

Chapter 1

The mysterious accident had been in the news. It was splashed across the Internet too. Anson Ledyard, a tech millionaire, had vanished. A week later his Porsche had been found. It was submerged under ten feet of water in a Florida swamp.

But the man's body was missing. The driver's-side door was open. The police speculated that he must have been thrown from the car. The swamp was infested with alligators. Ledyard was presumed dead. But heavy rains had hit the area right after the accident. Maybe Ledyard's body had been carried downstream.

Bob Pasquale was working for the Drake Detective Agency. The case file sat

on Bob's desk. Tom Drake, Bob's boss, was an ex-cop. A pair of bullets in his leg had forced an early retirement. But the man still had detective work in his blood. Now Drake stood before Bob. He explained the situation.

"The insurance company wants an independent investigation. There's a lot of money at stake," Drake said. "We're going to have to do some unusual investigating."

"How so?" Bob asked.

Drake was probably forty. He was a handsome and athletic man. Drake liked flashy clothes and hip-hop. Nobody who knew him ever called him Tom. "Ledyard's wife is your age, Bob. That makes her around twenty-four. So you're the one to get close to her. I've pulled some strings. You can go to some of the parties she attends. It seems she's quite the party animal. Get to know her. Eavesdrop. See if you can find out anything."

“You think maybe she wanted him dead?” Bob asked.

“Could be. The Porsche lost its brakes at a real bad time. It happened at a sharp curve. Was it a coincidence?” Drake said. “Maybe. Maybe not. You need to watch her closely. Is she grieving? Is she glad her husband is gone? Who knows? Maybe the accident was a setup. And she knows the truth. Maybe the husband is chillin’ in the Caribbean. They’re both waiting for the big insurance settlement and their romantic reunion.”

“Why would they need the insurance payout?” Bob asked. “Ledyard was loaded.”

Drake grinned. “The rich always want more. That’s how it works. Plus, the will could be tied up in court for a while. The insurance payoff is immediate.”

Bob figured the job would be easy. Shadowing Mrs. Ledyard wouldn’t be hard. Hanging out with the ultra-rich would be a nice change. Right now he took college

classes. One day he hoped to become a lawyer. His part-time job at the detective agency was giving him good experience. The flexible hours were great. The pay was good.

Usually, he investigated employee thefts. Or he followed unfaithful spouses. This would be his very first case involving a possible murder. It was pretty exciting!

Drake gave him some upfront money. He needed to dress for his new role. He was supposed to act the part. Rich. Bored. And new in town. Who knew shopping could be fun?



That night he met his girlfriend for dinner. They ate at their favorite Mexican restaurant. “Don’t let this go to your head,” Jeri McNeil said.

Bob grinned. “Hey, it’s just a job, Jeri,” he said. “Don’t worry.”

“Yeah, right,” Jeri said. “Driving a

rented roadster. Going to fancy parties every night. Kissing up to what's-her-name. What a tough job it is to spend time with a supermodel!”

“Her name is Kelly,” Bob said. “We don’t know what her deal is. Maybe she’s just a grieving widow.”

“Yeah, I’m sure she’s all broken up. Her middle-aged husband is dead. And she gets billions!” Jeri scoffed.

“Come on! You’re sounding like a cynic,” Bob said.

“Wouldn’t you be jealous? My job is boring. I teach people how to use computers. And what about you? Glamorous parties. Gourmet food. Beautiful people,” Jeri said, smirking.

“Look, honey. Usually I’m following some cheating jerk. Give me a break,” Bob said.

“You don’t get it,” Jeri said. She sipped some soda. “You *are* a cute guy. But do you

really expect her to fall for your charms? Do you actually think she'll confess something?"

"Of course not. I'm just looking for some clues. Something to point us in the right direction," Bob said. "Our client is counting on us."

They finished dinner. Then Bob drove Jeri home. They stopped in front of her building.

"Ledyard was megarich. He must have given his wife a great life. And don't forget this. She was already rich! Kelly earned top dollar. So why would she kill him for the insurance?" Jeri asked.

"I haven't got a clue. That's what I'm supposed to find out," he said. He kissed her goodnight.

Bob lived in a small apartment near the college. His parents owned a nice house in Butterfield. It was a small farming town about six hundred miles away. His dad had wanted his son to join him in the family

business. But Bob didn't want to be stuck in Butterfield. Nothing exciting ever happened there.

Before he went to bed, he glanced at some magazines. Kelly was on more than a few covers. There was no doubt about it. She was hot. He grinned wryly at her image.