

THE HERITAGE HEIST by Dianne Ascroft

EXCERPT

Chapter 1

Lois glanced at her watch then picked up her pace. She wasn't far from St Andrew Street and the market was only a couple of blocks away at the other end of the main street, but she wanted to give herself plenty of time to look around the stalls before she had to start her half-day shift at the library. Although she only needed vegetables, and maybe a treat from the bakery stall, she never knew what else she would find there. She loved wandering up and down the aisles, waiting for something to jump out and claim her attention.

A sharp bark sounded behind her then a woman spoke. "Isn't that a fresh morning?"

Lois sighed then smiled resignedly to herself. The easy company of her own thoughts and the peace of the quiet side street were about to disappear but Connie Harris and her dog weren't a completely unwelcome interruption. She liked her chatty neighbour.

Lois looked over her shoulder. "Hi, Connie. Yes, it is a bit cool this morning but, after the heat we had this summer, we shouldn't complain."

Connie laughed. "You can say that again! I prefer this weather. It's easier to keep up with Snowy when I'm not about to burst into flame!"

Lois glanced at the energetic white dog as Connie and her canine companion drew alongside of her. Since she first met her neighbour a few weeks ago, she had never seen the West Highland white terrier still. Most days as the pair passed her house, Connie was tugged along the sidewalk. The dog always seemed in a hurry to get somewhere. Lois was thankful that she could enjoy her walks at the pace she chose. She was sure she was much better suited to being a cat owner.

"Are you heading anywhere in particular?" Lois asked.

"No, just out for our morning walk. Snowy doesn't have the patience for me to make any stops on the way. What about you?"

"I'm working at the library this morning. I don't start until ten but I want to stop by the market first. You get the pick of the fresh vegetables if you get there early."

The two women chatted as Lois picked up her pace to match Connie and Snowy. So much for her contemplative start to the day. She would have to enjoy the brilliant scene fall had painted on her street on her way home this afternoon.

In the middle of the main street the women parted. Connie veered onto a side street to continue the square circuit back to her house opposite Lois's, and Lois continued along the main street to the market.

When she reached her destination, from the opposite corner of the street, she gazed at the barnlike structure in anticipation. It was wonderful to have a fresh produce and crafts market so close to her home. Last summer she had relished stepping inside the building to escape the sun's fierce rays. Today she would enjoy its warmth. But, no matter the season, she never tired of wandering its aisles.

She glanced at her watch. After her sprint to the main street with her companions, she was earlier than she had planned. She would have even more time to browse the stalls. Crossing the street at the traffic light, she headed straight for the wide double doors on the side of the building. As she approached them, she was surprised to see only one of the doors was open. Usually both were thrown back against the outer walls. Her eyebrows pulled down into a frown when she spotted a policewoman standing at the entrance. The officer looked like she was on duty, not just pausing on her beat as she passed the building. Lois knew that the market had hired security guards to patrol the building after a theft a couple months ago but she couldn't imagine why a police officer was also there.

The Ontario Provincial Police officer watched Lois as she neared the entrance and, although Lois knew she had no reason to worry, the scrutiny made her uneasy. She shook her head and smiled to herself. *Why on earth does the sight of a police officer always make you feel guilty when you haven't done anything wrong?*

The police officer spoke when Lois was a few feet from the entrance. "The market is closed today, ma'am."

Lois stared at the officer, noticing that the policewoman's sandy hair was pulled into a bun under her uniform cap. She still had a toned, athletic figure but she was not right out of police college. She had a more commanding presence than a new graduate.

Lois stared at the officer as her words sunk in. "Closed? Why?"

"Police investigation, ma'am."

Lois raised her eyebrows. "What are you investigating?" *What on earth could have happened at the market?*