

Chapter 1 *Summer in the city*

They say if you don't like the heat, get out of the kitchen. New York, mid-July, if you don't like the heat, get out of the city. Anyone who could take a vacation was in the mountains or on Long Island. Anywhere cooler than the city. But me, I had work to do and dollars to earn. As I left my apartment building in Queens, the heat hit me. The temperature was already up in the eighties. Only seven o'clock in the morning and I was sweating. It was going to be another one of those hot, uncomfortable days. Time to catch the number seven train to Manhattan.

The name's Marley, Nat Marley. I know the city of New York like the back of my hand. New York is part of me, it's in my blood. During my fifteen years' service with the New York Police Department, I saw the best and worst of life in the city. After leaving the NYPD, I became a private investigator. Although I don't make that much money, I'm my own boss and I don't have to take orders from anybody. I prefer it that way.

At Grand Central Station, crowds of office workers hurried out to 42nd Street. There were usually a few homeless people in the station trying to make a few dollars before the police moved them along. When you make the same trip every day, you get to know people's faces. But today, I couldn't see any homeless people. Maybe they were out in the sunshine on 42nd Street.

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Suddenly a voice called out, “Hey, Nat, don’t you recognize me?”

I turned around. There was an old woman in an expensive-looking coat and skirt. It was Annie, a real New York character: one of the homeless people I’d known since I was a patrolman with the NYPD.

“Do you like my coat, Nat? I found it in the trash.”

“A winter coat in July? You must be boiling. I like the coat, but you don’t look too great, Annie.”

“I’m OK, Nat. Anyway, a winter coat’s valuable so it stays with me, sunshine or snow.”

I looked at her closely. There was something different about her. I couldn’t say what exactly. But she had changed.

“Sure you’re feeling all right, Annie?”

“Me, Nat? Never felt better.”

Maybe she was just exhausted from trying to earn a living on the streets at her age. But something told me I should stay around.

“I’ll buy you breakfast. Coffee and doughnuts?” I offered.

Annie took my arm as we made our way toward the main entrance. Suddenly she pulled at my jacket.

“Hey, not so fast, Nat. Just give me a minute. It’s this pain in my chest.”

I looked at her closely. The sweat was pouring off her face. We hadn’t walked far, but she was out of breath. She held my hand tightly. Her skin felt cold.

“Oh my God!” she cried.

She reached for her chest, her eyes and mouth wide open in pain. Then she fell at my feet, unconscious. A heart

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attack. I felt her wrist. There was no pulse. There was no movement from her chest either. She wasn't breathing. I didn't have time to think. All that NYPD training came back to me. First the breathing. Head back, hold the nose, open mouth, check the airway. Close my lips over the mouth. Breathe out, pause, and again. Then both hands on her chest. Push down. Again, fifteen times. I looked up at the circle of people around us.

"Someone call 911. Get an ambulance! Anyone here done first aid training?" I asked.

A guy stepped forward nervously. "I've just taken a first aid course," he said.

"Start with the breathing, then we'll change over."

We worked on her for five long minutes. I felt Annie's wrist again. This time there was a pulse. And then some movement in her chest. At last, I heard the sound of the ambulance siren.

The ambulance men took over and put Annie in the ambulance waiting on 42nd Street. I knew someone like her wouldn't have health insurance.

"You taking her to Bellevue Hospital?" I asked.

"Yeah."

"Here's my card. Any questions about hospital bills, tell them to call me."

How I would actually pay any hospital bills was another matter.

A police officer came over to interview me. As soon as he left me, a reporter from the *Daily News* ran up to me.

"Can I ask a few questions, sir? This is going to be a great story."

I didn't mind. The story might be good for business.

From Grand Central, it was five minutes' walk to my office at 220 East 43rd Street. Most offices in the building had their own air conditioning. Mine didn't, so it was hot and uncomfortable.

It was very quiet in the office when I arrived. No surprises there. Business is usually quiet in July. Even bad guys take vacations.

Stella Delgado, my personal assistant, was already at her desk. She looked tired and annoyed.

"Nat, when are we going to get air conditioning?" she asked. "It's impossible to work. And look at the sweat on your shirt!"

"I've been on my knees at Grand Central," I said, "saving an old lady's life. That's hard work in this heat."

I told Stella what had just happened. She stopped complaining about the heat.

"Let's go and see how she is," she suggested.

New York private investigators don't normally use public transportation. But I'm different. Stella and I took a number 15 bus downtown on Second Avenue then walked one block east to the hospital on First Avenue. I introduced myself to the receptionist.

"The name's Nat Marley. I'm a close friend of Annie Clayton's. She's just been admitted to the emergency room. We have to see her, miss. You see . . ."

"Sorry. Family only in the emergency room," the receptionist said.

"Look, miss. She's more like family to me than my own wife," I said.

That was true. I hadn't seen much of Mrs. Marley since the divorce.

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“I’ll call the emergency room and see what they say,” replied the receptionist.

We were allowed to visit. Stella and I waited outside an examination room where a doctor was checking Annie’s heart. Eventually the doctor came out and introduced herself.

“Mr. Marley? I’m Dr. Fischer. The rules say family only in here, but this is a special case. So you’re the guy who saved Mrs. Clayton at Grand Central? You did a good job there.”

“Is she going to be all right, Doctor?” I asked.

Her face told me all I needed to know. “She’s a fighter, but she’s had a serious heart attack,” she said.

Annie was sleeping, and we waited over an hour before we were allowed in to see her. She looked exhausted but she smiled when she saw me.

“Nat, it’s good to see you,” she said. “And thanks.”

“It was nothing, Annie. I save lives every day,” I said.

“Nat, I’ve been thinking. I may not have much time left. This morning was no surprise. I’ve had heart trouble for years. Nat, can you find me a lawyer? I want to make a will.”

I wondered what Annie had to leave anybody after she died. Anyway, I agreed to do as she asked. I knew an excellent family lawyer, Wilma Patterson. I called her and she agreed to come over to the hospital that afternoon.

This was the beginning of the strange story of two old ladies from the opposite ends of New York society – the high life and the low life. Two old ladies who had never met and whose lives were very different. This is the story of how those lives came together.