

THE GIRL WHO PLAYED HARD TO GET - Leseprobe

It happened suddenly. She was having lunch and talking with her best friend Carmen when – pow! - it hit her. It reached her from all the way across the other side of the crowded cafeteria. Reached her? It almost knocked her out of her seat. It was like a strong light, a warm ray of sunshine.

She was confused. She didn't know how to react. Her heart started beating faster, her face grew warm. To calm down and gain time to think, she looked away as if she hadn't seen anything unusual. She wanted to smile back but was so surprised she couldn't. It was the new boy at school, Trevor Lambert. He was in her Spanish class, one of several boys who sat at the back and didn't take an active part in Ms. Santiago's class. But she had noticed him from the beginning – and hoped that he would notice her. He hadn't - until now.

The next few minutes she acted as if Carmen was saying something very interesting. When she looked at Trevor again, the smile was still there. This time she smiled back. What happened next made her heart stand still. He suddenly turned away and started talking with a girl opposite him. Jo recognized her at once. It was Belicia Rios, the dark-haired cheerleader and notorious flirt.

Jo sat staring for a long moment, her mouth open, waiting for him to turn back. When he didn't, she felt herself growing angry. She stared some more, banging at his door with her eyes, but he didn't look her way again.

In the next few days, she watched for him in the cafeteria but the only time she saw him he wasn't paying any attention to her. That was when she decided to test him. She had to find out what was behind that smile. She hadn't just imagined it, had she?

Test phase one: whenever Ms. Santiago called on Trevor, Jo turned in her seat and looked at him. She was sure he noticed her, but he didn't react.

Test phase two: instead of hurrying out of Ms. Santiago's class, she waited until Trevor passed her desk, then followed him out into the corridor. That went on for almost a week. Again, no reaction. *Why these silly tests?* She thought. *Why not just go up to him and talk to him?* She shook her head. She wished she was more self-confident, like some of the other girls in her class, like Belicia Rios, for example. She wouldn't hesitate in a situation like this, that's for sure. She'd go right up to the guy and find out what was going on.

By that time, Jo's hope of meeting Trevor was almost gone. She had begun to think that the whole thing was a mistake, and Trevor had been smiling at someone else that day in the cafeteria. She decided to follow him one more time.

That was when it happened. She was right behind him as they left the classroom, so close she could have reached out and touched him. Goodness knows, she wanted to – badly.

What would happen if she placed her hand on his shoulder? She was trying to imagine how he would react when suddenly he turned around and smiled at her. 'Hey, Jo. How's it going?'

Jo tried for a cool reaction. What came out was, 'Uh, Trevor. Hi.' Her voice sounded strange, squeaky, like a little girl's. She could feel her face growing red. When she tried to cover up her nervousness with a laugh, it stuck in her throat and she ended up coughing.

Trevor didn't seem to notice her distress. 'I've been wanting to talk to you,' he said casually. 'You're quite the jogger, I've heard. You jog regularly, don't you?'

Jo smiled. 'Not exactly. I *run* regularly, I don't jog.' *Hey, take it easy! You don't want to frighten him away, do you?*

'My doctor, uh, said it would be good if I got some exercise. To, uh, help get my blood pressure down. I've got a problem with blood pressure, he says.'

Jo nodded slowly and gave him a sympathetic look. *Say something helpful, you dope!*

Trevor hesitated a moment. 'I was wondering if - what I mean is, I'm having difficulties getting started, and was wondering if you could help me. You know, when you go for your practice runs - could I just tag along?'

Jo put a thoughtful look on her face, as if she had been asked a very difficult question. 'I guess so,' she said after a while. 'But I run quite fast. I don't think you'd be able to keep up with me.' *Correct that, you idiot!* 'Not at first anyway,' she added with a quick smile.

'That's okay. I know I can't keep up with you. I wouldn't even try. But it would be a big help to me just to be with you at the start. You run your way and I run mine.'

'But - does that make sense? Wouldn't it be easier for you just to run by yourself?' *Did I say that?* she thought as soon as the words left her mouth. She felt like biting off her tongue.

Trevor looked down a moment, then raised his head. 'Maybe you're right but, well, I'm lazy, too lazy to run by myself.' He let out a nervous little laugh. 'I need, uh, I need some motivation.'

'So that's where I come in. I'm your motivator, is that it?' Jo shook her head in mock disgust.

'My motivator and role model.' Trevor looked her in the eye and laughed.

Jo hesitated. She realized that he was one step away from asking her the decisive question. She decided not to say anything. Instead, she nodded and gave him her sweetest smile.

'So when and where can we meet? I'm looking forward to getting started,' Trevor said. 'Monday, 7 o'clock, at the old sawmill,' she said quickly.