

Shannon Symonds



Murder
Takes a



Selfie

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Contrary to Popular Belief

“So why can’t I come to your mom’s wedding again?” Sophie asked.

Esther pushed her glasses up her nose and, feeling warm, undid the top button of her sweater as she thought about the question. She locked the Oceanside High library money box in the desk drawer and put the key in a coffee cup where anyone could steal it but wouldn’t. It was one of the things Esther loved about their small town.

“She said they want to keep it small, just family and Hart’s partner at work, Officer Ironpot,” Esther said as she packed her AP chem book in her backpack. “I think the whole wedding is kind of a mess.” Esther wiped her pencil shavings off the library desk and into a trash can.

“Wait. Officer Ironpot is just a co-worker. I’m your best friend. Don’t I outrank him?” Sophie pushed the book cart behind the desk and started turning off lights in the ancient library. “And what are you going to call Officer Hart? Dad?”

“No! I have no idea,” Esther said loudly enough that she looked over her shoulder to be sure they were truly alone in the usually quiet library. Oceanside High’s library was dedicated in 1896. It was dusty and old, but Esther loved it, right down to the unused fireplace.

“What’s his first name?” Sophie called from across the room while she turned off a light.

“Joe.” Another light went off.

Sophie came back and got her coat off the rack. “Isn’t it weird to have your mom get married so soon after he proposed? Wasn’t it only a few weeks ago?”

She put her books into her backpack. After hefting the huge pack onto her petite frame, she pulled her long black hair out from under the straps and cleaned her round glasses. At four-foot-eleven, the pack was almost as big as she was.

“It’s fast. I mean, they’re friends and worked together for years, but I just met him last fall.” Esther put her own backpack on.

“So why the rush?”

Esther smiled at Sophie. “I asked Grandma Mable why, and she told me there was no reason to procrastinate happiness. But I heard the pastor at church tell my mom to beat the devil by running to the altar. Do you think it’s odd that when I was little I always wanted my real father to come back and be with us?”

“He came back all right.” Sophie laughed. “And then you had to call nine-one-one. He’s crazy mean. Did your mom tell you your dad was in prison before he escaped?”

“You know, we had good days too. He wasn’t always mean.” Sophie’s questions stung. Esther and her mom had moved with Grandma Mable to Oregon when Esther was nine, but she still remembered some of the good days. “We never talked about him very much.”

“I’ve known you since you moved here. You never talked about him at all.”

“It’s like I said, we were in hiding, until he walked away from a work release program last month and found us. Besides, he said he was sorry before they took him back to prison to finish his sentence” *Why am I defending him? I need to grow up and let go of childish dreams.*

The last bell rang. The hallway outside the library filled with noisy students getting on buses or going to track practice.

The library door opened, and Parker Stuart came in laughing with Ashley Gates Cadeau, one of the prettiest girls in Esther’s sophomore class. Esther let Sophie take the desk while she pretended to be busy organizing books. *Of course he’s with her. She looks as if she could wear two drinking straws for jeans. She should be a brunette hair model for shampoo commercials starring Parker, a handsome Viking who buys his clothes at REI.* Esther pushed her glasses into place.

“Hello. Is it too late to check out a book?” Parker asked with his British accent. Ashley smiled at him as if he were the only person in the room.

“We just closed everything up,” Sophie said.

Esther looked up just in time to catch Sophie looking back and giving her a knowing look—one eye narrowed and her mouth twisted in a half-smile. Parker leaned on the library desk, letting a lock of his blond hair fall out of his ponytail and into his face.

Parker had recently come to Oceanside High from England with his twin sister, and everything about him gave Esther butterflies. He hung out with Nephi, her seventeen-year-old uncle, and had even come to her house once, but she was too shy to speak to him.

“Oh. It’s all good.” He shrugged and turned to go.

“Wait!” Sophie called him back. “Esther can help you.”

Esther gave Sophie a wide-eyed look. Sophie just smiled and stepped back.

Parker stood up. “That’s okay. I can do it Monday. I need to go run with the long distance track team anyway.” He gave Esther a smile. “Thanks.”

Ashley stepped even closer to him and followed him out the door.

“Sophie!” Esther turned on her friend, shaking her head.

“What? You know you like him. Every time he walks by you comment on what he’s wearing.”

Esther smiled. “It’s just his accent. He’s smart and, well, I like his sweaters.”

“Right, it’s the sweaters.” Sophie laughed. “Let’s tell the librarian good night and then go study on the beach.”

“Sounds perfect.” Happy to change the subject, Esther peeked into the librarian’s office. “Good night, Ms. Priest.”

The young librarian looked up at Esther and smiled. “Good night, girls. Are you going to the midnight book launch and signing during spring break?”

“Of course,” Sophie said.

“I thought so.” Ms. Priest gave Sophie a beautiful smile. “If I don’t see you there, I’ll see you after spring break.”

Esther loved working in the library with Ms. Priest and Sophie. It was a great place to do her homework, and library sciences gave her an excuse to study for her college entrance exams.

The girls walked through the library to the double doors and pushed them open together. Esther turned around and made sure they had locked the doors behind them. They stood for a moment on the cement stairs, watching students drive out of the parking lot. In the distance, she could see the river flowing into the ocean. A gust of wind freed some of Esther's brown hair from her ponytail.

Adjusting her backpack, Esther said, "Come on, let's go to the beach."



Esther and Sophie walked along the riverbank until they reached the road to Esther's house. They passed her house and walked one more block to the beach.

The northern Oregon beach had an old swing set and a picnic table hidden in the grassy dunes near the beach access road. It was the perfect spot to study when the weather was good.

"Is this where they're having the ceremony?" Sophie got out her books and spread out next to Esther, facing the surf. "I bet it'll be a beautiful day, and I won't be there."

"I think so," Esther said. "All I know is Grandma Mable bought me bedazzled flip flops. They're straight out of the nineties and I love them. She bought my Uncle Nephi new Converse for his suit."

"How can he be your uncle?"

"Grandma calls him her best surprise." Esther laughed. "I think he is her smelliest."

"Speak of the stink, here he comes." Sophie pointed toward the beach access.

The entire long distance track team was headed their way. Paisley Pamela Stuart's long, perfect legs had the social-media queen ahead of the pack.

Paisley passed a middle-aged man in a sweat suit leaving the beach, and her lipstick fell out of her hot pink shorts. By the time the man picked up her lipstick and turned to give it to her, Paisley had passed Esther in a cloud of perfume, running toward the ocean.

Paisley's twin, Parker, was red faced and breathing hard as he ran toward them, racing to catch up. Nephi was right behind Parker.

Esther sighed deeply. Her stomach fluttered and her hands shook as she nervously twisted hair that had fallen out of her ponytail.

Laughing, Sophie said, "You've got it bad."

"I do not!" She hid her nervous hands in her lap but let out a quiet laugh.

"Yes, you do."

"I respect his mind. Have you heard him in lit class? He recites. For an athlete, he's brilliant."

"Right," Sophie said. "You were thinking about his mind."

"Quiet. Here he comes," Esther said. Parker spotted her and Sophie in their usual spot and nodded.

Nephi saw her. "Hey, geek squad! Are you checking out my manly legs?"

"You're going to blind someone!" Sophie yelled. Then she looked at Esther, and a slow smile spread across her face. "You like Parker. Too bad he's a twin to the mean girl."

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