

## **Chapter One:**

### **Mamma Mia, Here We Go Again**

*Written by: Jay Mosher*

The room is silent and the scent of paper envelops me. I stand between two bookshelves, a trail of books waiting everywhere I go. The book cart creaks across the floor as I drag it toward the next shelf.

It's getting late and the glass windows have started to darken. As much as I enjoy my job as a librarian, I'm ready to get home to our dog Hershey. He will be waiting anxiously for his dinner and a game of fetch. I glance toward the clock. Clay only has an hour left of dress rehearsal and then we will be back home in our flat.

Three years have passed since that night at Mr. Mason's mansion. Clay's grandfather's retirement party has become quite infamous in the papers, even years afterward.

Already so much has changed.

I never expected things to go back to normal, but sometimes I really wish that they would--that *we* could be normal.

Clay quit their job at the police station after a year, but later they couldn't deny that being a detective was their true calling. We had already been through so much that part of me didn't want them to go back, but it would be selfish to keep them from their passions.

Instead of going back to the police station, Clay started operating on their own as a private investigator. The first couple weeks of their new job left me terrified and in constant fear for their life.

As time has gone on it's gotten easier. I don't live in constant fear anymore. I spend my mornings working on my novels while Clay investigates. In the afternoons and evenings I work at the college library and Clay practices in the theater.

The theatre they inherited from their grandfather is currently in remodels but that hasn't stopped Clay from acting. They got a part as Sherlock Holmes in a community play. The auditorium is only a few doors down from the library. I smile when I think of the fact that they're practicing right now. I've never seen Clay come alive like they do when they're onstage. Watching them act is truly one of my favorite things about them, and one of the best parts of our new life.

My phone vibrates from my pocket and I quickly pull it out. We're closing soon so there's no one in the library at this hour.

“Hey, Willa,” I say, setting another book on the shelves.

“Hi, Park,” she yells over the sound of her stereo in the background. “Are you and Clay doing anything next week?”

“Not that I know of, besides work of course.”

“Do you and Clay want to go on a double-date with us? Axel and I want to check out that new bagel place in town. I figured we could go for lunch and coffee.”

“Yeah, that sounds great.” I pull the empty cart back to the desk. “I’ll talk to Clay when they’re done with rehearsal.”

“Right! We’ll see you at the show. Oliver will be there, too.”

“I’ll talk to you later, then.”

“Of course. See you soon, Park.”

I hang up and shove my phone back into my pocket. Double-dates are still something I’m new to. Clay and I have been dating for three years now; we started not long after the party. I’m so grateful to have them in my life. We have our flat, each other, our jobs, our dog Hershey.

Everything is perfect. I couldn’t want for anything else.

There’s an ear splitting crash from down the hall, quickly followed by screams. I freeze in front of the librarian’s desk. I know the play by heart. I’ve been practicing the lines with Clay for months. There’s nothing like this in the script.

I start running before I can fully process what this means.

All I can think of is Clay.

The memory of the dinner party flutters back into my mind. I can still picture Mr. Mason at the bottom of the stairs. I can hear Harvey’s gunshot in my memory, the image of Clay falling to the leaves is still ingrained into every thought.

I can’t let this happen again.

The cast is crowding the hallway outside of the theatre. I recognize the director’s assistant, Callie. There are tears rolling down her cheeks as she crouches on the ground with her phone cupped to her ear. I can hear her murmuring quickly to 911. She’s talking too fast to understand but I hear the words “fallen set piece.” My breath catches in my throat.

“Clay!” I shout anxiously. “Clay Easton!”

“Park!” I hear their voice as they shove past their cast mates. A moment later I feel Clay’s arms around me. I hug them tightly, sighing with relief.

“What happened?” I pull back, keeping my hands tight around their shoulders. Their brows are drawn and there’s a sharp crease in the middle.

“One of the set pieces fell while we were doing a scene.” Their voice is strained. “I--I was downstage when it fell, but--”

“But what?”

Clay sighs heavily and looks down. “Lewis...he was in the way. There wasn’t even time for him to move.”

“Oh my God.” I stifle a gasp.

“I don’t even understand how this could’ve happened.” They run a hand through their hair. Their expression is convoluted in confusion and misery. “It’s like someone cut the ropes.”

I freeze as our eyes meet. I shake my head. “Clay--”

“There’s no other explanation.”

I step back from them as my heart begins to race, and my hands curl into tight fists around my temples. I look hesitantly at the chaos surrounding us. The shouting and the sobbing reminds me exactly of what it was like to find Mr. Mason’s body.

*It’s exactly like the dinner party.*

“Parker--” Clay starts, reaching for my arm.

“No,” I mutter. “Oh God, no.”

Tonight’s death wasn’t accidental.

It’s another murder mystery.