

EVAN

We're on it.

Kate flashes Simmons a grim thumbs-up as Evan pulls her out the door.

INT. A HALLWAY - A FEW SECONDS LATER

EVAN

...Uh, I don't mean to question your authority as the Charlie Bennett expert, but... can we actually, you know, fix this?

This last is accompanied by a series of useless hand gestures. Kate rolls her eyes.

KATE

Well, this is a Level 3 meltdown, so it could go one of two ways - she gets her shit together, or we all get fired.

EVAN

Ah. I don't suppose there's any way to sway the results.

KATE

Just follow my lead and try not to get mad at her.

EVAN

...Motivational.

INT. CHARLIE'S EDITING SUITE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Kate bursts through the door without knocking. Charlie, anxiously playing Solitaire on her desk, looks up and glares fiercely at the pair.

CHARLIE

What?

EVAN  
(off-guard)  
Is that Solitaire?

KATE  
(annoyed)  
Are you fifty?

CHARLIE  
Do you need something, or are you  
just here to complain?

The three stare at each other for a few seconds. Evan, who is obviously unused to Charlie behaving this way, glances nervously at Kate.

KATE  
What the hell were you thinking,  
sending the Baines project to  
Simmons without letting him check  
it?

CHARLIE  
I was *thinking* that I'm not a  
child, I don't need to be watched  
to make sure I don't screw up every  
time I do something!

KATE  
Charlie, this is not college! This  
is real life, that's what bosses  
do, they *supervise*!

CHARLIE  
No one gets supervised like I do,  
you all watch me like a hawk. I'm  
treated like some silly little kid,  
with my coffee and my notes and my  
*god-damn thumb*!

There is silence. Kate stares, bewildered, at Charlie, who seems on the verge of tears.

EVAN  
(confused)  
I'm sorry?

The two women turn to look at him.

KATE  
(ignoring Evan, to  
Charlie)  
What the hell are you talking  
about?



CHARLIE

I'm talking about this whole week! Every time I turn around, Liam's acting like I'm one accident away from blowing up the building, you two won't stop going on about thumbs and coffee and buying stock in companies that make home cleaning supplies. The guy from the art gallery's looking to compare notes. Simmons keeps calling to ask if I'm done. I'm not stupid, I don't need your guidance, I'm a fully-functioning, competent adult!

KATE

Oh, for God's sake.

There's a beat of silence. The wheels in Kate's head are turning.

KATE (CONT'D)

Evan, sit down. It's story time.

EVAN

(glancing at Charlie)

Um, is - is now really the moment?

KATE

Yes, shut up and sit.

Evan sits. Kate leans precariously against the table, Charlie watching her suspiciously.

KATE (CONT'D)

Now, Evan, you might not believe this, but in high school, Charlie was a very awkward potato.

Charlie groans and leans back in her chair. Kate ignores her.

KATE (CONT'D)

And one morning, in the middle of May, Charlie woke up to discover that she had grown a pimple.

CHARLIE

Kate -

KATE

Now, Evan, you might be thinking, 'well, all highschoolers get pimples, don't they?' And the answer is yes, they do.

(MORE)

KATE (CONT'D)

And it might not have been so bad, except that day in English, Mindy Collins said, "God, if that pimple gets any bigger, you should start charging it rent."

EVAN

So you're saying it was a pimple of unusual size?

KATE

No, that's the thing. Mindy Collins was a bitch.

CHARLIE

Okay, really -

KATE

So, *Evan*, do you know what Charlie did? She panicked. She'd look in a mirror constantly during class to make sure it hadn't grown any. Every conversation our friends had was suddenly, miraculously about the pimple. She was sure that everyone was watching her all the time.

EVAN

She obsessed, basically.

KATE

Yes, thank you. And it just got worse from there. She caught a distorted view of the pimple in a chemistry flask and was so alarmed she knocked over the flask and melted through a stool. She failed our drama final because she kept trying to hold her hand over her pimple while reciting Shakespeare.

EVAN

Charlie. Come on.

CHARLIE

(very red)

Was there a point to this little spiel?

KATE

Well, Evan, you're probably thinking, 'how could this possibly get worse?' See, Charlie had decided the only way to cover up this disfiguring flaw was to wear make-up. Lots of make-up. So she did, except she constantly put twice as much make-up on the pimpled side of her face as the other, until finally, she came to Junior Prom looking like Two-Face!

CHARLIE

*So what?*

KATE

So, *Evan*, the moral of the story is, "nobody cares about your stupid little insecurities until you blow it completely out of proportion and end up looking like an idiot who's about to get fired!"

Silence. Charlie stares, wide-eyed, as Kate sighs and crosses to sit on the desk next to her.

KATE (CONT'D)

We're not 'watching' you and we're not treating you like a child. You've gotten yourself worked up over what, biting your thumb?  
(she playfully punches Charlie in the head)  
Everybody likes you for you, Charlie. Nobody cares.

Behind her, Evan shakes his head supportively. Charlie stares at her hands for a second, until what Kate's said reaches her brain.

CHARLIE

(alarmed)  
Did you say *fired*?

EVAN

Simmons is... not happy.

Charlie bites her thumb. Kate smiles.

CHARLIE

Oh my God, I have to go apologize. What was I thinking? I'm such a - I just - I've gotta go.

She slips out of her chair and shoots towards the door. As she passes through the door frame, she stops and turns back.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

I'm really, really sorry, you guys.  
I owe you big time.

(a pause)

Thanks.

Kate waves her off and smiles a bit as we hear Charlie trip over something and let out a pained 'argh.'

EVAN

(checking his watch)

You know, the bet's still on and Charlie technically lost. Are you really gonna make her clean your apartment?

KATE

Oh, definitely. I wasn't kidding about the buying stock thing - I'm gonna make millions.

EVAN

You're a bad friend.

KATE

I'm the *best* friend.

The two laugh and make their way out the door and down the hallway. Their voices carry as they walk away.

KATE (CONT'D)

Charlie! Wait up, we're coming with you.

EVAN

Yeah, Simmons can't be mad at all three of us at once, his head'll explode.

CHARLIE

You two are just gonna do more harm than good.

(a moment of thought)

...But you should come anyway.

FADE TO BLACK.