

YOUR THOUGHTS CAN TRAP YOU

CHAPTER ONE

Samantha Evans returned the telephone to its cradle with a more or less instinctive gesture. Her mind was numb and reeling from the pressure imposed on her. Her services were again being requested by the FBI. *Why couldn't they take no for an answer?* She had already told them that she didn't want to work for them.

That call was from Ben Collier, an FBI agent she had met earlier in the year on another case. He said he needed a little favor. As far as she was concerned, the favors for the FBI were never small. But they were stuck and knew she had uncanny methods for acquiring information from people. When others failed she seemed to succeed. Her concerned mind rehashed the call.

"Hi Sammi, this is Ben Collier. Remember me?"

"Sure, Ben, I remember you. How's it going? I must say this is quite a surprise."

"It shouldn't be," he said. "We'd still like to hire you."

Sammi laughed. "I don't think so, Ben. Not this year anyway."

She wondered why he would be calling her. It was unusual for him to call her directly.

"I won't keep you guessing. I know you must be wondering the real reason for my call."

"Yes, I am. What's it been, more than six months at least?"

"That's about right. I did try to call you a while back, but I never got an answer. I asked you again if you'd be interested in working for us."

"I figured you knew my answer, Ben."

Sammi remembered. When she had helped out her friend, Detective Dave Patterson on a fraud and money laundering case, Ben Collier had turned out to be a plant at the bank where she worked in Scranton. And she was surprised to find out he worked for the FBI. He had been impressed by her work, didn't know how she got her results, but was quite fascinated by the outcome. He had offered her a job on the spot, which she declined. Yet, he still pursued her hoping for occasional assistance.

"We're in a spot, Sammi; we've hit nothing but dead ends and we need some direction. Won't you consider helping us out?"

"I can't, Ben. I've got my hands full around here. You know I help out the local police."

"We could easily get priority over them."

"But I don't officially work for them. I work strictly on my own so that I don't have to get involved all the time. That last job was much more than I usually do."

"Sammi, we need a lead and we don't have one. We've been working on something for more than a year and are still in the dark. I know you have your ways of getting information. Damn, we need a break. Can't we talk you into helping us out?"

"My schedule's full. I simply can't do it."

Sammi had a unique talent. It's the main reason that she let herself get involved in anything at all. But now, it seemed that every year things were getting more and more intense for her. More people were finding out she was valuable and she found herself recoiling at the thought.

"We need someone like you."

"I'm sorry, but I need some time to unwind, you know. I'm still trying to get my life back down a peg or two after that last assignment."

"I'm there all the time."

"But you chose this profession, I didn't. I simply help out a few people sometimes on the side. I'm sorry, Ben. I have to say no."

She did have her ways and could get something out of anyone if she put her mind to it. She had this little talent that had started when she was seven years old and had never stopped. She could hear what other people were thinking. Incredible, right? But nonetheless true. She would stand next to someone, concentrate and their thoughts would talk to her out loud as if she were having a regular conversation with them. She didn't know how she did it; she'd never questioned it.

Her Grandpa Logan could do it, too. But he was the only other person she knew. And he had helped keep her rational about her gift. He taught her the value of when to harness it in or expand it as needed. But he had died when she was fourteen years old and now Dave Patterson and her friend Julie Watson were the only ones in her nearby environment who knew what she could do. But in truth, there were three other people in the world who knew--she'd helped them in the past, but they had been sworn to secrecy.

There was a long pause at the other end of the line. Then Ben started up again. "Let me give you a few details--that could help you make up your mind."

"I've already made up my mind. And I'm sorry, really I am, but I don't want to get involved in anything else. Sorry."

"Okay, Sammi. We could use your expertise, but I'll respect your wishes. I know you're overworked."

"Thanks, Ben. I'm so worn out; I simply can't do it. I wish you the best of luck."

Sammi usually felt bad when she turned someone down, but she was still worn out from the last case, which wasn't entirely over. Dave had gotten shot. He almost died and six months later was still recuperating. He had returned to work, but wasn't at his best even yet. That could still take a while. And the two main offenders were going on trial sometime next month. She didn't know if Dave would decide to go to court and watch the proceedings, but if he did, she wanted to be there for support. No, at this time she felt that she had made the correct decision.

A few hours later she received another call that unnerved her even more.

"Hello Professor Harley, it's been a long time."

He had been one of her college professors at Scranton University, and she hadn't talked to him in nearly twenty years.

"Yes, it has Sammi. I trust you're well and living a good life."

"Yes, I am. Thanks, and how about you?"

"I'm doing fine for an aging professor."

Sammi laughed as she remembered his unique sense of humor.

“But I’d guess there’s a serious reason for your call.” She had detected a slightly nervous tone in his voice.

“And you’d be correct. I might be requesting your help again in the near future. I haven’t bothered you in more than twenty years, but something serious is happening which involves some friends of mine. I don’t plan to go into the details right now; hopefully, it won’t be necessary. But I’d like to know if I could possibly talk to you about it, if and when the circumstances demand it.”

“We could always talk about it, professor.”

“I could tell you something now, if you like.”

She thought for a moment and answered, “I think I’d rather wait, since as you said, you may not need me. Why don’t we wait until that time?”

“That’s probably the best way to handle this. I’ll call you sometime in the future if I believe you can help out. Would that be better?”

“I think so. I’d prefer to wait until then.”

“Okay, Sammi. That’s what we’ll do. In truth, I sincerely hope that I don’t have to request your help. That would mean that a favorable solution has been reached. But if not, then we can discuss how to proceed. Agreed?”

“Yes, I can agree with that.”

“Good luck to you, Sammi, and bless you for your past help.”

“Thanks and the same to you, professor.”

That call left her somewhat upset and confused. When the time came she didn’t know what she’d decide. She would have to confer with Dave. He could always help her see all sides of a situation. She appreciated having someone trustworthy to consult.

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Detective Dave Patterson was still having trouble with his left shoulder at times. It had been over six months since he’d been shot in a sting operation and he’d had most of the necessary therapy. *When was this aggravation going to stop?* He was forty-three years old and had a lot of time ahead of him as a policeman, but even now he had to be careful. *Was he being impatient?* The doctor had said it would be at least a year before he was thoroughly healed and he would probably always have a slight weakness in that area, yet able to perform his duties without concern. Still, he was annoyed and it was something he’d have to work on mentally.

He brought the holster up to his left shoulder. He didn’t have a choice, he was right handed. Lately, he could wear it a few hours a day, but that was all. *Damn*, he thought, *he could go to a belt form, but he was used to the shoulder apparatus.* He would try and tough it out a while longer. His muscles had to strengthen soon.

The phone rang and yanked his mind out of his self-defeating pity thoughts. He laughed thinking the timing was perfect.

“Hi Dave, its Sammi.”

“Hi there, are you still at work?” He always perked up when he heard her voice.

“Yes, but I’m leaving soon. I need to talk to you about something. Are we still on for tonight?”

“Yeah, what’s up?”

“I think I’ll hold it for later. I called you at work and they said you’d left early. Everything okay?”