

I Told You So
Eva Leak
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My breathing accelerated as the cliff came into view. Sweat trickled down my neck and seeped through my palms. My knee bounced to the wild beat of my heart. As we drove along the precipice, vertigo swamped me, making my stomach tighten. A whimper escaped my dry lips. A cool hand wrapped around mine in a comforting gesture.

‘You don’t have to do this you know Jade,’ Lisa said, glancing at me from the driver’s seat.

If I didn’t know her so well, I would have missed the hint of regret in her voice. I had always been afraid of heights. So, to help me “live my life to the fullest” (cue the eye role), Lisa had booked an abseiling tour.

I gave her a forced smile. ‘No, we’re definitely doing this. It can’t be *that* bad.’

She looked at me and snorted before turning back to the road.

Silence sidled up between us. I looked out my window, purposefully avoiding eye contact with the steep drop that hugged the highway.

Lisa had been my best friend since forever. She was fun and outgoing, while I was terrified of the world and the people in it. We were complete opposites, but opposites attract, don’t they?

‘We’re here!’ Lisa yelled, pulling into the carpark.

I looked around and realised that the carpark was empty. Not a single car or person could be seen. Just empty parking spaces, a log cabin that acted as the administration and the cliff.

I turned back to Lisa, a little creeped out at the deadness of the place, ‘Are you sure that we are in the right place?’

‘Well obviously we are! When have I ever gotten us lost? And if you don’t believe me, look at the GPS,’ she said, leaning back, crossing her arms and sticking her chin in the air.

As if on cue, the navigation system said, ‘You have now arrived at your destination.’

Lisa smiled victoriously and got out of the car. I groaned and tried a deep breathing technique. First, a massive cliff that I was supposed to climb down backwards. Then, an abandoned adventure centre. All I could hope for now is that the place was actually empty. I looked out the window and saw Lisa tapping her wrist.

Ok, ok. You've got this. The faster you get it over with, the faster you can be back at home, safe in bed. You gotta do it now! Imagine the feeling of accomplishment that you'll get after. Unless you fall and die, then there won't be an after. Wow, thanks a lot mind for the pep talk. I rolled my eyes at myself and stepped out into the cool air.

'Finally!' Lisa groaned. 'Did you fall asleep in there Jade.'

'Do you really think that I would be able to fall asleep that easily when I'm thinking about every possible way that I could die today?' I asked, flinging my hands in the air.

'Yes, yes I do,' she her expression deadpan.

I cocked my head the side and looked at her. She was probably right.

We froze when a voice from the cabin door said, 'Are you Lisa and Jade?'

We didn't freeze because he surprised us, but because of how purely devoid of emotion his voice seemed.

'Y-yes,' Lisa stuttered.

'Come back another time, there is a storm coming,' he said flatly.

Granted, it was cool and there was a slight breeze, but the sky was blue and clear.

Lisa looked at me weirdly before speaking up: 'I think we'll be fine. We didn't come all the way out here for nothing.'

The man shrugged and held his arms out in a *its your funeral* type of way. 'This way, then.'

We walked a little way behind him, and I held onto Lisa's arm. 'I do not like this at all,' I whispered. 'I don't like the cliff, I don't like the emptiness, and I don't like him.'

Lisa rolled her eyes and kept walking, probably thinking I was overreacting. I gaped at her in disbelief. How could she be so calm about it? This guy talked like a psychopath. I started crying on the inside. I was too young to die!

When we reached an area in front of the cliff, he showed us how to put on the harnesses. By the time we were ready to start abseiling, I couldn't feel my legs because the strap was so tight.

'The storm is coming,' the guide stared straight at me then turned to Lisa. 'Ignorance can get you killed.'

A chill ran down my spine as he gave an *extremely* brief safety summary.

I stepped onto the edge of the drop. Each breath came with a whimper. Tears streamed down my face. Terror ripped through me like a battering ram with spikes. Lisa stepped closer and I clutched her hand. She smiled at me, the proudness that she had in her eyes made me turn around lean back off the edge of the cliff.

‘All you have to do is push off. We’ll do it together,’ Lisa coaxed.

‘Ok, ok, ok, ok, ok,’ I chanted. I positioned my feet in the right place and like a spring, pushed off with all my force. The air rushed and flicked my hair into my face. I felt myself falling and flying. Then my legs made contact with rock, my body pressing against the cliff.

‘Lisa! I was flying!’ I screamed to her with excitement.

‘Pfft, you were just falling with style,’ she said, beaming at me.

‘Hurry up. We don’t have all day,’ the guide yelled from beneath us, successfully killing the happy mood.

Lisa and I pushed off again. Adrenaline coursed through my veins and made me feel giddy with fear.

After half an hour of abseiling, rain started to pour down. Then the wind attacked and every time we jumped, it pushed us off course. The man had been right.

The fear swelled to an uncontrollable terror. Ripping all rational thought from my mind, we were still so far from the base of the cliff. And we couldn’t climb up. Caught up in the chaos of my mind, I didn’t look where I put my foot and slipped. A short, sharp shriek escaped my lips before the rope became taut and I jolted. The wind was too loud for anyone to hear my struggle.

‘There’s a cave just below us, it’s one jump to the ledge. We’ll be safe there,’ the guide roared out.

I looked around frantically for Lisa and found her a few metres to my right. I slid across to her, and she clutched at my wrist, her nails biting at my skin. It was no use talking, we wouldn’t be able to hear each other over the roar of the wind and I don’t know if I was able to form a coherent word.

I held my hand up, fingers splayed and looked at Lisa for confirmation that she knew what I was doing. She nodded. I started counting down.

Three...we moved our legs in front of us.

Two...we squatted—I slipped but regained my position.

One...we jumped.

I shut my eyes. I didn’t want to know if I had reached the ledge or not. Some way through the jump, Lisa released her grip on my arm. I felt my body swinging back towards the cliff. Instead of hitting rock in front of me, my feet hit rock beneath me. My knees gave out and I crumpled onto the ledge. I was safe.

‘Jade!’ Lisa’s scream yanked me out of my relief.

Everything slowed down. Searching for Lisa. Where was she? A trickle of doubt. The frayed end of a rope. The trickle became a stream. No, no—

Found her!

The guide was gripping her wrists. A sadistic grin on his face. She was speaking fast. Convincing, persuading.

Pleading.

I tried to stumble to her. But stopped short when the guide shifted forward.

Everything sped up. But I couldn't move.

Then he spoke, voice full of spite: 'I told you so.'

And he let her go.