

## CHAPTER ONE

I lowered the camera and checked the clock on my car's dashboard. Six p.m. on the dot. I was about to wrap up my first case as a PI and feeling mighty pleased with myself. A cold beer and a plate of nachos would help me to celebrate. I reached for my cellphone.

Jada Price, my new partner in solving crime at Storm Investigations, picked up on the first ring. "So, what you got, Agent 007?" she asked.

"Just solved that insurance fraud case. I'm ready to kick up my heels."

"I told you that you were a natural at getting the dirt on people." Jada's voice lost its lightness. "I need you to come to the office, though. A new case has come in. I'm working on that divorce stakeout so it's up to you. But I'm not sure you'll want to take this one."

"Oh?" I asked. "I thought you said our bank account says we can't be choosy."

“This job will be thankless. Storm Investigations might look stupid just for taking it on. I’ll fill you in as soon as you get here.”

“On my way,” I said. I tossed my phone onto the passenger seat and started my Chevy Sonic. I’d leased it for a year as a business expense. Unless more work rolled in, I would soon be returning it to the dealer and getting back on the city bus. The new case had to be a real loser if Jada was thinking about turning it down.

I drove slowly up Richmond Road past restaurants, clothing stores, and coffee and tea shops. Night was settling in already. It was the first week of October and chilly in the evenings. I thought about stopping in at Whispers Pub for that plate of nachos and a beer. But I kept going—past a string of condos, across Parkdale Avenue, and into our neighbourhood, Hintonburg. Jada wouldn’t be too pleased if I kept her waiting.

For once, I found a parking spot in the same block as our office on Wellington Street. Most stores were closed for the night, and it was early for the dinner crowd. We’d rented two tiny rooms on the second floor of a commercial building. A thrift shop and a takeout pizza place were down below. Gino Roma waved at me as I walked by on my way to the stairs. He was tossing pizza dough in front of

the wood-burning oven. He kept trying to set me up with his son Nick. So far, I'd resisted.

When I entered our office, Jada was sitting at the desk facing the door. A young woman in a navy blue suit sat across from her. Both faces turned to look at me. The woman stood and held out her hand.

"I'm Rosie Brown," she said. "You must be Anna Sweet."

I looked past her shoulder to Jada. I was trying to get a read on whether Rosie Brown was the case we didn't want to take. Jada kept her face blank. "Pleased to meet you," I said finally, shaking Rosie's hand.

"Pull up a chair," Jada said. "Ms. Brown is here because she needs someone to do some digging for her firm's client."

I grabbed a chair from the other office and sat between the two of them. Rosie was young. Maybe twenty-five. Her eyes were sparkly blue behind large black-framed glasses. She'd pulled her blond hair back into a bun, probably trying to look older.

She leaned toward me. "I'm with Jones, Jones, and Lockhart. I'm assisting Greg Jones Junior in defending a murder suspect. Sadly, the file is not going as planned."

Jada cleared her throat. "You might have heard of the case, Anna," she said in a deadpan voice. "The Crown versus Paul Taylor."

My eyes opened wide, as if I'd been poked with a cattle prod. Jada was right. This was not a case we wanted to get involved in. I said, "Front page news every day since August. Six weeks since the murder and people still can't get enough of the story. Odds-makers say he's going to get life. Open and shut. No other suspects."

Rosie Brown frowned. "Yeah, I know what the press is saying. Our client is innocent, however. We hired another PI but he didn't come up with anything helpful."

"Maybe because there was nothing to find," Jada said mildly. Her black eyes met mine.

"We don't think the investigator tried hard enough," Rosie said. Her eyes flashed. "My client has agreed to pay a higher fee. His money won't be worth anything to him if he gets life."

"Not many places to spend a fortune in Sing Sing," I agreed. "So what kind of money are we talking?" I could have pussy footed around and waited for her to state an amount. But it was late and I was tired.

"Seven hundred a day and a bonus fifty thousand if you find something to get him off."

Jada whistled. "We'll take it . . . I mean, Anna will take on the case. We can't promise results, though."

I shot Jada a "thanks a lot" stare, but I didn't say anything. We had to make money or we'd lose our office. And we had to have an office to run a PI business. The law was clear on that.

Rosie's face relaxed into a smile. "Great. I have a contract ready. I also copied a list of facts and witnesses for you." She whipped a stack of paper out of her briefcase before we could change our minds. She set it on the desk and handed me a pen. "Paul is being held in the detention centre without bail. He's expecting you early tomorrow morning. We have a week before the trial begins. We'll need something before then to prove his innocence."

"No problem," I said. "I'm sure . . ."

Jada met my eyes. The shake of her head made me close my mouth before I said the rest. It didn't stop me from thinking it, though.

*. . . there are some flying pigs out there somewhere.*