

## THINKING OUT LOUD

### CHAPTER ONE

Samantha Evans grabbed her black handbag from the kitchen counter, took a quick look around and headed for the front door. She grumbled as she turned back remembering her car keys. Taking time for a calming breath, she headed out a second time, realizing everything was finally in order. As she reached the door, the telephone rang. She paused, irritated at the timing. *Should she bother to answer it?* She was somewhat in a hurry. But then she'd wonder who it was. Waiting impatiently until the answering machine picked up the call, she recognized the excited voice of Dave Patterson.

*"Sammi? Hello Sammi. If you're there, pick up I need to talk to you. It's urgent."*

Dave Patterson was one of the lead detectives from the local precinct. She'd known him since college and he often consulted with her, usually when he was stuck and needed information. She had to pick up.

"Hello, Dave," she said in an exasperated tone.

"I'm so glad I caught you. I desperately need your help."

"No, Dave, please. I'm on my way out the door. My bags are already in the car. I'm heading to Ontario. You know that vacation I keep planning and then canceling?"

"Oh damn, is that today? Do you think you could postpone? Not cancel, simply postpone it a little. I really need you."

"I cancelled two weeks ago, remember?"

"But I desperately need your help. Give me a minute to explain. Just listen to me, okay?"

"Okay," said Sammi believing she was being played again. "Tell me what's going on. I don't promise anything, but I'll listen."

"Okay, good enough. We've got a problem with someone on the governor's staff. The Harrisburg police have asked for our help and I'm right in the middle of it. There's been a few too many mistakes happening lately. Some documents on file have disappeared totally and others get lost and then show up a few weeks later changed in some way. I can't say anymore than that. But I need you to attend a party tonight. And with me! See how lucky you are? We need to see if you can find out anything."

"Dave, is this desperate? Can't it wait a week? I've planned this trip three times already."

"It's got to be tonight. The party's the perfect cover and everyone will be there. We need to find out who's involved, at least that. Who do we start to target? What's this all about? We're stuck. We don't even know whom to watch right now. Anything you pick up could help point us in the right direction. That's all I want."

"What you want is for me to cancel my plans again. Gee, I don't know."

"I know I can't force you, but I could if you'd let me hire you."

"No, thanks. That I don't want. Well, I guess another day wouldn't matter. Just this party tonight, right?"

“Yeah, just this party. If you could listen in on a few people, it would really help. I’ve got the names of three we’re wondering about. And they’ll all be there. That’s everything I need right now. I promise.”

“Well... okay,” said Sammi, irritated because her civic duty wouldn’t allow her to say no. “But you owe me--again.”

“I can’t thank you enough, Sammi,” said Dave.

“That’s right. You can’t thank me enough.”

“It’s formal, so dress for the occasion and I’ll pick you up at eight o’clock.”

Sammi puckered up her face as she put down the receiver. He did it to her again. Why did all these crucial matters happen at the last minute when she had already made plans? She was somewhat irritated, but couldn’t easily refuse. She did have her ways of finding out information and only a few people knew about it. Her parents had a slight inkling, but they were now deceased. And she had never trusted her two older brothers with the news. So besides Dave, there were a total of three other people in the entire world who knew what she could do. And they were people who had needed her help in the past and had been sworn to absolute secrecy.

Most weren’t sure how she did it. She wasn’t entirely sure herself. She’d been called a psychic and all those things, but she was none of that. It’s simply that she could hear what people were thinking. If she stood next to someone and concentrated, his or her thoughts talked to her out loud, like a regular conversation. Strange, right? But true, nonetheless. She didn’t know how she did it, but she had done it since she was little. It was natural to her and nothing she’d practiced. When she was around seven years old it had started, and it never stopped.

\* \* \*

Dave had found out accidentally. They had met for lunch several years back and he was in the middle of telling her about some frustrating criminal case he had been working on when the suspects surprisingly walked into the restaurant and sat down two tables over from them. They were flaunting their ability to always be one step ahead of the police and even casually waved to Dave in triumphant victory from their table.

“They’re so smug,” said Dave. “We don’t know how they do it, but they’re always two steps ahead of us. They’re smart; I have to give them that. Probably have a mole somewhere in our unit, but we can’t figure out who that could possibly be. We do run a tight group. Anyway, someday we’ll get them.”

“What are they doing?”

“They deal in contraband coming in from Cuba, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, you name it. Some of it’s pretty valuable stuff, and that’s bad enough, but they also move heroine and cocaine. We’ve got to stop the drugs, especially. We’re always a day behind on the ship loads and they’ve already moved the cargo out of whatever warehouse or storage unit by the time we get there. It’s so maddening.”

“Quiet for a moment,” said Sammi.

“What?” asked Dave surprised at her curt manner.

“Give me a moment.”

And Sammi sat looking at Dave with her concentration obviously on the other table.

“What are you doing?” asked Dave.

“Give me some paper and a pencil--quick. Then pretend you’re telling me something to write down.”

Dave looked puzzled.

“Humor me, okay?”

Dave cooperated and then waited rather mystified to see what this peculiar turn of events was all about. Sammi was in deep concentration and she kept writing swiftly on her paper. Finally she stopped. About this time they heard his two suspects laughing cheerfully as if they were having a great time.

“Seems like they’re having fun, don’t you think?” said Dave showing slight anger.

As she slowly handed him her notes she said, “Well, remember you’re the cop, so don’t make a big deal when you read this, okay? It might be a good idea if you laugh out loud to show you’re having a good time, too.”

Dave began to read Sammi’s notes and his jaw dropped. Then, remembering, he laughed out loud as suggested. She knew he’d have trouble concealing his amazement and his glance questioned her.

“Does it make sense to you?” she asked.

“Yeah, it sure does. Is this for real? Are you sure?” asked Dave.

“That I don’t know. All I can tell you is that’s what they were talking about. That’s exactly what they were thinking and they were laughing because they said nobody would ever figure out how it’s done.”

“Holy shit. How’d you do this?”

“That’s not up for discussion, but wait a minute.”

Sammi got quiet again for a few minutes. She was in obvious concentration for a second time.

“I hope you can get them. They’re so arrogant. They said it was fun watching you from this distance and talking about their next job because you police were so out of it.”

“Sammi, I’m speechless.”

“No, you’re not. You’re never speechless.”

“Well, that’s true,” Dave laughed. “But this is about the closest I’ve ever been. Are you sure about this? How can you do this?”

Sammi explained. “Look, I’ve told you what I’ve heard. I can’t guarantee that this is what they’ll do. But I do know it’s exactly what they were thinking about right now. Other than that, I don’t know.”

“But they’re two tables away. I can’t hear them.”

“We can discuss that some other time, but for now, don’t you have work to do, maybe people to call? I’m ready to leave anyhow.”

“Sorry, Sammi, I don’t mean to be suspicious, but this seems impossible.”

“Only to those who don’t believe. Are you going to follow up on it or not?”

“Hell, yes.”

A few weeks later Sammi got a call from Dave. He had turned from a doubter into a complete believer. They nabbed the guys at an obscure ship loading area with the new cargo being unloaded. It was done exactly as Sammi had said. They also had managed to make it to a previously unknown warehouse before the last shipment was moved. They had them on a double violation. And these guys weren’t so smug anymore. But Dave wanted to know how she did it.