

CHAPTER 3



Mac leaped from the car and peeled the note off the windshield. Raindrops pelted her like tiny daggers hurled from the clouds. She dove back inside, slammed the door, and grabbed a plastic grocery bag from the back seat. After smoothing it out on the passenger side floor, she placed the sheet of paper on top to dry.

This wasn't the first time she'd received a threat like this, and it probably wouldn't be the last. She pushed aside the seed of anxiety before it grew into a field of fears—choosing instead to see it as a positive. She must be making someone nervous.

Now to share her news with Jake and Sam. She'd head straight over to Sam and Alan's place. She looked in the rearview mirror and groaned. Good thing they loved her for better or for worse, because this was one of her worst. She yanked a tissue from her purse and scrubbed black streaks of mascara off her cheeks before adding it to the pile stuffed in the driver's side door pocket.

Jake must have been watching for her arrival because as

soon as she pulled into Sam's gravel driveway, he came out the front door with an umbrella.

He shielded the open door from the rain while Mac gathered her things. "Where you been?"

"I'll tell you inside." She huddled next to him, slammed the door, and locked her car. "Thanks—"

He smothered her words with a kiss. "Come on." He hooked his arm around her waist, and they hustled up the sidewalk to the covered porch where Alan held the door for them.

Just inside, Sam handed her a thick bath towel. "You look like you could use this. Let me take your coat."

Mac stopped rubbing her hair and looked around. "Where's the pooch?"

"He's in his kennel."

"What'd he do?" Jake asked.

"Nothing. We're getting him used to it for when the baby comes." Alan led the way back to the kitchen-family room. "I'll let him out in a few minutes."

"Are you afraid he'll bite the baby?" Mac tossed the towel in the laundry room. "I can't imagine Killer hurting anyone, much less a baby."

"No. Not on purpose, but he's such a big lug." Alan lifted the lid on a pot simmering on the stove.

The aromas of garlic and onion drifted through the room, and her stomach growled. "What are you making?" She took an involuntary step forward.

"Spaghetti. I'm trying a new sauce recipe."

"If it tastes half as good as it smells, it's a keeper," Jake said.

Killer shot through the doorway from the hall and rose on his hind legs in front of Jake, front paws reaching for Jake's shoulders. The dog was almost as tall as the man. "Hello, big

guy.” Jake managed to stroke the wavy hair of the golden doodle’s back while dodging doggy kisses.

After a few minutes, the doodle dropped to all fours and bounded over to Mac with his welcoming grin that always made him sneeze.

“Bless you.” She sat in a chair and the dog plopped down beside her, tongue hanging out, his sturdy body leaning against her leg. She wrapped her arms around the dog’s neck. “So good to see you.” And she meant it. This sweet dog had almost lost his life trying to protect Sam, her best friend and partner. He would always be special to her.

Sam stood in the doorway, hands on hips, her belly swollen and her face a picture of perfect contentment. A brief pang of despair and jealousy took Mac by surprise. She was engaged to Jake. Within a year, they would be married, and if they wanted, they could start a family too. So, what was the problem?

“Everybody ready to eat?” Alan brandished a spoon.

“You bet.” Jake took a seat next to her.

“Killer. Go to your bed.” Sam pointed into the family room and then pulled out a chair across from Mac.

The dog trotted away. Wow. She already had the mom voice down.

Alan placed steaming bowls of noodles and sauce on the table along with a plate of garlic toast before taking a seat himself. The friends joined hands and Alan blessed the meal. For a time, the only thing heard was the clatter of utensils on china as everyone filled their plates.

“Delicious.” Jake managed to say between bites.

Mac nodded.

“What I want to know is why you came in looking like a drowned ... kitten?” Alan asked.

“Good save, Alan.” Mac glared at him and placed her fork

on her plate. "I'll show you." She left the table and returned with the note. "Have you got a large zipper baggie I can have?"

Alan rose and went to the pantry. "Will this do?"

"Perfect." Mac slipped the wrinkled note inside the baggie and pressed as much of the air out as she could before zipping it shut. "I found this on my windshield when I came out of the museum today."

Jake took it from her and held it up to the light. "What does it say?"

"Forget the past."

Sam uttered a sharp intake of breath. Mac locked eyes with her partner.

"What does it mean?" Jake used his police officer voice. He was upset.

"I've been researching the death of my parents. That's why I was at the history museum today." She inclined her head toward the paper. "I think the note means I'm making progress."

"I thought your parents' death was an accident."

Mac shook her head. "It was meant to look that way. But the car didn't go over the bridge like it was supposed to." She met his eyes. "Chief Baker was there. He knows what happened."

Jake pushed his chair away from her as if to distance himself from her words. "I can't believe the Chief would cover up a murder."

"At the time, my sister, Beth, thought it was the Mob, and she and the Chief were afraid for the rest of us. So, they played it as an accident." Mac massaged her right temple. "But we found out the Mob had nothing to do with their deaths. Now I want to find out who really killed them."

"Only it sounds like somebody doesn't want you digging up old dirt."

THE CASE OF THE INTENTIONAL ACCIDENT

“Maybe that’s because some of it might stick to them.”