

## Chapter Twelve:

### A Brush with Death

*Written by: Jay Mosher*

“Hey, Park.” Callie grins, wagging her fingers at me. “Long time no see.”

I can’t breathe.

Clay is standing stiffly on stage with their hands folded behind their back. They watch me with a carefully concealed expression, but I can see the terror lurking in their brown eyes.

Only a few members of the cast, including Ziggy and Floyd, are in the stage wings. They’re watching in horrified silence. There’s no way any of us can intervene. Callie is too close to Clay. She will just kill them before we can get to her.

My eyes brim with tears.

*How am I supposed to save them this time?*

*I told them we would be okay.*

*I promised everything would be okay.*

“Callie,” Art says in disbelief. “Why are you doing this?”

She shrugs. “There’s no hard feelings, Artie, but a gal has got to pay her bills.” Callie pauses to examine her bloody nails. “Honestly, I’m surprised you didn’t figure it out a long time ago. Do I look like a theater major to you?”

“This doesn’t make sense.” Art’s hands are fists at his temples. “Callie, how could you? I--It was you this whole time.”

“Well, it wasn’t *all* me,” she drawls in her thick British accent. “I was paid for it, you know? Sweet Miss. Irene wanted her revenge on her asshole husband and little Miss. Homewrecker over there.” She points a bloody finger at Andrea’s still body. “Not that I blame pretty Irene. She loved Lewis so much that she couldn’t stomach the betrayal.”

*Oh God.*

My head spins. It was *Irene*.

She had given us all the details of Lewis and Art’s argument to place the suspicions off of herself. She had played us.

I take a step forward despite the clammering of my heart. “If this is about Lewis’s affair, then you can let Clay go. They haven’t done anything wrong. You’re not getting money out of it. You told me you didn’t kill innocents.”

“Tsk Tsk Tsk.” Callie shakes her head. “That’s where you’re wrong, Park. Our detective over here isn’t innocent, and I was hired for their death.”

“By who?”

“You’re quite familiar with him actually. He’s a very old friend of mine. So, when he contacted me from ye ole jail box for a little favor, well, I couldn’t say no.”

My heart lurches. “*Harvey?*”

“That’s right!” Callie says cheerfully. “He gave me very clear instructions. He wanted me to put on a little charade--make it seem like this was all another mystery--and that at the end I would have my big reveal.” She grins wickedly. “He wanted you to feel like a failure when I killed Clay in front of you.”

“NO!” I start to run toward the stage, but Art grabs me and holds me back. I struggle against him, kicking him hard in the shin, but he doesn’t let go.

Callie watches with a calm smirk and gives Clay a small jab with the dagger. “Got any less words, Sherlock Holmes.”

Clay gives me a somber smile. “Goodnight, sweet prince.”

My heart breaks. *Horatio’s last line to Hamlet.*

“NO!” I sob, trying to pull from Art’s grasp. “DON’T TOUCH THEM!”

I fight against Art like a wild animal, scratching at his arms as he holds me tight. Clay’s brown eyes are focused on me; his gaze is unreadable.

“DON’T TOUCH THEM!” I scream again as the tears pour down my cheeks.

I have no choice but to squeeze my eyes shut.

*I won’t watch them die.*

There’s a loud crash that echoes across the theater. I scream in agony. The sounds of multiple castmates yelling blocks out the thoughts in my head. Without warning, Art lets go of me and I drop to the floor on my knees.

My stomach aches as I shake with sobs, clinging tightly to myself.

*Clay. My Clay.*

“Parker!” I hear the voice from the stage. “Parker, open your eyes!”

I blink up toward the stage in shock.

“Clay,” I breathe.

A large set piece is resting on the stage where Callie and Clay had just been. The cast is screaming and crying around the wings.

*And Clay.*

Clay is standing off to the side, shaking, but unharmed.

I clamber to my feet and run toward the stage. My heart is bursting. Clay opens their arms for me, and I pull them into a deathly tight embrace.

“Clay,” I sob. “Clay, you’re alive. You’re okay.”

They hold tightly to me and kiss my forehead. “I’m okay. We’re all okay. It’s over, Park.”

I release them in order to look at the destruction surrounding us. “How are we alive?”

“I don’t know.” Clay holds me closer to them.

“Uh, that would be me.” Blake steps out from the wings. She’s shaking and her face is slightly green. A utility knife is in one of her hands and a cut rope in the other. “I didn’t know what else to do. She was going to kill Clay.”

“You saved me, Blake.” Clay’s eyes are wide in astonishment. “I--I don’t even know how to thank you.”

“Send me a gift basket.” She waves them off. “I’ll be throwing up backstage if the cops need me for questioning.”

“Thank you, Blake,” I say. “Thank you so much.”

She gives me a thumbs up and disappears.

I hold tightly to Clay, closing my eyes to block out the horrific nature of our surroundings.

All that matters is that we’re alive.

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