



THE GAME CHANGER

JENNIFER BROWN

BROOKS WAS SITTING IN HIS car just on the other side of my car. As I expected him to be. I had a few minutes to kill while Daisy ran Brant home, so instead of getting into my car, I walked over to his and motioned for him to roll down his window. He did.

“Still babysitting, I see?”

“Be fair, now,” he said. “I stuck up for you.”

“Yeah, you did,” I said. “Thank you for that.”

He cupped his ear. “What was that? Did I just hear a thank-you? Say it again. I want to savor it.” This time I was sure—he was openly flirting, and I didn’t hate it. Okay, I liked it. A lot, actually.

I put my hand on my hip. “Don’t press your luck. It was a rare moment of weakness.” I tried to sound tough, but my smile betrayed me.

His mouth dropped open, still turned up mischievously at the corners. “And she admits weakness, too? Someone call the press.”

I cocked my head to one side. “Very funny. I suppose I deserved that. I’ve been pretty hard on you.”

He opened his car door, and I stepped back so he could get out. He towered over me; I had to shade my eyes when I looked up. “I didn’t take it personally. Truth be told, I like

the way you stand up for yourself. And I like the way you go all-in when you've got a lead."

I cleared my throat. "Speaking of leads..."

His eyebrows went up. "I can't wait to hear where this is going."

"It's going to River Fork. I'm pretty sure we cracked your case, Officer."

"Oh, did you, now? Let me guess. It was the captain of the high school chess team. Farley stole his knight."

"Good guess!" I slugged his arm lightly. "But no."

He ducked away from my punch playfully, but then looked at me more closely. "Wait. Are you being serious right now?"

"The news is always serious."

"No, I mean it, Hollis, do you know something? Who is it?"

"That, I'm not going to tell you."

"What? Yes, you are."

"I just want to check out the house, see if our theory has any merit, then we'll talk."

"Talk now. You can't withhold information from a police officer. Especially information about a murder case. It's obstruction of justice."

"Oh, come on, we both know you're going to follow me there anyway. Besides, If I tell you, you'll just tell Chief Henderson, and he'll find a way to keep me out. "

He sighed in frustration. "I'll call him after we get there, how about that?"

"No way. What if I'm wrong? It'll just make him even madder at me. And then he'll have you casing my house twenty-four/seven."

"But what if you're right, Hollis? This could be dangerous. You could be tipping someone off and they'll bolt before I can arrest them."

I pulled my keys out of my purse. "I'm pretty sure about this. It will all make sense when you get there. I promise you that."

Daisy's van pulled in on two wheels, spraying gravel everywhere. She practically jumped out while it was still moving. She'd changed clothes and was now wearing black yoga pants, a black long-sleeved shirt, a black jacket, and a black stocking cap that pushed the spikes of her hair so that they framed her face adorably.

"What are you wearing?" I asked. "And how did you change so fast?"

"Stakeout clothes," she said. "And I'm a mother of four. I get precisely nine minutes a day to myself. I can do just about anything in two minutes or less."

"You look like you're about to rob a bank."

"I bought these pants specifically for this purpose. Well, and because they hide cat hair."

"And to work out in?" I asked.

She snorted a laugh. "Yeah, right, like I ever work out."

"We're going to have to start," I grumbled. "All those sweets are going to the wrong places." Brooks ducked his head, and I was pretty sure I saw him blush.

She clapped her hands twice. "Come on, now, let's go get this woman!"

"Woman?" Brooks said curiously. "But Evangeline—"

"No, not Evangeline," Daisy said, but I clapped my hand over her mouth.

"Brooks is going to follow us there."

She grinned beneath my palm and I let up. "Of course. Don't worry, Brooks, we'll drive slowly so you can keep up."

With that, we both jumped in the car. I had it halfway out of the parking lot before Brooks could even get his door open.