



THE GAME CHANGER

JENNIFER BROWN

“WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, MARY Jean.” I licked my lips nervously. “I am abiding by the rules. My podcast has nothing to do with my job here.”

“In Parkwood, everything you do has to do with your job here. Everyone knows you’re one of our reporters. They think I’ve sanctioned this hooey about that coach being murdered.”

“It’s not hooey,” I said. “And you said nothing about moonlighting when you hired me.”

“It is hooey, but I’m not going to convince you of that, am I?” She slid a pair of readers onto her face. “And I may not have said it then but I’m saying it now. If you insist on moonlighting in this way, I would just suggest to you that you tread very carefully.”

“Wait. Is that some sort of threat? Are you saying I could lose my job?”

She pursed her lips and thumbed through some papers on her desk. “Did you get the bank story finished?”

Case closed. I wasn’t sure what resolution we had come to, but I was pretty sure I was on the losing side of it.

But, darn it, I was right. I was not about to let it go now.

“Yes, ma’am. All that’s left is to write it up.”

“End of the day,” she said. “And I’ve got a new one for you. Human interest piece on Wickham Birkland. His birdseed store is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this week. I thought we could do a brief history of seed in Parkwood. Or maybe a brief history of birds. Or both.”

The most gripping part of writing that story would be surviving Wickham’s ire du jour.

“I’ll get right on it,” I said in my best can-do voice.

I went back to my desk, noting on the way that Ernie was sleeping again. I thumped his desk with my fist. “Rise and shine, Ernie! Got stories to do!” He snorted and jerked awake, his hand flying to his computer mouse.

“I’ve got it right here, Mary Jean...” He started clicking on random things. I held back a laugh and kept on.

I was four paragraphs into the bank story when Mary Jean slipped out, telling Joyce she was going to run to Leaf It to Me and get some tea to soothe her sore throat. The atmosphere in the news room lightened drastically when she left. I breathed a sigh of relief. Joyce—earbuds in place—began humming along with the song she was listening to. Ernie raided the vending machine for Donettes.

The door opened and in walked a young woman.

“Obituary? Fill out this form,” Joyce said, automatically plucking the form from the file folder that sat permanently on her desk. Purchasing obituaries was really the only reason people ever came in anymore—and even that was waning after Bale & Sons began offering free webpages for their deceased. She tried to hand over the form.

“What? No. I don’t think so,” the woman said. She sounded kind of bewildered. She also sounded very familiar. Where had I heard her voice before?

Joyce blinked. “You don’t think so?”

The woman shook her head and began to tear up.

“Unless you know something I don’t. Did someone call you?”

Joyce’s mouth hung open in confusion, the paper still dangling between her fingernails. “I don’t know,” she said. “Why would someone call?”

The woman began to sob. “Because you’re the news and all. Oh, no. Bad luck follows me everywhere.”

And that was when I realized where I knew her from. I stood at my desk. “Agnes Tellerman?”

The woman turned to me in surprise, her knees bending as if she were about to bolt. Or faint. “Y-yes?”

I came around my desk. “You’re Agnes Tellerman?”

“So someone did die? I just knew it.”

“What? No. I mean, yes. Gerald Farley died. And you witnessed it, right? I was there that night. I remember your voice.”

She wiped her eyes with the palms of her hands, the sleeves of her shirt pulled down over them, just like a child would do. And only then did it become obvious that Agnes Tellerman was not much older than a teenager herself. Maybe mid-twenties. She was pretty, in a droopy-eyed, downtrodden sort of way. She sniffed.

“You’re that podcast lady?”

Whoa. Four listeners in one morning. I was on a roll.

Thinking of the podcast and rolls made me think of Daisy and my heart dropped again. I missed her. I was going to have to make things right, as soon as I possibly could. Also, I needed to talk her into making cinnamon rolls soon.

“I am that podcast lady.” I stuck out my hand. “Hollis Bisbee.”

“I came to talk to you,” she said, shaking my hand with hers still covered by her shirt sleeve.

“About?”

“About what I saw that night. The night the coach died.”