

Chapter Two: Luck Be A Lady Tonight

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“This is ridiculous!” Grant exclaimed, snatching the letter back from my hands and shoving it in Clay’s face. “Mr. Mason was not murdered.”

Flora stepped forward hesitantly. “Grant’s right. Mr. Mason was an elderly man. He could’ve just fallen down the stairs.”

“How about we stop making up theories, find a way to get out of here and call the police?” Emilia huffed under her breath.

“No one’s leaving until we figure out what’s going on.” Clay said with authority.

Birdie flipped her long white hair over her shoulder. “Who died and made you king?”

“Mr. Mason,” They replied without missing a beat. “And regardless of what happened, I’m a detective. This is what I do.”

“And how do we know it wasn’t you who killed him?” Birdie rebutted.

“It wasn’t!” I chimed in. Everyone turned toward me as soon as I spoke, and my face flushed with heat. “I was with Clay the whole time. In the hall. We were looking at the paintings.”

“What are they still doing here anyway?” Emilia remarked. “You have no reasoning to be here. You didn’t even know Mr. Mason.”

“I think we should listen to the kids,” A deep and accented voice came from the opposite side of the room. We all turned to where Harvey was leaning precariously against the wall. It was the first time he had spoken all evening. “There’s something going on here, and we’re all involved. We might as well take a shot at figuring this mess out, eh? Unless anyone has a better idea?”

The room went silent and Clay cleared their throat. “Um, thanks. Anyway. I don’t have the materials to set this up as a traditional crime scene. All we have so far is the letter and the dice, but I think it’s pretty obvious what’s happening here.”

Emilia rolled her eyes. “It’s not.”

“*The Westing Game*?” Clay responded, but everyone gave them a puzzled look. They sighed. “*The Westing Game* was one of Mr. Mason’s favorite plays, and in it, Sam Westing faked his death and created a game for his inheritance. Mr. Mason is doing the same thing, except he’s really dead.”

“Why would he create a game for his inheritance?” Claude spoke up. “He already has me and my parents. *We’re* his heirs.”

Clay held up the letter. “Well, clearly, he had other means in mind.”

“On the off chance that this is real, which it isn’t,” Flora started anxiously. “What are we supposed to do about it?”

“I think we should figure out which one of us is the murderer and solve the clues.” Clay pushed their glasses up. “The first course of action is alibis. Everyone needs to detail exactly what they were doing when we left the parlor, up until Mr. Mason was murdered.”

Grant threw up his hands in exasperation. “This is pointless! Mr. Mason wasn’t murdered! He fell down the stairs.”

“Then I’m sure you’ll have no issue telling us where you were, eh, Grant?” Harvey chimed in again.

I remained quiet as Grant shot Harvey a look of extreme distaste. Without a thought, Clay perched on the arm rest of the couch next to me and produced a small notebook and pen from their suit coat pocket. They always came prepared.

Clay flipped past a few pages of drawings and scribbles before they found a clean page. They casually glanced up through their glasses at Grant. “Whenever you’re ready.”

“You have all got to be kidding me,” Grant mumbled under his breath. Harvey gave him a pointed look, and Grant sighed, crossing his arms. “Fine. We were going to be waiting for a while, so Flora and I went to the library, right next door - might I add - to practice her lines for the play. We stayed in there until we heard yelling, at which point, we left right away to see what was going on. Okay? Satisfied?”

“Which play?”

Grant sighed. “Romeo and Juliet. It’s for Mr. Mason’s theatre. He put me in charge of it.”

“I can verify that,” Harvey added politely. “I’m the stage manager, and Emilia is Grant’s assistant director.”

The woman with the black curly hair, Willa, raised her hand. “Me too. I’ve been doing the costumes.”

“Who here is not involved with the play?” Clay inquired.

Only Claude, Birdie, Oliver, and I raised our hands.

“What? You think the play has something to do with it now too, Sherlock?” Grant scoffed.

Clay didn’t answer but drew a line in the notebook. “Okay, Emilia, you’re next.”

“Well, it’s none of your business, but I was in the bathroom down the hall fixing my makeup. I misplaced my setting spray, and it’s important for me to reapply. I heard the yelling as well, and came to see what happened. Same as them.”

I glanced at her and realized that she was wearing different lipstick and more eyeshadow than before we left the parlor. Clay seemed to realize the same thing and moved on to Claude.

“I needed to call my parents about recent family matters, so I stepped out in the hall,” Claude answered, wringing his hands. “I was not too far from the hall with the staircase. I heard the crash and ran there as fast as I could.”

Harvey was next. “Like I said, I’m working as stage manager for the play. Even though it’s our night off from rehearsal, there’s still work to do. Oliver took my bag and coat when I arrived. I keep my show binder in my rehearsal bag, so I went to retrieve it. There was a crash. I thought something happened, and went in the direction of the sound, and here we all are.”

“Is this true, Oliver?” Clay looked up from their writing.

Oliver nodded from where he was still standing, pale-faced, at the door. “I-I, yes. I remember taking a bag to the coat room.”

“Where were you when the murder occurred?”

“U-Upstairs,” Oliver stammered while fidgeting. “I don’t know w-what happened. I-I swear. Mr. Mason asked me to get some cleaning supplies to finish in the kitchen because it was still quite a mess. They’re-They’re in the upstairs closet. That’s where I was. I-I couldn’t see the staircase from t-there. I only heard the crash.”

Clay scribbled a note down in the notebook before turning to someone else. “And you, Willa?”

“I went to the kitchen,” Her face flushed slightly red. “Oliver said there was trouble with dinner. I’ve been taking some culinary classes, so I thought I might be able to help.”

“Was anyone else there?”

She shook her head. “No, but Oliver showed me where it was.”

“She’s right,” His voice was still shaking. “I did.”

“Alright,” Clay answered, writing more stuff down. “If Flora was with Grant, and everyone else has given their alibis, then all that’s left to explain is Birdie.”

“I’d be happy to share where I was. I have nothing to hide,” Birdie said confidently, but fidgeted with the crystal necklace she was wearing. “I was in the dining room.”

“I thought we weren’t supposed to go in there for twenty minutes?” I asked reluctantly.

“Exactly. I knew no one else would be there, so that’s where I went. You see, I was practicing my yoga. I need complete silence.”

Clay’s nose scrunched up. “You were practicing yoga. At a party. In a floor length dress?”

“Indeed I was!” Birdie exclaimed and whisked up her dress to show she was wearing yoga pants underneath. “I always wear a pair of these bad boys. You never know when the energy is just right for yoga.”

“Um, alrighty then,” Clay replied, rather than protest, and flipped the notebook shut. “Now that we’ve got the alibis done, I will be investigating further and asking more questions privately.”

“Hold on, kid,” Emilia interrupted, twirling her glass of champagne. “What about the will? Mr. Mason clearly wants us to look for it. We wouldn’t be in this mess if he didn’t.”

Grant took a step forward. “I hate to say it, but she’s right. We know more about the will and the clues then we do about his death. How do we know it isn’t really *The Westing Game*, and that this isn’t all a sham? Mr. Mason was rather theatrical.”

“The will belongs to me and my family,” Claude protested firmly. “I’m Mr. Mason’s grandson. He would’ve left his inheritance to me.”

“We don’t know that for sure. The letter says there’s a chance for all of us.” Birdie replied, pointing toward the letter Clay had set on the coffee table.

“It wouldn’t be wrong to look for the will,” Flora added quietly. “I mean, if Mr. Mason wanted us to... We’ll need something to give to the police once they get here.”

Clay stood up abruptly from the couch. “Everyone be quiet! There’s a real mystery to be solved here-“

“You’re exactly right,” Grant cut them off. “And that mystery is where Mr. Mason hid the will. You said it yourself, this is like *The Westing Game*. This was probably his plan all along, to send us on some wild goose chase for his inheritance.”

“Then how do you explain the body in the next room?!”

“Easy. Just like *The Westing Game*, it’s not real. There is no murderer, and Mr. Mason is having a good chuckle at all of us.”

“So that’s it?” Clay said with exasperation. I could see the distress lighting their features and stood up from the couch to stand beside them. “We’re all just going to ignore the fact that Mr. Mason was *murdered* and look for a will?”

“I think Grant has a point,” Birdie shrugged, adjusting her necklace. “Mr. Mason was always very eccentric, and it’s clear he wants us to find the will. We might as well split up and start looking.”

Grant raised his hand. “All those in favor of splitting up and searching for the will, say aye.”

I could feel the heat of my anger rising in my blood at Grant’s arrogance in this matter, but remained quiet as everyone in the room said ‘aye’, except for Clay, Willa, Oliver, Harvey, and I.

“That’s five to four.” Clay glared at Grant.

“Not so fast,” Emilia barged through the group. My heart skipped a beat as she pointed toward me. “They don’t count. They don’t even know Mr. Mason, *and* they weren’t invited.”

Clay opened their mouth, but I stepped forward angrily. “My name is Park, and it doesn’t matter if all of you want to look for the will or not, because Clay and I are going to find it first, and we’re going to find out who’s behind the murder.”

“You better watch it, *Park*,” Emilia spat, accentuating my name in a mocking manner. “I don’t care who you are, but you don’t want to cross the wrong line.”

“Is that a threat?”

She smiled slyly and stepped back. “No. Just a suggestion.”

“Knock it off,” Grant interfered, but began walking toward the door. “It doesn’t matter whose side you’re on. I’m making the rules now. The letter says we have until morning to find the will, which means Mr. Mason must have something planned. We only have one night to find it, so we better start searching.”

Without another word, Grant disappeared out the door. Oliver gave him a stern glare as he passed by, but Grant didn’t flinch. Flora practically ran out after him and was soon followed by Claude and Birdie. Emilia fixed me with one last venomous look, before offering a cold smile and flipping her hair. She turned and took another careful sip of champagne and strolled out the door after the others. I turned to Clay, but they were still standing stiffly beside me, their face emotionless.

After a beat, Harvey shifted from where he was leaning on the wall. “That gives you one night to solve the mystery, kid.”

“I thought you were on our side.” I spoke up as he walked toward the door.

He paused. “Oh, I am. Which is why I suggest looking into Miss Flora.”

Before we could get another word in, Harvey walked out of the room, leaving only Clay, Willa, Oliver, and I.

“What are we supposed to do?” Willa asked, straightening her suit.

Oliver sighed. “We’re too far from town to walk.”

Unfortunately, I knew that he was right. Mr. Mason’s house was at the very outskirts of town. Not to mention, it was surrounded by thick forest. Between the length of the walk to town and the potentially dangerous animals lurking among the trees, it wasn’t plausible. We were stuck here until we could find a way to call the police.

“I couldn’t care less about the will,” She said after a moment, and walked reluctantly in the direction of the door. “But I’m not going to stand here all night.”

Willa paused as if she was going to say more, but instead just continued out of the parlor. There was a beat of silence that filled the room. Oliver stepped away from the door, and straightening his posture, looked toward Clay.

“Mx. Easten, I knew Mr. Mason well enough to know that he would want you in charge. I’m still the caretaker of the house, which means for the time being, my orders come from you.”

Clay inhaled sharply. “This isn’t 1912, Oliver.”

“I know,” He replied, folding his hands. “But Mr. Mason liked the house run that way, and besides, I’m rather fond of *Downton Abbey*.”

“Um, okay. Make some tea then, I don’t know.”

“Right away.” Oliver gave a quick nod and exited.

He closed the door behind him, leaving Clay and I alone for the first time since the drive here. I turned toward them, but I didn’t know what to say. I could see the weariness in their expression. They had just lost their family friend, teacher, and mentor, and I didn’t know what on Earth to say.

“Are you okay?” I finally asked.

Clay shook their head. “No, but that doesn’t change what happened. We have to solve this mystery, Park.”

“I know,” I sighed. “Do you have any idea where to start?”

“I think so,” They said, walking over to the coffee table where the others had left the letter. They held up the dice for me. “*Guys and Dolls*.”

“What?”

“The first clue is a reference to the musical *Guys and Dolls*,” Clay explained, setting the dice down. “It was one of Mr. Mason’s favorites. I’m guessing all of the clues have to deal with theatre.”

“Okay. So if the clue is from *Guys and Dolls*, then what does that mean?”

“I’m not completely sure, but I think that Mr. Mason has hidden the clues in places relating to different shows.”

“Then where do we look first?”

“Well, I have a hunch. And it involves mink.”
