

## A Friend's Secret

### Book 5 of the Get Away Diner Series

#### Chapter 1

Well, as most things do, it took much longer than a few months for the Get Away Diner to get to a place where William felt comfortable leaving. Then there was his new restaurant that he was opening. This was his excuse because his body wasn't ready either. Despite going to physical therapy twice a week and doing his exercises daily, it still took him months to feel normal again. After the explosion and fire destroyed our family home, we stayed at Jane's bed-and-breakfast inn during the holidays instead of going to New Orleans like we'd planned. William, being the control freak I love, also wanted to supervise the rebuilding process. In two weeks, it will be our first anniversary and I hope to spend it in our new home and, maybe, finally go on a honeymoon.

This morning I'm sitting at my desk at the Arroyo Police Station and enjoying a cup of hot apple cider. The weather is getting cooler in my small town surrounded by the Sierra Foothills, rivers, and a man-made lake. The tourists are still here as the colder weather doesn't deter them from fishing and visiting our local antique shops. At least the snow people haven't arrived with their obnoxious snowmobiles yet.

The phone rang. "Chief of Police Davenport."

"Good afternoon, Connie," my ex-husband and FBI Director, Matthew Brewer, said.

"It's still morning, Matthew."

"Well, not here in D.C., Connie, how are you?"

"I'm doing well, and yourself?"

"Great. Is your shoulder still weak and giving you trouble?"

"No, I'm done with physical therapy. My shoulder is stronger than it was before. William and I went out to Grandpa's place to visit with Sadie and we did some target practice. My shooting is on target and I beat William nine out of ten shots."

"Well, that's great. I can't believe your grandpa has tolerated Sadie living there for all this time. He never was a dog person."

"That's true, but that little beagle has won over his heart. It helped that she found a set of keys to an old Hummer he'd been working on five years ago and lost the keys."

"How'd she find the keys?"

“He must have been eating pizza when he was working on it last and somehow the keys ended up in the pizza box. Sadie found the box and came trotting into the house with the keys in her mouth.”

Matthew laughed. “That’s great since I know you were having trouble with her at the Inn and the station.”

“Yeah, it just didn’t work out trying to have someone watch her at the Inn when they’re all working too. And at the station, all my officers did was play with her and chase her outside.”

“And how is William’s back?”

Why was Matthew asking about us? Sure, he called a few weeks ago, but we never spent this long talking about our injuries. “William’s doing well. He still goes to physical therapy, but I think he’s just still getting stories from Beverly. I think they are talking about my middle school years.”

Matthew laughed. “And the house?”

Now, I was getting a bad feeling about his call. If I had bells and alarms in my head, they’d be going off, loud and clear, right now. I received a call from him three months ago, along with case files to review and provide investigation suggestions. They caught the bank robber two weeks later.

“If some company in New Zealand would ship the dishwasher William ordered, we would already live there.”

“Dishwasher? Can’t you get one at the local hardware store?”

“Not one with two drawers and different temperature controls for each.”

“They make those?”

“Yes, and William says it’s essential for any kitchen.”

“What’s going on with the Loft?”

The Loft or Get Away Loft was Williams’ answer to not having a decent upscale dinner restaurant in town. When he had the diner rebuilt, he added a second floor and is turning it into a nice dinner restaurant. He hired some chef from San Francisco and it’s due to open in three or four weeks.

“It’s on schedule, whatever that means. What’s going on, Matthew? Why the twenty questions?”

“I have a problem that I could use yours *and* William’s help on?”

“We’re not FBI anymore, Matthew.”

“Semantics, Connie. Just a phone call and that’s not a problem.”

“No, I don’t think so, Matthew.”

“Please, Connie, I wouldn’t ask if I didn’t *really* need you and William.”

I heard the implied ‘you owe me’ in his voice.

“I will check what’s going on here in town and if I can, I’ll come, but I can’t guarantee William. He’s very busy with the house, diner, and the new restaurant.”

“He’ll come if you ask him, Connie. You know he will.”

And I heard the ‘he owes me’ in his voice.

“We’ll see, Matthew.”

“Great. My private jet is at Sacramento airport, waiting for you. I love the law that says the director of the FBI cannot fly on a commercial airplane. Let me know when you land in Memphis and I’ll have a car waiting to take you both to the latest crime scene. Files will be on the jet for the crimes.”

“Who’s there already working on the case?”

“I’ve sent one of my experienced investigators and a young, newly graduated profiler. They are working out of a tiny satellite office in Carlinville. It’s in Ripton County, and they stationed only a few agents at that office.”

“Is it one of those, we don’t know what to do with these agents, office?”

“I will not confirm or deny that.”

I chuckled. “Okay, Matthew.”

“Thanks again, Connie.”

I opened the drawer in my desk, pulled out my FBI credentials, and laid them on the desk. I didn’t think I’d ever need or use these again.

A quiet knock and Bob walked into my office. He still used a cane, although he didn’t really need it after metal shrapnel hit him during the explosion at my wedding. According to him, it made him look distinguished. I disagree, but I let him keep his delusion.

“Morning, Chief.”

I nodded. “Morning, Bob. What’s up?”

He moved toward my desk, exhaled, and sat in one chair in front of my desk. I deliberately have very uncomfortable wooden chairs there so people won’t stay long, but the way he was settling in, this was going to be a long conversation.

He opened his mouth. I lifted my hand. "Before you start, what is going on in my town?"

Bob adjusted his posture. "Well, we've had several fires started in garbage cans and dumpsters. Peter is ready to kill whoever is doing it. His volunteers keep having to run to the station from their jobs and homes, put out the fires and then go back."

Peter Edward was our fire chief and his volunteers, Chris and Curtis Crestor, Carl, and Ted, worked in many jobs around the town.

"How many fires?"

"So far, there have been fifteen."

"Fifteen? And this is the first time I'm hearing about it?"

"It's a fire department problem."

"Get Trent to go to the middle school and high school. Get the principals to schedule an assembly. Trent can give a 'You're going to get in trouble!' speech and someone will talk or have heard someone talk. We'll find out who did it."

"I miss Jonathan," Bob sighed.

"Yes, well, he was the kid who knew everything that was going on in Arroyo and all of its citizens' lives, but he's in college and we have to do the job ourselves."

"We could call him. He might know who is doing it. It would save a lot of time."

"Just tell Trevor what I want him to do. Anything else I should know about?"

"They have almost finished the remodeling of the motel. I think they have two rooms left and it will be complete."

"It will be nice to have that eyesore fixed and give the tourists someplace to stay without bugs and cockroaches. I never understood why the tourists stayed there."

"It was the only local place except for Jane's inn. She's only got so many rooms available. It will be nice for the wedding. With people coming from out of town, there's no way Sheila or I can put them up."

"Who's coming?"

"My sister's latest husband is coming. I think his name is Arnaldo or something like that. I haven't even met him yet. And Sheila's daughter will be here."

"First off, it will be great to see Aunt Evelyn and her latest husband. They are always a kick. Does this one speak English?"

Bob shrugged and rolled his eyes.

“It was hard to talk to Bernardo, who only spoke Portuguese last time she came to town. Second, I didn’t know that Sheila had a daughter. She didn’t come out when we had the memorial service for Sheila’s brother, Jerry, after he died in the explosion at the hospital.”

“No, she lives in Texas and couldn’t get the time off work to come. And Sheila has two kids. Although, they’re not actual brother and sister, just halves. Jean is from Sheila’s first husband and George is from her second husband. There are ten years between them and the two siblings never got along.”

“OK, I did not know Sheila had been married twice before, either.”

Bob smiled. “Third time is the charm.”

“Let’s hope so. Is George coming to the wedding, too?”

“I doubt it. Sheila hadn’t had contact with him in years. She’s not even sure where he lives, but she’ll send an invitation to his last known address and see if his mail is still being forwarded to him.”

“Anything else I need to know?”

“Nope, that’s it.”

“Okay, what is going on with you?”

“It’s Sheila and the wedding.”

“They finished the renovations on the church and William has already offered the Loft for your wedding reception. What’s the problem?”

Bob sighed again. “Sheila’s worried that it won’t be as beautiful as your wedding. With the drapery and twinkling lights, it was gorgeous in the church.”

“Seriously, Bob, my wedding had an explosion, flying metal, injuries, and death. She certainly doesn’t want a repeat of that.”

“No, but William had the entire place decorated so exquisitely and Sheila thinks everyone will think her wedding is plain in comparison.”

“Okay, I know William had some help with the decorations. How about I get the name of that person for Sheila?”

“Oh, that would be fantastic, Chief.” Bob jumped up. “I’m going to call her right away. She’ll be so excited.”

Bob left my office much happier than when he arrived. My work as Chief was done, except for the basket full of paperwork. I pulled the files out of the basket and spread them over my desk. Where to start?

The door opened and William walked in. My heart did that little jump that it always does when I saw him. His six-foot four, solid muscular frame with broad shoulders, narrow waist, jet black hair and green eyes were all focused on me.

“Hello, beautiful.” He smiled as he walked toward my desk.

I am a lot of things, but beautiful wouldn’t even make the top one hundred list. He leaned his butt on my desk, used a finger to raise my chin, and then he kissed me. As the kiss deepened, my pulse sped up and at that point, I’d believe anything that man said.

When he broke the kiss, his long lashes were half closed, and I knew the kiss affected him just as much as it had me. He closed his eyes and sighed, then opened them and said, “How is Mrs. Carlotti on this fine Wednesday morning?”

I lowered my chin and stared at him. He chuckled. “Oh, yeah. Chief Davenport at the station. Mrs. Carlotti everywhere else.”

I smiled. “Both of us are doing well. How’s your negotiations going with your chef?”

“We’ve agreed to be open Friday and Saturday night. As well as a Sunday brunch. She’s bringing two of her own people with her to help her in the kitchen.”

“Wait, I thought it was a man.”

“It was until two days ago when Bianca became available. She’s an outstanding chef and I’m lucky she’s taking some time off to be with her baby. Bianca was looking for a part-time position and it works perfectly for the Loft.”

“Are two nights going to be enough?”

“To start, yes. Although I’ve got reservations already for most of the time slots.”

“But you don’t even know when you’re going to open. How can you already have reservations?”

“People have already called and taken time slots for whenever I open the restaurant.”

William shifted his butt, pushing the files aside and exposing my FBI credentials. He looked at me, then raised his eyebrows.

I looked at him.

Several moments passed.

He nodded. “Ah, he wants us both.”

I nodded. “The jet’s at the airport with a flight plan to Memphis.”

“I need thirty minutes to check in with Jane about the diner and make a few phone calls. I’ll meet you at the inn.”

“Thanks.”

William nodded and walked toward the door. He opened it and looked back at me. “At some point, we’re going to need to stop letting him use the ‘you slept together while you and he were still married card’.”

I closed my eyes as the guilt and shame of that entire situation still weighed heavy on my heart.

“But not today,” he whispered and closed the door.

