

PRAISE FOR DEBORAH SPRINKLE

The Case of Mistaken Identity is a suspenseful novel with a romantic thread guaranteed to keep readers turning the pages as the dangers of mistaken identity threaten lives. A great read. Don't miss it.

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THE CASE OF
MISTAKEN
IDENTITY

a mac & sam
mystery 

A NOVEL BY
DEBORAH SPRINKLE



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All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

To my husband, Les.

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CHAPTER I



In the brisk November wind, the helium balloons pulled and twisted against her grasp like rebellious toddlers. Private Investigator Mackenzie Love threw an ugly look at the shiny bags of gas and tightened her grip. Mama always said patience was a learned virtue. In that case, she still had a lot to learn.

She hurried across the lot to where she'd parked her new four-door sedan well away from the other vehicles. As usual, it no longer stood by itself. Pickups, vans, and SUVs hemmed it in on three sides and formed an island of metal in a sea of asphalt. What was wrong with people?

At the car, the real battle began. Mac opened the rear door and wrestled her charges into the backseat. By the time she'd safely tucked the last balloon inside, sweat trickled down her neck. She withdrew from the car and slammed the door.

Her partner, Samantha Majors, should have done balloon duty. After all, she drove an SUV. But Sam was busy this morning getting ready for her mother's visit.

An itching sensation traveled the back of Mac's neck. She lifted a hand to scratch as a low voice sounded behind her.

"Too bad you won't get to enjoy those."

Mac pivoted, ready for a fight. "Back off. I'm in no mood for jokes."

Her words faded away, and beads of sweat turned to ice water. The barrel of a gun filled her vision—pointed straight at her heart.

"You have been hard to find. Come with us like a good girl."

Mac tore her eyes away from the pistol and took a mental mug shot for later—if there was a later.

"Who are you?" She fought to keep her voice from shaking.

Lines of confusion flashed across the man's brow. And he made a fatal error—he shifted his weight to his back foot and took his focus off his gun for an instant. But an instant was all Mac needed.

Adrenaline surged through her as she lunged forward and snapped her left forearm under his gun hand. The spit of a suppressed weapon sounded next to her ear, but her assailant managed to hold on to his pistol. Mac wasn't out of danger yet.

With her other hand, she delivered a lightning punch to the man's ribs. He bent at the waist and wrapped his arms around his stomach.

"Hey." A parking lot guard appeared out of nowhere. "What's going on here?"

Distracted, Mackenzie glanced toward the approaching man. The last thing she wanted was someone else hurt. "Stay back." She waved him away.

"You witch." Her attacker swung his gun arm in an arc and caught Mac next to her right eye with the hard metal of his weapon.

Fireworks exploded in her head. She fumbled for a hold and prayed she'd stay conscious.

Behind Mackenzie's car, a white van screeched to a halt, and the man jumped inside.

The adrenaline release left Mac shaken. She opened her car door and slid into the driver's seat.

"Are you all right?" The guard peered at her. "I've called 911."

"I'm fine." Mac jerked her head at the retreating van. "Get the license plate."

The guard rushed into the open parking lot.

Mac laid her forehead on the steering wheel and groaned. How had a simple trip to get balloons turned into a man pointing a gun at her and a 911 call?

"Sorry, miss. The van didn't have a plate." The guard reached a hand in her direction. "There's blood running down your face."

"Figures." Mac dabbed her head with a tissue and winced.

An ambulance pulled in behind her car, and an EMT trotted over.

"Could you turn to face me, ma'am?"

Ma'am? Things were going from bad to worse.

The medical technician cleaned the wound. "Could use a stitch or two. Want me to do it here or go to the hospital?"

"Here." It would take a lot more than a cut on the head to get her into the hospital again. Like maybe a severed ear, or a leg.

The EMT returned with equipment from his truck and sewed her up. Two stitches and a gauze dressing later, he pronounced her ready to go.

"Thanks." Mac explored the bandage on her face with her fingers.

"Hi, Mackenzie." Washington, Missouri, Detective Victor Young strode over to her. "Before you leave, I need a statement."

“I’ve got a splitting headache, Vic. Can we do this later?”

“You know it’s better while it’s fresh.”

She nodded and cringed as a sharp pain stabbed her temple. “I was so busy putting those dumb balloons in the car, I didn’t realize the man was behind me until he spoke.”

Detective Young’s eyes narrowed as he listened to her story.

“I don’t know who the man was or who he thought I was.” The memory of the gun sent a chill down her spine. Mac rubbed her arms.

She’d had guns pointed at her before, but she’d expected it—been prepared. This guy came out of nowhere. She vowed to never let it happen again.

“You must have a doppelgänger.”

“A what?”

“A twin—someone who looks like you. In your case, someone in a lot of trouble.” A crease appeared on Detective Young’s brow. “You’ll need to come to the station and help with a sketch.”

“I’d like to get these balloons out of my car.” Mac glanced at her backseat. “And get something for my headache.”

“The balloons will be fine, and I’ve got aspirin at the precinct.” Young closed his notebook. “I’ll see you at the station.”

Mac cast a scowl toward Detective Young’s retreating back, retrieved her phone, and pressed two.

“Mackenzie Love and Samantha Majors, Private Investigators. How can we help you?”

“Hi, Sam.” Mac started her car, and the phone switched to her radio speakers.

“Hi, yourself. Did you get the balloons?”

“Yep.”

“What happened, Mac?”

“I haven’t said three words.” Mac raised an eyebrow at her phone. “What makes you think something happened?”

“Because you only said three words. By now, I’d be getting an earful about how you’ll never volunteer to get the balloons for anything ever again.”

“Sam, sometimes you scare me. I’m on my way to the police station.”

“Hang on. I’m putting you on speaker so Miss P can hear this.”

Mac gave her partner and their researcher/secretary, Miss Prudence Freebody, the short version of her attack. “Now I’ve got to help the police with a sketch, and my head’s pounding.”

“I’ll meet you at the station,” Sam said. “For moral support, and I’ll bring ibuprofen.”

“Thanks. I can use both.” Mac ended the call and pulled her seat belt across her torso. She wasn’t excited about a visit to the police station. Not because she wasn’t welcome there, but because Detective Jake Sanders, Sam’s brother, worked there.

Mac’s pulse raced. She and Jake dated—sort of. A family emergency interrupted their one and only date, and since then, he’d been in Florida for a month. But the brief time they’d spent together left her with memories of his embrace, his kiss, and murmured words of love. They’d filled her dreams while he was gone.

Mac hadn’t seen him since he’d returned to Washington. She touched a finger to her lips. Would their first meeting be awkward? Would he regret asking her out?

And there was Nate, Miss P’s nephew, and her college boyfriend. Why did he have to set up his law practice in Washington? Mac groaned. Maybe she should give up dating altogether.