

One of Us Is Lying Chapter 22 - Tips

0 8 minutes read

Cooper

Sunday, October 21, 5:25 p.m.

We've almost finished dinner when Pop's phone rings. He looks at the number and picks up immediately, the lines around his mouth deepening. "This is Kevin. Yeah. What, tonight? Is that really necessary?" He waits a beat. "All right. We'll see you there." He hangs up and blows out an irritated sigh. "We gotta meet your lawyer at the police station in half an hour. Detective Chang wants to talk to you again." He holds up a hand when I open my mouth. "I don't know what about."

I swallow hard. I haven't been questioned in a while, and I'd been hoping the whole thing was fading away. I want to text Addy and see if she's getting brought in too, but I'm under strict orders not to put anything about the investigation in writing. Calling Addy's not a great idea, either. So I finish my dinner in silence and drive to the station with Pop.

My lawyer, Mary, is already talking with Detective Chang when we get inside. He beckons us toward the interrogation room, which is nothing like you see on TV. No big pane of glass with a two-way mirror behind it. Just a drab little room with a conference table and a bunch of folding chairs. "Hello, Cooper. Mr. Clay. Thanks for coming." I'm about to brush past him through the door when he puts a hand on my arm. "You sure you want your father here?"

I'm about to ask Why wouldn't I? but before I can speak, Pop starts blustering about how it's his God-given right to be present during questioning. He has this speech perfected and once he winds up, he needs to finish.

"Of course," Detective Chang says politely. "It's mainly a privacy issue for Cooper."

The way he says that makes me nervous, and I look to Mary for help. "It should be fine to start with just me in the room, Kevin," she says. "I'll bring you in if needed." Mary's okay. She's in her fifties, no-nonsense, and can handle both the police and my father. So in the end it's me, Detective Chang, and Mary seating ourselves around the table.

My heart's already pounding when Detective Chang pulls out a laptop. "You've always been vocal about Simon's accusation not being true, Cooper. And there's been no drop in your baseball performance. Which is inconsistent with the reputation of Simon's app. It wasn't known for posting lies."

I try to keep my expression neutral, even though I've been thinking the same thing. I was more relieved than mad when Detective Chang first showed me Simon's site, because a lie was better than the truth. But why would Simon lie about me?

“So we dug a little deeper. Turns out we missed something in our initial analysis of Simon’s files. There was a second entry for you that was encrypted and replaced with the steroids accusation. It took a while to get that file figured out, but the original is here.” He turns the screen so it’s facing Mary and me. We lean forward together to read it.

Everybody wants a piece of Bayview southpaw CC and he’s finally been tempted. He’s stepping out on the beautiful KS with a hot German underwear model. What guy wouldn’t, right? Except the new love interest models boxers and briefs, not bras and thongs. Sorry, K, but you can’t compete when you play for the wrong team.

Every part of me feels frozen except my eyes, which can’t stop blinking. This is what I was afraid I’d see weeks ago.

“Cooper.” Mary’s voice is even. “There’s no need to react to this. Do you have a question, Detective Chang?”

“Yes. Is the rumor Simon planned to print true, Cooper?”

Mary speaks before I can. “There’s nothing criminal in this accusation. Cooper doesn’t need to address it.”

“Mary, you know that’s not the case. We have an interesting situation here. Four students with four entries they want to keep quiet. One gets deleted and replaced with a fake. Do you know what that looks like?”

“Shoddy rumormongering?” Mary asks.

“Like someone accessed Simon’s files to get rid of this particular entry. And made sure Simon wouldn’t be around to correct it.”

“I need a few minutes with my client,” Mary says.

I feel sick. I’ve imagined breaking the news about Kris to my parents in dozens of ways, but none as flat-out horrible as this.

“Of course. You should know we’ll be requesting a warrant to search more of the Clays’ home, beyond Cooper’s computer and cell phone records. Given this new information, he’s a more significant person of interest than he was previously.”

Mary has a hand on my arm. She doesn’t want me to talk. She doesn’t have to worry. I couldn’t if I tried.

Disclosing information about sexual orientation violates constitutional rights to privacy. That’s what Mary says, and she’s threatened to involve the American Civil

Liberties Union if the police make Simon's post about me public. Which would fall into the category of Too Little, Way Too Late.

Detective Chang dances around it. They have no intention of invading my privacy. But they have to investigate. It would help if I told them everything. Our definitions of everything are different. His includes me confessing that I killed Simon, deleted my About That entry, and replaced it with a fake one about steroids.

Which makes no sense. Wouldn't I have taken myself out of the equation entirely? Or come up with something less career-threatening? Like cheating on Keely with another girl. That might've killed two birds with one stone, so to speak.

"This changes nothing," Mary keeps saying. "You have no more proof than you ever did that Cooper touched Simon's site. Don't you dare disclose sensitive information in the name of your investigation."

The thing is, though, it doesn't matter. It's getting out. This case has been full of leaks from the beginning. And I can't waltz out of here after being interrogated for an hour and tell my father nothing's changed.

When Detective Chang leaves, he makes it clear they'll be digging deep into my life over the next few days. They want Kris's number. Mary tells me I don't have to provide it, but Detective Chang reminds her they'll subpoena my cell phone and get it anyway. They want to talk to Keely, too. Mary keeps threatening the ACLU, and Detective Chang keeps telling her, mild as skim milk, that they need to understand my actions in the weeks leading up to the murder.

But we all know what's really happening. They'll make my life miserable until I cave from the pressure.

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. Pop loves Cooperstown. 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.

There's a knock on the door before I can reply. Pop pokes his head in and snaps his fingers. "We done in here? I wanna get home."

"All set," I say.

"The hell was that all about?" he demands of Mary.

"You and Cooper need to talk," she says. Pop's jaw tenses. What the hell are we paying you for? is written all over his face. "We can discuss next steps after that."

"Fantastic," Pop mutters. I stand and squeeze myself through the narrow gap between the table and the wall, ducking past Mary and into the hallway. We walk in silence, one in front of the other, until we pass through the double glass doors and Mary murmurs a good-bye. "Night," Pop says, tersely leading the way to our car at the far end of the parking lot.

Everything in me clenches and twists as I buckle myself next to him in the Jeep. How do I start? What do I say? Do I tell him now, or wait till we're home and I can tell Mom and Nonny and ... Oh God. Lucas?

"What was all that about?" Pop asks. "What took so long?"

"There's new evidence," I say woodenly.

"Yeah? What's that?"

I can't. I can't. Not just the two of us in this car. "Let's wait till we're home."

"This serious, Coop?" Pop glances at me as he passes a slow-moving Volkswagen. "You in trouble?"

My palms start sweating. "Let's wait," I repeat.

I need to tell Kris what's happening, but I don't dare text him. I should go to his apartment and explain in person. Another conversation that'll kill some part of me. Kris has been out since junior high. His parents are both artists and it was never a big deal. They were pretty much like, Yeah, we knew. What took you so long? He's never pressured me, but sneaking around isn't how he wants to live.

I stare out the window, my fingers tapping on the door handle for the rest of the ride home. Pop pulls into the driveway and our house looms in front of me: solid, familiar, and the last place I want to be right now.

We head inside, Pop tossing his keys onto the hallway table and catching sight of my mother in the living room. She and Nonny are sitting next to each other on the couch as though they've been waiting for us. "Where's Lucas?" I ask, following Pop into the room.

"Downstairs playing Xbox." Mom mutes the television as Nonny c0cks her head to one side and fastens her eyes on me. "Everything okay?"

"Cooper's being all mysterious." Pop's glance at me is half shrewd, half dismissive. He doesn't know whether to take my obvious freaking out seriously or not. "You tell us, Cooperstown. What's all the fuss about? They got some actual evidence this time?"

"They think they do." I clear my throat and push my hands into my khakis. "I mean, they do. Have new information."

Everybody's quiet, absorbing that, until they notice I'm not in any hurry to continue.

"What kind of new information?" Mom prompts.

"There was an entry on Simon's site that was encrypted before the police got there. I guess it's what he originally meant to post about me. Nothin' to do with steroids." There goes my accent again.

Pop never lost his, and doesn't notice when mine fades in and out. "I knew it!" he says triumphantly. "They clear you, then?"

I'm mute, my mind blank. Nonny leans forward, hands gripping her skull-topped cane.

"Cooper, what was Simon going to post about you?"

"Well." A couple of words is all it'll take to make everything in my life Before and After. The air leaves my lungs. I can't look at my mother, and I sure as hell can't look at my father. So I focus on Nonny. "Simon. Somehow. Found out. That." God. I've run out of filler words. Nonny taps her cane on the floor like she wants to help me along. "I'm gay."

Pop laughs. Actually laughs, a relieved kind of guffaw, and slaps me on the shoulder.

"Jesus, Coop. Had me going there for a minute. Seriously, what's up?"

"Kevin." Nonny grits the word through her teeth. "Cooper is not joking."

"Course he is," Pop says, still laughing. I watch his face, because I'm pretty sure it's the last time he'll look at me the way he always has. "Right?" His eyes slide over to mine, casual and confident, but when he sees my face his smile dims. There it is. "Right, Coop?"

"Wrong," I tell him.