



The Heartbreak Sheriff (Small-Town Scandals Book 2)

By Elle Kennedy



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Editorial Review

About the Author

A RITA-award nominated author, Elle Kennedy grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, and holds a B.A. in English from York University. From an early age, she knew she wanted to be a writer, and actively began pursuing that dream when she was a teenager. Elle currently publishes with Silhouette Romantic Suspense and Harlequin Blaze. She loves strong heroines and sexy alpha heroes, and just enough heat and danger to keep things interesting!

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"I didn't kill her."

The quiet plea pierced into Finn's heart like a dull, serrated blade, bringing a rush of pain and helplessness. He couldn't tear his eyes from the woman sitting in front of him. He'd dreamed of being in the same room as her for so long now, but not like this. Not in this tiny, airless interrogation room, with a narrow metal table separating them, those liquid-brown eyes staring at him with anguish and resentment.

"Sarah," he began, his voice coming out gruff, "just tell me what happened the night Teresa died."

Sarah Connely gaped at him. Even with her expression awash with anger, she was still beautiful. Her thick brown hair gleamed under the fluorescent lights on the ceiling, and her mouth, though twisted in disbelief, was as lush and sensual as ever. She was the most stunning woman he'd ever seen, and the only woman who could send a shiver of desire up his spine even when she was glaring daggers at him.

"*Nothing* happened the night Teresa died," Sarah replied in a frosty voice. "I was at home, asleep. I woke up at three to give Lucy a bottle, and then I went back to bed, where I stayed until seven in the morning."

"You didn't leave the house at all?" Finn had to ask.

"No. Not until eight-thirty, when I dropped off Lucy at day care and opened the gallery."

Finn stifled a groan. "Then how did your hair and fingerprint wind up at the crime scene? Christ, Sarah, *explain* it to me!"

"Don't yell at me, Patrick." Ice slithered into her tone. "I don't know how my hair and fingerprint ended up at the scene—but I can assure you, *I wasn't there.*"

Frustration bubbled in Finn's gut. For the hundredth time, he wished Teresa Donovan had never been killed. Not because he and Teresa had been best buds or anything, but because the woman's death had brought nothing but chaos to Finn's peaceful little town.

Exactly one month ago, Teresa had been shot in the heart, her body discovered in the living room of the majestic stone mansion her ex-husband had built for her. Cole Donovan, the ex-husband, had been Finn's prime suspect, but with the help of Special Agent Jamie Crawford—who also happened to be Finn's best friend and took a leave of absence to assist him and Cole—Cole was cleared of the crime. Now Finn was back to square one, and it was definitely a position he didn't want to be in.

Especially now, with this new evidence in his possession. Evidence that pointed right at Sarah.

"Your print was on the coffee table next to the body," he said quietly. "Your hair was on the floor, by the puddle of blood pouring out of Teresa's chest."

Sarah's flawless fair skin went even paler. "Then someone put it there," she whispered. "I didn't kill that woman." Her voice wobbled. "I can't believe you'd even think that."

Problem was, he *didn't* think it. From the second his deputy phoned him with the news, Finn had been in a paralyzed state of doubt. Every cell in his body, every instinct in his gut, told him that Sarah wasn't a killer. He *knew* her. He'd lived with her, kissed her, held her in his arms. She had a gentle soul, an innate need to nurture everyone around her. Even picturing Sarah with a gun in her hands, sending a bullet into someone's heart, made his mind spin like a carousel.

But he was the sheriff. He'd taken an oath to protect the citizens of Serenade. And just because he hadn't been fond of Teresa Donovan—who was?—didn't mean he could overlook this new development in her murder case.

Still, that didn't stop him from murmuring, "I don't think you killed her."

The shock in Sarah's eyes was so strong it brought a spark of irritation to his gut. "What, you're surprised?" he muttered.

She spoke in an even tone. "You showed up at my place of business at eleven in the morning on a Saturday, forced me to lock up for the day, and dragged me to the police station for questioning. Was I supposed to think you were on my side?"

I'm always on your side, he wanted to say, but bit back the words. She wouldn't believe him, anyway, and really, how could he blame her? He hadn't exactly proven to her, now or in the past, that he would stick by her.

"I'm doing my job, Sarah. I couldn't ignore the evidence." He swallowed. "And I really think you shouldn't have turned down your option of having a lawyer present."

Her eyes widened. "Do I really need one?"

"You might." Reluctance clamped over him. "This doesn't look good for you. Evidence places you at the crime scene, and there are witnesses claiming you threatened the victim."

"I didn't threaten her!"

Finn sighed. "No?"

"Well, okay, maybe a little, but I didn't actually mean it," she stammered. "She provoked me."

"Tell me how."

"I already—"

"Then tell me again," he cut in. Leaning back in the uncomfortable plastic chair, he raked both hands through his hair and fixed a tired look across the table. "Please. I need to know every last detail if I'm going to make sense of this."

"Fine." Looking very prim and proper, Sarah clasped her delicate hands together. "Teresa cornered me outside the grocery store the day after I got back to town. I had Lucy with me, and Teresa made some less-than-pleasant comments about how I had to adopt a baby because no man would ever want me. She then claimed that she'd slept with you, mocked me about how I wasn't *woman enough* to hold on to you, and finished off with a lovely threat about calling social services to take Lucy away—because a mental case like me shouldn't be raising a baby."

She recited the speech in a calm, emotionless voice, but Finn suspected the encounter had affected her more than she was letting on. He knew firsthand how cruel Teresa could be, and being taunted by that woman would have driven anyone crazy. It drove *him* crazy, just hearing that Teresa was going around town telling people she'd slept with him.

Uh-uh, no way would that have ever happened. For him to have touched that loathsome female, the sky would need to be filled with flying pigs, there'd be a skating rink down in hell, and the Easter Bunny would be coming over for Sunday breakfasts.

But that was Teresa Donovan for you. A pathological liar. A woman intent on unleashing as much pain as she could on the world.

"Two people heard you threaten her," he pointed out.

"Not my best moment," Sarah admitted. "But she was completely out of line. And it's not like I said *I'm gonna kill you, you awful shrew.*"

He winced, acutely aware of the mini-recorder whirring away on the center of the table, recording every word being uttered. *I'm gonna kill you, you awful shrew.* Good thing Finn wasn't corrupt, or an artfully edited version of that tape could've landed in court, marked Exhibit A, Connelly's confession.

"What did you say exactly?" he prompted.

"I told her if she didn't leave me and my daughter alone, she would regret it."

The threat hung in the air, an ominous black cloud that had *motive* written all over it.

"It was just talk," Sarah insisted. "Obviously I wasn't going to hurt her. I just wanted her to go away." Her face went ashen as she realized what she'd said. "Leave the grocery store," she quickly amended. "I wanted her to *walk* away. Alive. But just go somewhere else."

Silence stretched between them. Finn valiantly tried not to stare into her bottomless brown eyes, for fear that he'd get lost in them. Just being in the same room as her, just smelling the sweet fragrance of her lilac perfume was pure torture. He'd been fantasizing about this woman for four years, dreaming of holding her in his arms again, longing to see forgiveness—the forgiveness he surely didn't deserve—etched into her classically elegant features.

As far as reunions went, this was not what he'd imagined. But what choice did he have? The mayor was breathing down his neck, demanding that Finn close this case so that the citizens of Serenade could sleep easy. *Get the murderer off our streets*, Mayor Williams had snapped during their last phone conversation.

Finn agreed with Williams—he wanted to catch this killer, too.

But he knew, without a doubt, that the killer he was searching for was *not* Sarah.

"So what's going to happen now?" Sarah's soft voice pulled him back to grim reality. "I told you what happened and you're going to let me go now, right?"

Uneasiness circled his gut like a school of sharks. "I can't let you go."

Her gasp echoed in the suddenly cold air. "What do you mean, you *can't*? Am I under arrest?"

"No." Despite the lump in his throat, he had to add,

"Not yet."

Incredulity flashed across her face. "I didn't do this, Finn! Someone is obviously trying to frame me."

Yep, he'd heard those words before, hadn't he? Cole Donovan had insisted the same thing, only a week ago, when the murder weapon was discovered in the town dump. Although the gun had been wiped clean of prints, Cole had been at the dump a few days after his ex-wife's murder, which had raised Finn's suspicions. But Cole's fancy big-city lawyer had made it clear to Finn that he had no case, no leg to stand on in court, and Serenade's district attorney had been inclined to agree.

The D.A., however, did not agree with Finn regarding *this* particular suspect.

"I suggested the same thing to Gregory," Finn told her, referring to Jonas Gregory, the D.A. "But he thinks the framing angle is far-fetched."

"Far-fetched?" she grumbled. ...

Users Review

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