

## Chapter Six: Damaged, Badly Damaged

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“What is this place?” Willa questioned, staring in shock.

Clay’s voice was filled with disbelief. “It’s Mr. Mason’s study.”

I took a step past the doorway and into the room. It was huge, almost twice the size of my bedroom at home. The walls were fully covered in bookshelves on all four sides. Each was overflowing with books. At the center of the room was a large wooden desk. It was covered in a mess of papers, random desk trinkets, and a vintage typewriter. Pencils and pens were scattered everywhere, some even on the floor. There were no windows in the room, and the floors were made of the same wood as the desk. The room was cluttered with various antiques and props from shows. There was even a large clothing rack that was filled with elaborate costumes.

My eyes flitted quickly through the rack, as I was unable to help myself. There was a long flowing lace gown, that I couldn’t decipher whether it was meant to be a Cinderella dress or for a wedding scene. There were long white feathers that flanked the perfect lace bodice. Among the beautiful gown, were a few other historical looking dresses. One was gray with black rhinestones from the flapper era. Another was a blush pink that mirrored a soft renaissance dress. Besides the dresses, there were multiple clean cut suits and jackets. Each was a different color, and some were patterned in stripes or simple plaid. Also on the rack were a few random coats, lacy pieces for dresses, and dark dress pants. I couldn’t help but look at the costumes and wonder how many shows they had been in, and which ones.

Willa and I walked further into the study, staring in awe at Mr. Mason’s belongings. Clay went straight to the desk, a puzzled look spread over their face. I reached for one of the books on the shelves, realizing that it was an expensive signed copy. I looked around at all of the books. Mr. Mason had a large collection of some of the rarest and oldest books I had ever seen. Excitement began to fill me. How had he managed to collect all of these? My thoughts were immediately drawn away as Clay’s horrified voice came from the center of the room.

“There’s a letter...to me.”

Willa glanced up in surprise. “What?”

I turned as Clay shakily held up a large white envelope. Their name was written out in a fancy cursive font, the envelope sealed with gold wax. I didn’t say a word, but merely walked over to the desk as Willa hesitantly followed. I watched as Clay, hands still shaking, opened the envelope. A letter from the typewriter fell onto the desk with Mr. Mason’s elegant signature at the bottom. Clay’s face was riddled with both confusion and shock, as they picked it up and read over the words. The color from their face instantly drained.

“Clay?” I said, my voice feeling weak, after a long moment of silence. “What does it say?”

They tried to answer, but no words came out, and they just handed it to me.

*Dearest Clay,*

*I am so sorry that I have to be writing this to you, because if you are reading it, it means that I am gone. There's so much to tell you, but I'm afraid even as I write this, I don't have much time. You see, this evening's party is about to begin, and by now you know what has happened.*

*The first thing you must know is the location of a special folder of mine. It is in the third drawer on the right in my desk. There is a trick bottom, but you should be able to open it easily enough. In this drawer, you will find every show that I have ever written. The folder is on top of the stack. In this folder are all of my plans for the future of my theatre, along with the costs and finances. If you look in the back of the folder, you will find the deed and all of the official papers for my house and the theatre. If tonight goes as I hope, you will need it.*

*Secondly, it is important for you to solve the mystery before anyone else does. If you've made it this far, it means that you only have two clues left. One of them is under the desk. I'm relying on you to solve this mystery, Clay. I know you can do it.*

*The third, and final thing you must know, is that you are in very grave danger. If tonight plays out how I fear, I will not be the only one who dies. I am sorry to say that the possibility of it being you is very high. You must be more careful than you ever have been before. Your life depends on it.*

*Best of wishes.*

*-August Mason*

My heart had begun to race in my chest. How could this be? How could Clay's life be in danger? And was Mr. Mason inferring that the will was made out to Clay? My mind flickered back to Birdie and Claude's argument. Did they mean Clay?

Clay was still standing with their mouth open in shock, as if they couldn't quite believe what was happening anymore. Willa had seen the letter as well, and the worry in her face was unmistakable. She sighed and looked at the letter one more time before reaching under the desk.

A moment later she pulled out a croquet mallet. Thin stripes were painted over the handle. Blue, red, green, and yellow.

She stared in confusion. "How is this a clue?"

"Huh, ironic," Clay chuckled darkly. "It's a reference to *Heathers*."

"Are all the clues involving shows?"

Before either of us could answer her, there was a shrill scream from somewhere in the mansion. Even though we were far in the tunnels, the voice was so horrified that the words were unmistakable.

"There's blood in the parlor room!"

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