

Prologue

Savannah Hadley loved this place. It was her favorite pub in all of London.

The Dove pub overlooked the River Thames, just across the Hammersmith Bridge from London's city center. The sun would soon be setting over the water on this early autumn evening. White cranes picked at scrap food between the clefts in the cobblestone sidewalks, and grey street pigeons fought over crumbs along the terraces.

Savannah came to *The Dove* every Friday, because she could take two hours for lunch. She was a curator at Sotheby's, and the last shipment of art for the week came on Thursdays. Therefore, Fridays were spent bringing closure on the week and preparing for the next.

Tucking a lock of her hair behind her ear, Savannah flipped to the next page in the book she was reading: Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. She had read the book at least fifty times but could never get enough of Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy. Would he truly save Elizabeth's family

from that cunning and horrid Mr. Wickham? Would Elizabeth let go of her prejudice against Mr. Darcy and believe the words in his letter? And would Mr. Darcy abandon his pride and take Elizabeth into his arms?

Savannah smiled and set her book down, allowing her imagination to replay her favorite scenes from the story. She lifted her wine glass from the table and took another sip as her gaze scanned the room.

The pub's dark, oak planked floors looked as old as England. Coats of polish caked the floors and had preserved the wood through the centuries. The day was a bit chilly and overcast, so the manager had built a fire under the mantle. The popping and snapping of the wood embers, and the flickering reflection of the flames against the walls, tables, and glasses somehow made London feel, well, comfy. If only she had a blanket to curl up in and never return to work.

A handful of older men sat across the pub at a square table playing Backgammon, eating sausage and mashed potatoes, and drinking pints of Guinness beer. Beside Savannah's table, a younger couple sat in cushioned chairs. They were obviously on a first or second date, because their faces were bright. They couldn't look at each other without smiling.

The bar was just beside the front door, and the bartender wore a white dress shirt tucked into his black slacks. He wiped the water stains from the glasses with a towel he kept draped across his shoulder, talking and laughing with two older gentlemen. One wore a Knickerbocker hat, and the other a vest and tweed coat.

The bartender placed the glasses back onto their shelves. “What eva ya want, it’s two pounds, lad,” the bartender said with a smile.

“Doon’t yaz call me a lad, pal,” the old man in the vest said, grinning. He stood from his stool and shook his finger at the bartender. “I’m olda and can still rlun circlles arlound ya.” All three of them laughed.

Savannah smiled at their accents. She was from Colorado and had been living in England for seven years now, but she still found the various British accents charming. *Whatever you want, it will be two British pounds*, she interpreted. The older man must either be from Scotland or the northern countryside.

Her phone vibrated on the table, and Savannah lifted it to see the name of her old college roommate, a good friend from Pepperdine University: *Joanna*.

“Hey, kiddo!” Savannah said into her phone.

“Hey, lovely girl!” Joanna replied.

“Whatcha doing?”

“About to go to a meeting, but wanted to call real quick and tell you about a little something I’m holding in my hand.”

“Oh, yeah?” Savannah asked.

“Yeeesss.” Joanna drew out the syllables, teasing Savannah. “I was just reading about you.”

“In the Sotheby’s magazine?”

“Absolutely not,” Joanna said with a smile in her voice. “It’s a book titled, *The Mason Jar*. Written by Clayton Fincannon. Do you remember that name?”

“A book?” Savannah asked, startled. “Finn wrote

a book?"

"Yep, and it's about you."

"It is?" Savannah almost tipped over her wine glass.

"Yeah. And it's intense." Joanna was laughing now. "It's beautiful, Savannah. It really is. He says wonderful things about you, lovely things. I even cried a few times. I loved it. I really did. I know it's about you. It's got to be about you. I mean, Finn didn't date anybody else at Pepperdine. He changes your name and stuff but it sounds like you all the way through. He gives you the name 'Eden Valmonte.'"

"He calls me Eden?"

"Yep. As in, the garden of Eden."

Savannah smiled and glanced at the floor. That sounded like something Finn, with his gentle and romantic spirit, would call her. "What's it about?"

"It's about your time together at Pepperdine," Joanna replied. "The book was published last year, it seems."

"Can you send me a copy?"

"Yeah. I'm giving it to my secretary right now, and she'll drop it in the mail to you."

"Wait, how did you get it?" Savannah asked.

"Ian sent it to me."

"Who's Ian?"

"He was one of Finn's friends at Pepperdine. Ian and I had some classes together. Anyway, Ian liked the book and knew I liked romantic stories, so he sent me a copy."

"Oh, no," Savannah moaned, worried. What had Finn written about her?

"Savannah," Joanna said, her voice softening. "Finn

loved you. You needn't worry."

"What does he say?"

"You just need to read it. That's all I can say. I need to let you go, but we'll chat later. The book will be in the mail today, okay? We'll talk after you read it."

"Okay."

"Oh! One more thing," Joanna said. "You know how we're going to Homecoming next month?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I talked to Ian, and he's friends with Finn, and Ian said Finn would be there."

Savannah remained quiet on the other end, thoughts tumbling through her mind. She couldn't even remember when she'd last thought of Clayton Fincannon. It was so long ago. The last she'd heard, he was living in Africa and working with street orphans.

"Are you still there?" Joanna asked.

"Yeah." Seven years had passed and not once had she returned for a homecoming. And now, the one time she decided to go, Finn would be there.

"Well," Joanna continued, "just letting you know. It'll be good to see you! We'll talk about it all later, okay?"

"Okay."

Clayton Fincannon, Savannah thought to herself. Images played in front of her eyes like an old movie reel, memories of Finn, with his soft, brown hair and shy smile. She saw him stirring the honey and milk into their hot tea at Dietrich's Coffee in Malibu. Finn looked over and smiled at her, his hazel eyes dancing. He kissed her on her temple, and she remembered blushing. Warm feelings

had swept through her body like an ocean wave. But it was over, she thought, bringing herself back to attention. That was a long time ago, and she'd moved on.

During that next week at the museum, Savannah's colleagues were concerned. "You seem distracted," one lady remarked. Savannah answered with topics concerning deadlines, reviews, and feelings of stress. But secretly, she was nervous about what she might read in Finn's book. Her brief time with Finn had been lovely, but she couldn't recall any details of those days together or even what they had talked about. She had hurt him, she knew that, though she hadn't meant to. She had never set out to intentionally hurt anyone. She feared Finn might seek retribution through his writings. But Finn wasn't like that, was he? Not that she could remember. And besides, Joanna said the book was lovely.

Savannah found herself bobbing her knees up and down while sitting behind her desk, and picking and biting her nails while at home. Savannah lived in a flat in Notting Hill with a roommate. Even her roommate asked Savannah why she was so quiet and nervous, but Savannah shrugged and made excuses about work.

A week passed, and just as Savannah had grown accustomed to being patient, and her nerves had settled a bit, she returned home after dinner with friends to find a package from New York awaiting her on the kitchen table. She dropped her purse onto the sofa and lifted the box. Maybe she needed to put on some tea before she opened this.

Savannah walked to the jars of various teas sitting on the kitchen counter. She scooped out a generous helping of English Breakfast, which she had purchased at the farmer's market. She dropped the tea leaves into the filter basket on the coffee maker and turned the water on. She took a mug from the cupboard and mixed the freshly brewed tea with milk and honey, remembering again how Finn had showed her that method.

She stepped toward the kitchen table and picked up the package again. She pulled a knife from the drawer and cut through the tape, opening the box to find a sticky note pasted on the front cover of a book. "Here you go, love," scribbled in Joanna's handwriting.

And there it was. *The Mason Jar* by Clayton Fincannon.

Savannah took her mug into her hands, slipped off her shoes at the edge of the living room rug, and pushed them aside with her feet. A reprint of Van Gogh's *Café Terrace* hung on the wall. Across from it hung Caravaggio's self-portrait, which he painted while living in Italy during the sixteenth-century.

Her flat's livingroom window overlooked the town center. Streaks of pinks and purples painted the western sky, and reminded Savannah that nightfall approached.

She walked over to the couch and sat, sinking down into the soft cushions. She reached over and turned on the lamp sitting on the end table. Then she opened the front cover of Finn's book, and began to read.