

CHAPTER 1

Jacob was disturbed by how dark it was outside this early in the day. It was not even four in the afternoon, and he could not see in front of him without a light on. As he lit his cigarette, it caused an instinctual reaction to pour more whiskey in his red plastic cup. Work had been slow going on two years now with no new business whatsoever. He reckoned that he was either the worst private investigator in town or people stopped having problems they could not solve on their own. For as long as he lived, he knew the latter to be impossible, but it was difficult for him to accept he was a bad PI. He was not a cocky man, but he did have confidence that he knew how to read people. This was his foundation, but now on the bad side of his thirties, he no longer did much of it. These days, he was simply the disassembled pieces that survived his past.

Jacob liked being a detective because it allowed him to be a rebel without being a criminal. This seemed ideal for a man who believed in justice but hated the system as it were or even how it was supposed to be. Previously, he had worked for a top-dollar insurance firm investigating potentially fraudulent claims. For all his drunken debauchery, he was good at knowing when people were being deceitful, a highly valuable quality in the insurance field. He managed to save enough from his previous career to live a meager existence, but soon he would not even be able to maintain being meager. If he did not get a case soon, his existence would be demoted to pathetic.

Jacob poured more Kentucky Jack into his red cup filled with half-melted ice and cranked the CD player louder. He had a fancy MP3 player that he never used except for the occasional audiobook, as he was adamant about the importance of reading. Someone once taught him how to transfer

all his CDs onto his iPod. If Jacob bought the CDs and a CD player, why in the hell would he transfer them?

“LA Woman” was the next track to play, and per involuntary tradition, he closed his eyes and reimagined his drive from San Diego to San Francisco on the Pacific Coast Highway. He could visualize the Pacific Ocean capturing the sun’s early reflection as it rose from the dusk of the night on its globular morning journey. He recalled smoking very potent weed the whole way through; listening to Morrison’s vocals carried him through the road and to the other side.

By the time the song was over, he was on his third whiskey. He got hard out of habit and unzipped his pants to rearrange his genital positions when he heard a knock on the door. *Who the hell could that be?* he thought as he pulled his pants up.

“Hello?” a woman’s voice asked.

Shit, he thought, *a female! And I have a visible erection with my hand down my pants!*

Jacob opened the door ajar and quickly returned to his seat behind the desk to hide his half-erect penis from this unknown woman. “Hi,” Jacob said, too flushed to think of any other greeting or even another word.

“Is this the office of Frank’s Detective Agency?” she asked, standing slightly inside the door.

“Sure is,” Jacob replied as his vocabulary slowly came back to him.

The woman was more than attractive; he reviewed to himself, *She is smoking hot*. He estimated she was five foot seven and took careful notice of her slightly larger than proportional breasts and legs that’d make heterosexual men turn slightly to the side.

“Are you Frank?” she asked.

“Excuse me?” he asked, too focused on her figure to fully interpret what she was saying.

“Are you Frank?” she asked again impatiently.

“Oh, no, I am not Frank.”

“But this is Frank’s Detective Agency?”

“Says it right on the door.”

“But you are not Frank?”

“No, still not Frank.”

“But you are a detective?”

“Absolutely.”

“Is there a detective named Frank who works here?”

“Nope, no Franks here.”

“So you are a detective who works at Frank’s Detective Agency, the only detective I presume, but you are not Frank?”

“Do you need a job? Seems like you put that all together pretty quickly.”

“I don’t need a job. I need a detective!”

“Even better. I can’t afford to pay you anyway.”

“Can I sit down?” she dismissively asked.

“By all means. What can I assist you with?”

“I need you to find my brother.”

“You don’t know where he is?”

“Would I hire a detective to find him if I did?” she responded with what looked like actual ice coming out of her mouth.

“When was the last time you saw your brother?”

“Two years ago, at his place in San Mateo.”

“What was he doing there?”

“He was living there.” She glared as she took out a cigarette. “I’m sorry, are you really a detective?”

“Yes, I assure you I am. Was he also working in the area?”

“I heard through my mother that he might be working at some Silicon Valley tech company. She is not always coherent, so it is difficult to know for sure.”

“Did he have any motivation to leave town—maybe a debt, a bad relationship, something incriminating to him or another person?”

“I don’t know the answer to any of these questions. We have barely spoken to each other for nearly a decade.”

“So if you have not seen him in so many years, how do you know he is missing?”

“My mother told me,” she quipped back as she lit her thin cigarette. “She is worried and asked me to take care of it.”

“Take care of it?” Jacob asked.

“To find him,” she impatiently clarified. “That is the only reason I am here. I simply typed in “detective agency” on the internet, and Frank’s Detective Agency was shown to be the closest one. I don’t really care what happened to Tony. I mean, I hope he is alive, I honestly do, but if it were up to me, I would leave it alone. He has a rather difficult personality and caused my mother much grief. His welfare, besides the basic being alive and well and whatnot, is really not my concern.”

She rose from her seat and disposed of her cigarette in his shot of whiskey, suggesting this was the end of their conversation as she finished speaking, “Listen, not Frank, I don’t care if you are a good detective. I just need you to tell me where Tony is and what happened to him so I can tell my mother some news, even if it is bad news. The very act of hiring you to find him fulfills my familial obligation. I will pay you fifty dollars a day for one month, which you will receive in two installments—one-half now and one-half at the end of the month. If you find him, dead or alive, though preferably alive for my mother’s sake, I will double your payment. Deal?”

He calculated it would be \$750 now, \$750 in a month, and an extra \$1,500 if and when he finds this Tony. He was admittedly too broke to turn down a potential three grand. However, he felt he should walk away from it; this woman was not telling him everything. *Hell, she is not telling me anything.* The other side to it was that he needed the money and was very bored and needed the inspiration to get out of bed in the morning. Plus if he took the case, he could see this woman again almost definitely.

“Deal,” Jacob replied.

After she left, Jacob lit his cigarette with a heavy sigh and a semi-erect penis.