

Everybody Lies Excerpt: Chapter 10

'I was expecting a pizza delivery,' Crombie said in disgust.

However, since Mr Tibbs had already squeezed into the entrance lobby, Crombie reached around the man mountain and nudged open the lounge door.

'But please, come in. Make yourself at home. Unfortunately, my wife and daughters are away, so it's just me. But no doubt, you already know that.'

Better out than in, so rather than fester in silence, Crombie oozed sarcasm.

'The door was on the latch. You should be more cautious, Detective.' Tibbs looked pointedly at the rigid plaster cast that encased Crombie's left forearm, a reminder of why the Health and Safety Brigade cautioned against chasing over garage roofs. Then after a quick survey of Crombie's living room, Tibbs headed towards the sofa parked under the front facing window. Though he remained standing, files tucked tightly under one arm, cluttering up the place in his neatly pressed chinos and pink lacrosse tee-shirt.

'Mr Tibbs, why are you here?' Crombie asked.

'Call me Edward,' he replied, lifting his upper lip to flash large, perfectly aligned teeth.

'Mr Tibbs, why are you here?'

'This is a matter too sensitive for a phone conversation.'

Crombie shook his head. 'Don't be pedantic. Why are you here?' The third time was the charm.

'Rex Raven is dead.'

'Yeah, I heard.' Though he'd only learned the news when a colleague had dropped by with some paperwork, and jokingly referred to Rex Raven's suicide as a killer career move.

'George Reynolds is still on the run. Kathy Raven is in contact with him. You represent our best chance of getting her to reveal his whereabouts.'

Crombie barked a laugh. 'You're wrong. She hates my guts. Blames me for persuading her dad to turn Queen's Evidence.'

'A trifle unfair — after all, Rex approached you, didn't he?'

'Yeah, well. What does it matter? Nobody likes us, everybody hates us. Until they need us.'

'Kathy's convinced her dad's death wasn't accidental.'

'She's riddled with guilt. She *wants* it to be murder.'

Tibbs splayed his fingers in a gesture that said, who cares?

'She's vulnerable. Get her to see that George Reynolds is the cause of all her dad's troubles. He doesn't deserve her protection.'

'Waste of time. About three weeks into the New Year, Rex called; Season's Greetings and all that. But this was the last week in January. What he really wanted was to find out if we'd any updates on George Reynolds.'

'And what did you tell him?' Tibbs's glasses slipped a notch as he lifted his eyebrows.

'That I wasn't involved, and to call Scotland Yard,' Crombie said sharply. 'But the point is, Rex went on to say that some good had resulted from George's little Christmas escapade, because Kathy was talking to him again. In fact, he passed the phone to her. It must have eaten her up inside, but she said "Happy New Year," and in the next breath, asked if I'd had any news on George.'

Kathy's usually confident voice had sounded frail, and Crombie had felt sorry for the woman, but he wasn't about to admit that to Tibbs.

'I said something like "If George makes contact with anyone, it'll be you," and she said, "Wrong again, Crombie. Because I haven't even had an anonymous Christmas Card." She choked up then. Rex came back on the phone. He was sort of apologetic, but pleased.'

'Pleased?'

'He'd got his daughter back. Rex didn't give a monkey's about George Reynolds. Obviously Kathy had twisted his arm to call me. And no wonder the girl was desperate — she hadn't spoken or seen George since her last prison visit, in November.'

'She told you that?' Tibbs said, with a puzzled frown. His fingers twitched over the files. Crombie suspected they held reports that detailed exactly who Kathy Raven phoned and when she phoned them.

'I bumped into her at the hospital a couple of weeks back.' He lifted the arm in plaster. 'She asked again about George. She said that the previous Saturday should have been their wedding day.'

Crombie paused, remembering Kathy's sunken eyes and how she'd played nervously with the gold chains around her neck. An engagement ring dangled from one of the chains, and Crombie had guessed it had gotten too loose for her fingers, and he'd also guessed that their meeting wasn't as serendipitous as it seemed.

Out-loud, he continued, 'she expressed a fear that George might be dead; she hadn't seen or heard from him since before Christmas.'

'Then she lied to you,' Tibbs said, an expression of smug certainty on his face. The back of Crombie's neck burned and he knew his cheeks flushed.

Tibbs smiled at his discomfort. 'You're living in the wrong era, Detective. You don't like cussing, and you dislike being lied to even more.'

'I don't like being taken for a fool by anyone,' Crombie retaliated. 'Especially not after I've helped them out. Sit down, Mr Tibbs.'

Tibbs returned his glare with a benevolent gaze, stretched his lips into a smile, and sat. He leaned forwards to place the files on the coffee table, squared them neatly, and then leaned back against the sofa's cream cushions. Studiously avoiding glancing at the files, Crombie dragged an armchair up to the table, directly opposite Tibbs.

'You lied to me.'

'I told you what you needed to know.'

'And anything else was above my pay grade?'

Rather than answer, Tibbs swiped off his glasses, and busied himself cleaning the lens with a handkerchief. His naked face seemed younger, more vulnerable, as though by taking off his glasses, Superman changed into Clark Kent.

Still Crombie attacked. 'You're not worried about the odd photo surfacing showing an MP up to naughties. So what is it? What has George Reynolds got that makes him so interesting?'

Tibbs shoved the glasses back over his nose. 'A diary.'

And that was a throwback to another era.

'Henry's diary?'

Tibbs sighed. 'Young Henry attends many private functions and parties. Some a little more exclusive than others.'

'And he kept a diary?'

'Yep. Fancied himself as a writer.' Tibbs scoffed. 'Didn't want to risk committing his precious prose to hard disk, because computers crash.' He scoffed again.

Crombie's thoughts scrabbled to keep up, and a memory returned of an unseen but very audible Henry, complete with the crash and rumble of furniture.

'When did you know about the diary?'

Tibbs slipped off his glasses again and began polishing the polish.

'Henry finally confessed to the diary, and its disappearance on Boxing Day.'

Crombie reached across the coffee table and stilled Tibbs from fidgeting. 'You haven't answered my question,'

Tibbs blinked up at him with myopic eyes, and then stared down at Crombie's hand on his wrist. Sighing, Crombie released his grip and rephrased.

'When did you learn of the diary's existence?'

The glasses were shunted back on. 'Six months ago.'

Both men glanced towards the door as it opened and a dark suited, dark skinned man slipped into the room with a pizza box.

'Mr Crombie's pizza, sir.'

Crombie's blood warmed again. Tibbs noticed and mocked. 'You really should be more cautious, anyone could walk in.' To the chauffeur, he said, 'thank you, Charles. Close the front door on your way out.'

Without turning his head, Crombie called, 'Charlie, hang on a minute.' He stared at Tibbs. 'I'm not that fond of pizza.'

'Why did you order it then?'

Crombie lifted his left arm, like a dog displaying a hurt paw. 'It's the only delivery service around here.'

'You poor old thing,' Tibbs said and smiled indulgently. 'What do you fancy?'

Crombie consulted an internal menu then said, 'fish and chips. Double helping. Pickled onions on the side.' Smirking, he twisted around to Charles. 'George's, Portobello Road, up by the Goldborne end. Don't hang about on the way back.'

At a nod from Tibbs, a bemused looking Charles departed.

Crombie tapped the pizza box, 'help yourself.'

'Thank you. Any chance of a drink? A glass of whiskey wouldn't go amiss.'

Crombie bet it wouldn't. 'Sorry, no.'

As if by magic, a silver flask appeared on the coffee table.

Now that alcohol had been mentioned, Crombie rather fancied a beer. But he got up, walked over to the side cabinet and juggled bottles until he found Mrs Crombie's best crystal.

Tibbs had already devoured most of the pizza. 'Not really a fan myself either,' he remarked, nodding with approval as Crombie chinked the heavy crystal tumblers onto the coffee table.

'So I noticed.'

'DI Crombie, I'm beginning to understand why my predecessor found you amusing. Before you got him the sack, of course.'

Crombie gave a shy smile. 'Well, what are we here for, if not to provide amusement for others, and be amused in our turn?'

'Jane Austen?'

'No. Pride and Prejudice. It was on the telly,' Crombie replied. 'And I might be laughing on the outside, but inside, I'm angry.' He watched as Tibbs poured two measures of whiskey.

'Your very good health.'

'My very good health depends on you coming clean. I'm two minutes away from exploding.'

Tibbs sipped at the whiskey, then smacked his lips.

Crombie followed suit. 'Not bad,' he admitted.

'Knappogue Castle. Some consider me a whiskey snob, I prefer the term connoisseur.'

'Sir, once your driver returns with my supper, I'm throwing you both out. So cut to the chase. Six months ago, you discovered Henry Drayton-Maye was keeping a diary. I'm guessing shortly after that, his invitations to the more interesting soirées dried up. Giving you the chance to introduce a string of fun loving chaps and chapesses to Henry.'

'How did you know he swings both ways?' Tibbs murmured.

'I didn't. But I know you lot like to cover all bases. But I'm guessing again here: try as they might, your lot couldn't get Henry to trust them with his innermost secrets. Or the diary.'

'Correct. It's something I've started to notice. It's as though my people give off a tell-tale scent. Apparently, undercover police have the same issue.' He regarded Crombie thoughtfully. 'I doubt you have that problem though.'

Uncertain whether he'd been complimented or insulted, Crombie ignored the remark. 'So you wound George Reynolds up, and set him loose?'

'Oh, please. Give us some credit. Reynolds actually absconded on the eighteenth of December. We picked him up the next day, lurking around Kathy's apartment block.'

Crombie motioned for him to continue.

'We came to an amicable agreement.'

'Like I said, you wound him up and set him loose.'

Just as Tibbs shot him a dirty look, his mobile beeped with an incoming message. He glanced at the text, then Crombie. 'It's Charles. Do you want the low fat option?' In response to Crombie's incredulous stare, he bent back to the phone, and tapped out two letters.

Pointedly turning his mobile off, Tibbs said, 'We had a gentleman's agreement.'

Crombie scoffed. 'With a con-man. But you reckoned without Henry's cleaning lady?'

'Right again. We also reckoned without that lying bastard lying to us.' He gulped down the remainder of his whiskey.

Crombie couldn't help himself. 'Not nice, is it?'

Tibbs scowled, poured himself another shot, and then admitted, 'You did well, to get Henry to confess that he'd lied about the necklace. It shook him. A week later, he came clean about the diary.'

'And you came clean about George, I suppose?' Crombie mocked.

Behind thick lenses, Tibbs eyes turned granite.

'National security,' he said, between gritted teeth.

Crombie smirked. 'George was supposed to stay on the run over Christmas? Give himself up in the New Year, parole rubber stamped, what, round about now?' He grinned broadly. 'Except George now has the golden goose. He doesn't need your handouts.'

Tibbs's face grew stonier.

'When did the blackmailing start?'

'A month after George stole the diary. 25th January.'

Crombie raised an eyebrow. 'I'm surprised he waited that long.'

Tibbs shook his head. 'George isn't the blackmailer. It's Kathy.'

As Crombie digested this, sirens wailed outside.

'Sounds like your order's arrived,' Tibbs said; heaved himself up, then turned to look out the window.

'Great. That should give the neighbours something to talk about.'

Hands in pockets, Tibbs swung around again. 'They don't know you're police?' then answered his own question. 'Oh, of course. You've only moved in recently. And who would suspect you of being a copper?'

'My supper's here, time you were off,' Crombie snapped, feeling his original dislike of Tibbs creep back.

'I can wait outside. Or call back tomorrow,' Tibbs offered.

Just to play hard to get, Crombie hesitated for a few seconds. Though tempted to make Tibbs wait outside, it wasn't wise to make unnecessary enemies.

'You can stay, I'll listen, but I'm not agreeing to anything.'

'Good man. And thank you.' Tibbs bounded to the door with the grace of a baby elephant. Straining to look through the window, Crombie saw his broad form reappear outside, heading towards the Bentley, still flashing previously concealed blue lights.

Crombie waited. Then did what he'd been longing to do all evening. Pulling the block of files towards him, he eased the bottom one free. The cover was blank. He peered out the window again. In the deepening dusk, he could just make out Tibbs's head bent over a smart phone, and surmised he was catching up with messages. Feeling knots tighten in his stomach that had nothing to do with hunger, Crombie turned to the reports inside the file. A younger fresher version of his face beamed from the nineteen nineties. Even the leather jacket gleamed with newness. Crombie brushed a finger against the photo, closed the file then re-buried it under the others. With unseeing eyes, he swiped up his glass and knocked back its contents in one swallow. The whiskey warmed his insides and the knots loosened a little.

A deep bass voice called from the doorway. 'Sir, I've got your order here.'

'Leave it in the kitchen, son. I'll warm it through later,' Crombie instructed.

Then, unhurriedly, because Tibbs had left them there and hadn't forbidden him to look inside, he pulled the top file from the stack. Inside were two emails, sent from different IP addresses, both with attachments. Crombie read the attachments with relish. They were pages from Henry's diary, littered with household names, some minor royalty.

Crombie looked up as Tibbs re-entered and re-seated himself on the sofa.

'You've upset Charles. He made a special effort for you.'

'Sorry. I've lost my appetite.' He turned back to the first email. 'How do you know this is Kathy's work?'

Tibbs gave a lop-sided half smile. 'It's amateur hour. The emails have been traced. Not directly to Kathy, but to a nearby school and the local library. Look at the amounts being demanded — five thousand pounds at a time. Pocket change.'

'Pocket change,' Crombie agreed. 'So why haven't you gone after her?'

'Because George is still out there, somewhere. And that stupid bastard Henry DM dropped off both payments before we could intervene.' Tibbs placed the emails side by side, and scored a fingernail under each date. 'See, last week in January, last week in February. When nothing arrived in March, Henry thought he was about to be outed, got jittery and rang me.' Tibbs snorted. 'That's when we traced the emails to Kathy, who of course, at present is otherwise engaged.' In a lower voice he added, 'her dad's funeral is this week.'

'Yet you've have Kathy under surveillance since Christmas, and I'm guessing you've turned her apartment over?'

Tibbs stared at him blankly. Crombie practically heard the unspoken jeer:

Ask yourself that question again, only slower.

He frowned. 'So you think Kathy keeps the diary on her?' He shook his head. 'Doubtful.'

'It has to be Kathy! It can only be her! Somehow George Reynolds got the diary to her and is pulling the strings,' Tibbs slammed his palm against the paperwork. 'This won't last for long. Now George knows it's easy money, he'll get her to re-route the emails and set up an off-shore bank account somewhere untraceable and untouchable.'

'But Kathy was nursing a patient with Ebola when you picked George up: Unless one of your men fell asleep on the job and allowed George to waltz into the hospital grounds unnoticed...' Crombie broke off, thought for a second, then with a grimace, added, 'I take it you've been intercepting her mail too?'

Tibbs turned his lips down in disgust. Of course.

'Then how? How did George Reynolds get the diary to her? Unless he walked into a quarantined ward, and even then he'd have to have a private jet or helicopter to have abandoned the bike at Folkestone. Even a skilled rider would have trouble negotiating the Harley through holiday traffic.'

Crombie almost felt sorry for Tibbs; sweat beaded his broad forehead. Producing a polka dot handkerchief, he dabbed his brow, then with an air of confession, mumbled, 'there was one small window of opportunity. CCTV cameras picked up the Harley Davidson parked outside a courier service on Tottenham Court Road.' Tibbs shuffled through paperwork, selected a single page and handed it over. Crombie squinted at the photocopied delivery note, a hybrid of printed and scribbled information.

'He used a courier service over the Christmas period? He must have been bloody desperate.'

'Maybe he was. Maybe he wasn't. He couldn't lose. Even if the diary had gone astray, he'd still have the photo and our gentleman's agreement.'

'Which wasn't worth the paper it wasn't written on.'

'Well the diary obviously made it through!' Tibbs shouted, finally rattled. He breathed heavily, in a visible effort for calm.

'Look,' his hands formed a begging bowl, 'here's where we're at now. Kathy's a loose cannon.'

'She's a dedicated nurse, who's a little too trusting and as loyal as they come.'

'A loose cannon with lethal ammunition. Right now, she's shouting and screaming that her dad wouldn't commit suicide. She trusts you. Let her know that we know she has the diary. We'll let the blackmail slide, even reinstate George's parole. And go balls out to prove she's right.' He slumped back in his seat, muttering, 'hell, I'll even produce a murderer.'

Crombie glared.

Tibbs glanced down at his shoes, then back to Crombie. 'Sorry, got a little carried away. But she does trust you. She's adamant that her dad was murdered. And now, her little sister Marnie has disappeared.'

Crombie froze. 'What?'

Tibbs waved his concern away. 'The girl's been missing barely twenty-four hours. She got off the Manchester coach in London, but didn't catch her connection to Puddlemoor. She probably got side-tracked.'

'On the way to her father's funeral?!' A nasty thought occurred. 'Is this your work?'

'No. Of course not. That idea never crossed my mind.' Tibbs sounded regretful. His hand moved to extract the bottom file. Reaching across the table, Crombie stopped him. 'Don't. Don't go there.'

Tibbs looked up, frowning. 'You don't know what I'm about to say.'

'I can guess.' He smiled mirthlessly. 'I'm good at guessing.'

Tibbs frown deepened. 'You don't want him in from the cold? Clean slate, new start. He's your brother.'

... brother ... role model ... best friend ... Out loud Crombie said, 'Declan made his own choices.'

'As we all do. And you don't like the idea of being in my pocket,' Tibbs stated bluntly.

Crombie winced. 'Declan made his own choices,' he repeated.

'Then I won't, as you advise, go there.' Tibbs gazed around the room again. Crombie waited for some smart arsed remark about the ancient radiators, or the plywood doors that no amount of paint could enhance.

Instead Tibbs said, 'I was warned that you're an honest man.' He dipped his chin so his glasses reflected the ceiling's light. 'So, what do you say? An honest day's work, for an honest day's pay. Take this, and you'll earn a top consultant's fee. With a bonus of two grand if the diary's recovered.'

Though unable to read the expression in Tibbs' eyes, Crombie stared back impassively. 'Two grand? I'm not that cheap. There must be at least another sixty pages in that diary. At least. Make it three.'

Tibbs barred his teeth. 'Done.'

Just like that? He'd pitched too low. 'Five hundred a day, three thousand for the diary's return, and I'll consider it.'

'You don't believe Kathy has the diary, do you?'

Crombie replied with a shrug.

'She needs a friend.' Tibbs said softly. 'We've got her dad's autopsy results back, there's no doubt he took his own life. The coroner might be persuaded to change the verdict from suicide to death by misadventure. And I've got total faith that you'll trace Marnie. You've got a good record for finding missing people.' He unearthed the bottom file, tucked it under his arm and stood. 'Enjoy your meal,' he said, stretching out his hand. Crombie frowned and flicked his hand over the remaining files. 'Take those with you.'

'I'll leave them with you, for now. Consider carefully. Call me tomorrow, before seven with your answer.'

Crombie waited, certain Tibbs would tap the file under his arm in warning. But it seemed Tibbs finally had his measure. 'Don't leave me hanging,' he said, and stretched his lips into a smile. So Crombie stood, and shook hands with the man from the Home Office.

Then he accompanied Tibbs to his car, and made a humble apology to Charles.

'No worries, Sir. Anytime. Enjoy your meal.'

Since Mrs Crombie and the girls had left for their Wilderness Trip in Wales, Crombie had dined on calorie counted meals. Something must be working, as he could only pinch one roll of stomach fat. So he watched the rugby highlights with his feet up on the coffee table, fish and chips in his lap, beer can in hand and obeyed Charles's instructions with a clear conscience.

End of Excerpt. [Everybody Lies](#) is available to download exclusively from Amazon.

