

WINDY CITY DANGER 11



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Windy City Danger

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Designed by Jacqueline L. Noe

Edited by Lorie Popp

Published in association with the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jenkins, Jerry B.

Windy City danger / Jerry B. Jenkins, Chris Fabry.

p. cm. — (Red Rock mysteries ; 11)

Summary: While visiting Chicago, twins Ashley and Bryce catch up with old friends, visit the house where they grew up, see many reminders of their deceased father, and help search for their best friends' uncle, who disappeared days before his wedding.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-0150-1 (sc)

ISBN-10: 1-4143-0150-2 (sc)

[1. Missing persons—Fiction. 2. Christian life—Fiction. 3. Extortion—Fiction. 4. Twins—Fiction.

5. Chicago (Ill.)—Fiction. 6. Mystery and detective stories.] I. Fabry, Chris, date. II. Title.

PZ7.J4138W in 2006

[Fic]—dc22

2005028440

Printed in the United States of America

09 08 07 06

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

“It is **BETTER** for a woman to marry
a man who loves her than a man she loves.”

Anonymous

“A **FRIEND** is one who
knows us, but **LOVES** us anyway.”

Father Jerome Cummings

“When a friend is in trouble, don’t
ANNOY him by asking if there is
anything you can do. Think up something
appropriate and **DO IT.**”

E.W. Howe

PART 1



CHAPTER 1

MONDAY

✧ Ashley ✧

They say your life can change with a phone call. I don't know who "they" are, but they're right. It happened to me on a late-September night.

Bryce, my younger twin (by 57 seconds), and I were fighting over who got to sit at the head of the kitchen table to do homework. Dylan, our little brother, was jumping in the netted trampoline in our backyard, squealing into the wind. Leigh, our stepsister, was waiting for a call from her boyfriend. Sam, our stepdad, was late for dinner, and Mom was trying to throw something together at the stove.

Pretty much a normal evening until the phone rang.

"Timberline residence," I said.

"Ashley, you're not going to believe this! It's just the greatest!"

"I'm sorry. Who is this?"

It was Carolyn Hamilton, my best friend from Chicago. The one I had promised to write to every day and e-mail every hour when we moved to Colorado a few years ago. The one I hadn't talked with in ages.

We were going to prick our fingers and take a blood oath before I moved, but both of us got scared so we just spat in our hands and shook and promised we'd always be best friends. She's a year older than I am, but we were perfect for each other when I was in elementary school.

"What's going on?" I said. "Your brother getting married?" Tim is my age. He and Bryce used to play basketball and hang out together.

"You're not going to believe it," Carolyn said. I was getting tired of not believing something I didn't even know. "How would you like to come to Chicago and be in a commercial with me?"

She was right. I didn't believe it.

"My dad's advertising agency needs two kids for a commercial, and I remember how good you are at that kind of stuff."

Actually I don't like talking in front of people, but the last couple of years I've competed in forensics (speech) tournaments and feel comfortable as long as I know my lines.

"Want to do it?" Carolyn said. "My dad said they'd pay you."

"Sure. When?"

"This Thursday. You'd need to get here by Wednesday night."

I bit my lip as Mom stirred a pan on the stove. Looked like spaghetti. I had to convince her that this was a good-enough educational opportunity to miss school.



CHAPTER 2

☺ Bryce ☺

I'd been asking Mom for a year to let me go back to Ridgely, our hometown in Illinois, and see my friends. No way was I going to let Ashley go back before me, so I was glad when Mom told her no, that she would miss too much school.

Ashley started crying. Leigh asked to use the phone, which was not good timing, and there were angry words. Ashley told Carolyn she'd call back and slammed down the phone.

I wished I'd made popcorn, because I like food with my entertainment.

When things get that hot, I usually try to find a way to leave, but

I kept my head down, listening to the pasta boil and Dylan squeal outside.

“Mom, this would be perfect for me! I’d actually get to be in a commercial! And Carolyn said I get paid!”

Mom seemed to be thinking about it as steam rose from the water. She’d known the Hamiltons a long time and had talked off and on with Mrs. Hamilton over the past few years.

“I just don’t think this is a good time,” Mom said.

Ashley jumped on that. “So when *would* be a good time? I don’t think you’ll ever let me go.”

Mom held up a dripping wooden spoon, steam swirling from the end. “Now don’t go there. You know how much I let you do.”

I went to our computer and pulled up the schedule for the Chicago Cubs. I’d been following them all season, but especially lately as the season was near the end. The Web site said they were scheduled to return to Chicago Thursday for a make-up game with St. Louis, their archrival.

“I’ll go with her!” I yelled.

Mom and Ashley glanced at me like two boxers who’d just been stopped by the referee. Neither seemed to like my offer.

“You know how I’ve been wanting to go back,” I said. “I could keep an eye on Lindsay Lohan here—”

“Hey, watch it!”

“Okay, I’ll be your business manager and make sure they pay you. Anyway, two for one seems like a pretty good deal. The house will be really quiet.”

Mom’s face twisted into a little smile, but she regained her bulldog look in a flash. “Does this have anything to do with the Cubs?”

She sees everything, I thought.