

Chapter Eleven: One of Us is Lying

Author: Jay Mosher

Editor: Emily Sheridan

Willa and I took the tunnels back to the main hallway of the house, past where we found the study. Clay had come with us, but stopped when we reached the door to the study. My heart had been thumping in my chest since I had to leave them there. This was the first time that I had been separated from them this whole party, minus when they had investigated the murder scene. However, I was more worried for their safety than I was for mine. I had decided to trust Willa after all she had done for us and the trust Clay placed in her. She was the only one in the house who cared about finding the murderer from the beginning. Or *murderers*. But Clay was alone out there, which meant I couldn't keep them safe.

As soon as Willa pushed open the secret door to the hallway, there was a loud crash and a scream. My heart skipped a beat as we both rushed into the hall, the door swinging shut behind us. Oliver was standing, pale-faced in the hall, the tray of tea he was carrying laying in shatters all over the pristine floors.

“What are you doing in there!” He exclaimed, looking shocked. “You’re not supposed to know about that!”

“Oliver, it’s okay,” I raised my hands up slightly. “Clay-uh, Mx. Easten needs a favor from you.”

“Where are they?”

“Outside. They think they’ve solved the case, but they need time to get evidence.”

Oliver glanced suspiciously between both of us. “What can I do?”

“I need you to gather everyone in the dining room. Tell them it’s important. We’ll be there in five minutes. Okay?”

Oliver nodded hesitantly, looking at the mess on the floor, and then back at us. He still seemed reluctant but disappeared down the hall after the others.

I turned toward Willa. “Are you ready?”

“Let’s go.”

As soon as Oliver opened the door for us into the dining room, I knew that this was a dreadful mistake, and I wished desperately that Clay was here to help.

“I should’ve known this was just a ploy,” Emilia scowled as soon as she saw me. “Where’s Sherlock?”

The dining room was a large space that was made of dark walnut wood walls and floors. Among the walls were various theatre paintings. A crystal chandelier was hanging from the ceiling, and it cast sparkled light over the matching dark walnut table. I might have taken the time to closely examine the room if it weren’t for the unfortunate circumstances.

“Stop it, Emilia,” Flora’s eyes were red from crying. “They’re just trying to help.”

“Well they’re not doing a fantastic job, now are they?”

“Clay, is...um, trying to get the phone signal back. They’ll be here soon,” I announced, stopping at the head of the table. Everyone was seated except for Harvey, who stood leaning against the wall. “In the meantime, I think it’s time we all had a little chat.”

Birdie burst out laughing mockingly. “A chat?”

“What Park means to say is that we’re having another round of questions.” Willa said firmly from beside me.

“Another round of questions?” Claude asked. “What do we need that for? If the phones come back, we can just wait for the police to get here.”

Flora wiped her eyes. “A questioning sounds great. Maybe we’ll finally get some answers.”

“This is absurd!” Emilia stood from the table. “There is a will to look for, and this one isn’t even the criminology nerd.”

“Actually, I’m also a criminology major.”

That was a complete lie, I was a history major. I actually hated criminology, and I couldn’t even watch NCIS, but Emilia didn’t need to know that.

Harvey fixed her with a hard stare. “Sit down and listen to what the kid has to say.”

As soon as he spoke, the room fell into silence. My face flushed slightly. I wasn’t used to being the center of attention. In fact, I hated it. Clay was an actor, and they were way better at speaking to groups than I was, but Clay had put Willa and I in charge. I couldn’t let them down.

“I want to know where everyone was at the time of the murder.”

“We already went over this,” Emilia rolled her eyes in an annoyed manner. “I was reapplying my makeup in the bathroom.”

“I was getting cleaning supplies from the closet.” Oliver gave me a subtle wink.

Willa sat down at the head of the table beside where I was standing. “I was helping in the kitchen.”

“I was doing my yoga.” Birdie started doing a pose to demonstrate.

Harvey glanced awkwardly at Birdie, who was now in a full yoga pose. “I was getting my rehearsal bag.”

“I was on a phone call.” Claude folded his arms.

A notion suddenly hit me. “How were you taking a phone call, if the landline and phone signal were tampered with?”

Everyone immediately turned to Claude and his face went white.

“I-I...um, I was-“

“Where were you, Claude?”

Before he could answer, Flora burst into tears. “H-He was in the library with me. M-My purse was with our coats...Grant was getting it for me.”

Willa looked across the table. “Oliver?”

“She did have a purse. I remember taking it up.”

“T-That’s why I-I tried to run. E-Emilia...she walked past the library a-and saw us together...we’ve been, we’ve been dating.”

A rush of shock crossed me, and the small snippet of the conversation Clay and I overheard played over again in my mind.

“You have no idea what you’re talking about!”

“Oh really, Flora?; Is that what you think? You really can’t own up to your own wrongdoing. How pathetic.”

“I...I was going to tell Grant the truth...a-and break up with him, after the party, but-but-” Flora broke down sobbing into her hands.

I exchanged a look with Willa. Clay didn’t give me any protocol for this situation. They had told me to distract everyone, and I guess that cheating in the midst of a murder was distracting enough. As Flora continued to sob, I said a quick prayer in my head that Clay would hurry up.

It was almost morning. The exhaustion was beginning to drag at me. My eyes felt heavy and my mind was foggy. Willa and I had been taking turns asking various questions for long over an

hour. My hands were shaking from where I had them folded in front of me. The tension in the room felt like a thick cloud hanging over us. Birdie was glaring at me. There were dark circles under her eyes. Claude had put his head down on the table. It crossed my mind that he could possibly be asleep. Flora kept her eyes on the surface of the table. She had only stopped crying recently, after everyone learned of her relationship with Claude. Since then she had remained silent. Harvey was still leaning quietly against the wall, watching the scene unfold, and occasionally glancing at the door.

I yawned. "Let's go over everyone's job relation with Mr. Mason."

"No. You have asked enough questions. It's almost morning," Emilia stood from the table, the frustration clear on her face. "We're going to keep looking for the will. Now."

"No!" I moved to block the door. "No one's leaving until we're done with questions."

My heart was thumping loudly in my chest as everyone was beginning to stand up except for Willa and Oliver. I was out of questions to ask, and Clay still wasn't here.

Emilia crossed her arms. "Fine, one more question. Ask away, Watson."

"Um, well..." I glanced toward Willa, but she only shook her head with panic. "How long have you known Mr. Mason?"

"Ha, wrong answer. You already asked that hours ago," She shoved me aside roughly. "The game's over, Park."

At that moment, the door swung open dramatically to reveal Clay. "Wait! I've got one more move left in this game."