

# DEATH BY CHANCE

A JOSIAH REYNOLDS MYSTERY

BOOK SIXTEEN

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As I was rounding a corner in the corn maze, Lincoln ran into me almost knocking me down. His eyes were wide with fright, and the boy pulled on my arms. "Come! Come away!"

I grabbed him tightly by the shoulders. "What is it, Linc?"

Looking beyond me, Lincoln shuddered and wrestled away from me, leaving me in the dust as he ran away. I turned to see what was troubling Lincoln when I spied the upper part of a scythe moving across the tops of the corn sheaths. It gave me a start.

If Lady Elsmere had hired actors for her party, she didn't bother to notify her staff. I was very puzzled. I knew the Grim Reaper would soon encroach upon my row, so I tiptoed to another part of the maze, listening for other people and my dog. I wasn't quite sure if I should be wary. If Lady Elsmere had hired someone to scare the bejeebies out of her guests, she didn't remember it when the Grim Reaper showed up in her ballroom. She seemed genuinely surprised, but Her Ladyship was known for playing games. This was a game, wasn't it?

With all the mayhem that had happened over the past several days, my nerves were frayed, so I decided to skip the rest of the ball entirely and go home, but I had to find Baby, my English Mastiff, first. I glanced at the full moon before moving down the intersecting pathways. Where was that dog?

Baby howled. Somewhere deep in the maze, Baby howled again, and he didn't stop howling.

My heart froze.

I know my dog, and that was a howl was of desperation and fear. He needed help. I cried out, "BABY, MOMMY'S HERE!" I ran, or rather shuffled, down one path and then another following the sound of his cries until I chanced upon him. Baby was standing over something which I couldn't make out. Since Baby was agitated and can't see very well with only one eye, I held out my hand so he could sniff me. "It's me, Baby. It's me."

Recognizing my scent, Baby wagged his tail.

“Good boy. Good boy.” Grabbing hold of his collar, I pulled Baby off whatever he was standing over. I bent closer, peering at what seemed to be a scarecrow dressed in a Confederate general’s uniform. A cloud drifted over the moon, making it more difficult for me to see. I took a solar light from a straw bale and studied the form more closely.

Was it a dummy? I gingerly poked the form with my shoe which came away with blood on it.

Oh, my goodness! It was a person! This was no scarecrow!

It’s hard for me to kneel, so I had to lean on Baby to get close enough to feel for a pulse. That is until Baby growled. Jerking my head up, I spotted the Grim Reaper standing motionless at the end of the path, quietly observing me.

“I need help. This person is injured.”

The reaper swung the scythe around as though he was to cut a row of wheat or someone’s head off, marching toward me. The only thing that sprang to mind was “Danger, Will Robinson. Danger!” from the *Lost In Space* TV show. I don’t know how I sprung up, but the next thing I remember I was running with Baby nudging from behind trying to get around me. It was every woman or dog for her/himself.

I quickly glanced over my shoulder only to see the Reaper giving chase. I ran across the lawn, through a crowd smoking on the patio, and burst into the ballroom, screaming, “Death! Death in the corn maze!”

Do I know how to party or what!