

## Chapter Five:

### The Search Continues

*Written by: Jay Mosher*

The fall air is crisp with the promise of a cold winter. I shiver in one of Clay's coats. It's a jean jacket with a sherpa inlining. Their coat is a bit big on me but it's warm and smells like them.

Lewis MacGartney's house is one of many small white houses in the suburb. The shutters are painted in a dark blue chipping paint, and the yard is decorated with far too many garden gnomes.

Clay stands on the wooden porch next to me. They're dressed in a soft green suit. I didn't realize how many suits they owned until we moved in together. I've never seen someone with as many suits as they do.

I shift hesitantly on my feet. The casserole dish is heavy in my hands. There's a welcome rug under our feet, and standing by the door is yet another gnome. It's wearing a pointy blue cap and has a long white beard. A collection of multicolored pumpkins are clutched in its meaty ceramic hands.

*Why does someone need this many garden gnomes? I've counted at least ten.*

The door hesitantly creaks open after several minutes of knocking. Irene MacGartney peers through the crack in the door with weary eyes. Her face is blotchy and red from sobbing, and her thin blonde hair hangs stiffly around her shoulders.

"What do you want?" she asks hoarsely. "If you're selling something, I don't want it."

Clay stands straighter. "We're here to ask a few questions--"

I elbow them roughly in the side and move in front of them. "Hello, Mrs. MacGartney," I greet politely. "We're Lewis's castmates. We wanted to check in on you and give you our sympathies." I hold up the casserole dish. "I made you some lasagna."

"Oh." The tension eases from her thin shoulders. She pushes the door open further. "I didn't realize you were friends of Lewis's. Come in."

I give Clay a look of *I told you so* as we follow Irene into the house. Several cats tip toe around our feet. Clay grabs the lasagna from me when I almost trip over a white cat laying in the middle of the hallway.

Irene brings us to her small living room. Clay sets the lasagna on a table out of the many cats' reaches.

I wrinkle my nose and try to ignore the scent of cat litter as I sit down on the flowered sofa. Clay sits stiffly down next to me. By the look on their face, I can tell that they've noticed the cat litter smell as well.

"It was really kind of you to stop by," Irene says softly, sitting down in a red armchair. A white long-haired cat quickly jumps into her lap. She strokes its fur and the sound purring fills the room. "I'm sure Lewis appreciates it."

"We're so sorry for your loss, Mrs. MacGartney," I say.

She waves a slender hand. "Please. Just call me Irene."

"Irene," I correct. "What happened last night was terrible. I can't even imagine what you're going through."

"My Lewis." She sighs, wiping her teary eyes on the sleeve of her sweater. "At least he went out doing what he loved. He adored acting with all of his heart."

"Irene." Clay's voice turns soft; compassionate. "Did Lewis mention anything odd during the days leading up to dress rehearsal?"

She looks at them with wide blue eyes. "What do you mean?"

"We think that Lewis's death wasn't accidental," I tell her.

"Oh my God," she gasps, holding her thin hands over her mouth. "Oh my God."

"I know it's hard to think about," Clay says. "But we have evidence supporting that suspicion, which means we need to gather as much information as possible if we have any hope of finding out who his killer is."

"Yes. Yes, of course." She runs a hand through her long hair. Her bottom lip trembles. "I'm sorry. I just...I can't imagine anyone wanting to hurt Lewis. He got along with everyone, that's just how he was."

"Any detail helps," I say. There's a box of tissues sitting on the cluttered coffee table in front of us. I hand the box to her and she takes it gratefully.

"I guess there was one thing." She dabs at her eyes with a tissue. "After rehearsals, he was arguing a lot with the director, Art." Irene shrugs, a tear rolling down her cheek. "I didn't think anything of it. I figured it was just theatre things."

Clay takes their notebook from their suit. "What were these arguments about?"

"Lewis's portrayal of Watson. Art wanted him to make more interesting character choices and to play a more modern version of Watson, but Lewis liked to stick to the classics. He

didn't want to do anything too outside of Watson's character. Literature was very important to Lewis. He even talked about quitting a few times because of Art."

"Thank you so much for your time, Irene." Clay stands from the couch. "We'll get out of your hair now."

She nods. "Thank you for investigating on my husband's behalf. If there's foul play involved, I hope you find whatever monster did it."

"Of course. We'll keep you updated."

I stay quiet as we dodge the many cats to get back outside. Clay scribbles a couple more notes in their notebook.

"Well, we have a suspect," I say as soon as the door is closed behind us. "We should give Art a questioning."

"I don't think Art is the culprit." Clay chews on the end of their pen.

I nearly trip over another lawn gnome. "Clay. She just said that they have been arguing for weeks."

"Do you really think that's a motive for *murder*?"

"No, but there could be more behind it." I walk around several gnomes holding a wheelbarrow. "The point is that arguing is more than enough reason to do a questioning."

Clay stops in the middle of the lawn. There's a sharp crease between their brows, and their lips are pursed into a frown.

I cross my arms, giving them a look. "Come on. You know I'm right."

"I don't think it's him." Clay shakes their head. "Call it a hunch or intuition or whatever, but I don't think Art is the killer."

"Clay." I step toward them, putting a hand on their shoulder. "You have a good intuition, but it's not perfect. We've been wrong before."

The sound of Harvey's gunshot goes off in my mind. I can still picture him standing in the middle of the forest. A chill runs up my spine.

"I won't jump to conclusions until we have more evidence," they say.

"I'm not asking you to." I trace a finger across their shoulder blade, the same spot where they had been shot. "All I'm asking is that you don't put your trust in anyone right now. We can't afford it. Everyone in your cast and crew is a suspect."

"I know that."

“Good.” I remove my hand from their shoulder and turn away. “Because I can’t repeat the dinner party. I won’t watch you get hurt like that again.”

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