

Chapter Nine: Snake Eyes

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Willa still had Clay's flashlight and flicked it on while we walked the length of Mr. Mason's brick mansion. The lights from the upstairs window cast a golden glow over the dark grass. I was grateful for the light, despite the fact that it caused a swarm of large white moths everywhere I turned. However, there was more to fear than moths. Every time I heard a rustle in the bushes, or the snapping of a stick, I nearly jumped out of my skin. The last thing we needed was to be caught by Birdie or one of the others and dragged back to Emilia.

There was a large rose bush planted in front of one corner of the house. It was in full bloom, and I could make out the inky crimson petals in the dark. Willa came to an abrupt halt in front of it. Clay and I both stood back as she shined the light over the length of the wall, finally stopping at a brick that had a smooth X etched into it. It was almost completely unnoticeable and could easily be passed by if you didn't know to look. She glanced back at us before pressing the brick. I watched in shock as it immediately sank into the wall, and the secret door popped open with a loud unnerving creak. I was suddenly very interested in speaking to Mr. Mason's architect.

Willa stepped into the dark space, and I continued to stare in awe as she reached up and pulled on a thin chain that was hanging from the ceiling. The dark room was flooded with light. I sighed with relief. So Mr. Mason had managed to get lighting in his secret passageways. However, the area we entered wasn't like the rest of the tunnels we had been in earlier. Instead, the wall of the house had opened up into a narrow wooden room with a concrete floor that was otherwise empty. On the first wall was a simple wooden door, and I realized that it must open into the rest of the tunnels. Whoever designed this was either brilliant or insane.

Clay and I both exchanged a glance before stepping into the room. Willa walked behind us and grabbed a handle on the interior panel of the hidden door, pulling it shut. It quickly flashed across my mind that Willa could be the murderer we were searching for. My hands trembled at my side. I remembered what Clay had said earlier in the evening. They told me we could trust her, so I had no choice but to trust their judgement and hope for the best.

The good news was that we were now completely hidden from the others-giving us the chance to finally figure out this mystery. The bad news was that if Clay's judgement was wrong, we were now alone with a killer.

"Let's review what we know," Clay said. We were all sitting on the cold floor in a circle. I was covered in goosebumps and Clay had given me the suit jacket they were carrying to keep warm. They had taken out their notebook and were now glancing through the many notes. "Mr. Mason had enough information about his murder to conjure the idea of throwing this party and

leaving clues. The only other person who knew his life was in danger, and about the party, was Oliver.”

“Wait,” Willa’s face was scrunched up in confusion. “Oliver was in on it?”

“Yes, he claims that he tried to get the police involved beforehand, but no one believed that someone was after Mr. Mason’s life. Oliver said he has no idea who the murderer is, and I believe him.” Clay replied, flipping through the notebook. “We all arrived and were in the parlor. There was a problem with dinner, and Mr. Mason helped out. He went upstairs, and Oliver came to tell us to disperse. Park and I went to look at the paintings, you went to the kitchen to help, Birdie was in the dining room doing yoga, Emilia was in the bathroom doing her makeup, Harvey was getting his rehearsal bag, Claude was making a phone call in the hall, Flora was in the library, and we don’t know where Grant was, but it wasn’t with Flora.”

I nodded. “What else?”

“Motives. Whoever killed Mr. Mason had to have had a reason, and another reason to kill Grant.”

“If this is all related to Romeo and Juliet, which Mr. Mason put Grant in charge of, is it possible that someone could’ve been angry that he made Grant director?”

“It’s possible. Willa?”

“Well, I don’t know much about whether anyone’s jealous of Grant,” Willa answered, straightening her suit. “But there’s been a lot of issues with Emilia and Flora.”

My mind flashed back to when we saw them arguing in the hall. “What kind of issues?”

“Emilia didn’t want to be assistant director, she wanted to be Juliet. She’s been trying to get a lead in one of Mr. Mason’s shows for ages. When Grant was made director, he cast Flora over her, and a short while later, ended up choosing Emilia to be assistant director.”

“Okay, so that gives Emilia a motive for killing Grant and Mr. Mason, but what about Harvey?”

“Harvey’s been Mr. Mason’s stage manager for ages,” Clay chimed in. “I’ve even been in shows with him. He’s never tried to do anything else other than stage manage.”

“I haven’t noticed any issues with him either.” Willa agreed.

“What about Birdie and Claude?” I turned to Clay. “You remember hearing them on the balcony talking about Mr. Mason’s will. What if they killed him to get the will so that they could change the name and get the inheritance?”

“Claude’s our age. Do you really think he’d kill his own grandfather for an inheritance?” Willa countered.

Clay's face was serious. "People have done a lot more for a lot less."

"There's still the question of Flora," I said after a moment of silence. "Harvey said she was suspicious, and then she lied about being with Grant. Not to mention, she came with Grant. She could've easily taken his stuff from his car."

"Also possible, although I can't think of a reason why she would kill Mr. Mason and Grant, unless if she had some kind of secret we don't know about."

"We can't figure out motives without knowing more," Willa continued. "So what about the clues?"

"Mr. Mason left us the original letter with the dice. Then we found the rose in the mink coat. Which led us to the ace of hearts on the balcony, and then to the croquet mallet in the study, and finally the skull. We also found the letter he left to me, and Grant's bag and knife," Clay took their glasses off and cleaned them on the edge of their shirt. "At some point during the night, someone slashed our tires, cut the landline, and tampered with the cell phone service. And that person had to be there to push Mr. Mason down the stairs."

"I went out to my car to grab Tylenol after you both arrived. My tires weren't slashed then."

I thought back to it and realized that she was right. While I was looking through the guests and becoming familiar with their names and faces, Willa had briefly left and come back to the party. It was about the same time that Harvey had arrived.

"Okay, so the killer would've had to slash the tires after that, and then get to Mr. Mason, which doesn't make any sense." Clay put their glasses back on.

"Someone else has to know about the tunnels. We found Grant's bag in there."

Willa frowned. "They still wouldn't have time to be outside, slash the tires, and then make it back upstairs to push Mr. Mason. They'd have to be in two places at once."

I ran a hand through my hair as silence fell over us. There were too many dots to connect and too many lines that led nowhere. It was impossible to decide who could be the murderer, when almost everyone looked guilty. This was more dramatic and confusing than any murder mystery show Mr. Mason could put on. I glanced at the watch on Clay's wrist. It was almost three AM, and I was finally starting to feel the exhaustion drag at me. I should've drunk that tea earlier for some caffeine.

All of the sudden Clay jumped up, making me flinch in surprise.

"Snake eyes!" They shouted with excitement. "The answer is snake eyes!"

I stared at them with confusion. "Clay, I have no idea what you're talking about."

"The dice."

Willa and I both exchanged a glance. “What about them?”

“They weren’t just about Guys and Dolls! They were a clue!” Clay was out of breath with excitement. “Mr. Mason knew along- we just didn’t know where to look. Snake eyes. They couldn’t be in two places at once, unless there were two murderers.”
