

# YESTERDAY CALLING

A Sam Dawson Mystery

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# CHAPTER 1

September 2011

Hello,” Sam said, slightly out of breath, pressing the cool receiver to his sweaty ear. He swallowed the mouthful of potato chips he had grabbed on the way in and swept the salt from the corners of his mouth.

“Is this Sam Dawson?” The man’s voice was distant and weak.

“Ye-es.” Sam drew out the vowel impatiently. He paid the phone company extra every month for an unlisted number. Still, he received unwanted solicitations. This one was interrupting his plans. Anticipating a hard winter, Sam had been pushing to finish splitting the jag of wood he had unloaded the day before. The *Farmer’s Almanac* warned of below-average temperatures and above-average snowfall for 2011, and September had borne that out with early fall colors.

He glanced at the kitchen clock. It was just past 11:30, almost time for lunch. *Wrong again*, he thought as beads of sweat slid down his face. Sam sighed. He tilted his ball cap back on his head and dragged a dirty sleeve across his forehead. The caller did not speak. “Hello?” Sam repeated.

“This is Hank Thompson.”

Sam waited. He had to remind himself to breathe. It was his turn. He stalled. “Who?” he lied. He knew exactly who he was. Sam had never spoken to the man but he had waited a lifetime for this call.

“Hank Thompson,” the man repeated softly, then cleared his throat.

Sam’s mind raced. He was tempted to tell him he must have the wrong number, hang up, pull the phone from the wall, and cut the line. Instead, he inhaled deeply and said, “Yes?” He was surprised by the weakness in his own voice. It was an acknowledgment of the past, an admission of guilt.

“Val died on Tuesday.”

Sam did not respond. He waited. What could he say? What was he supposed to say? Grief would come to him later. So would all the things he should have said.

“I thought you should know.”

Sam still could not find the words. He closed his eyes and inhaled slowly.

Hank Thompson hung up the phone with a gentle click, then silence. Valentina Thompson was dead.