

THE PAPERWHITE GIRLS

Bluebell's Stalker

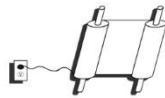


A M Jenner

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AM Jenner



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The characters in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental and entirely in the imagination of the reader.

Books by A M Jenner

Sleigh Ride off Devil's Ridge

Corpse on the Porch

Bolts from the Blue

Manor of Death

Web of Lies

Deadly Gamble

Inherit My Heart

A Heart Full of Diamonds

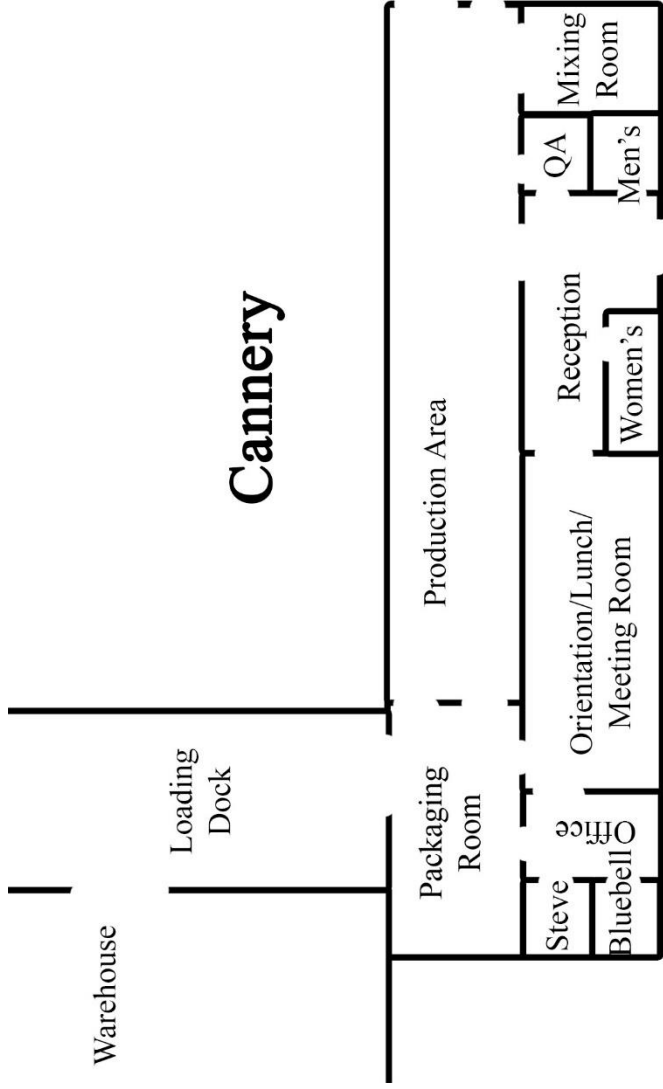
Clues to Food (a cook book)

Bits and Bites (an anthology)

The Paperwhite Girls

Azalea's Trust (by Natalie Peck)

Bluebell's Stalker



Warehouse

Loading Dock

Cannery

Packaging Room

Production Area

Steve

Bluebell

Office

Orientation/Lunch/Meeting Room

Reception

Women's

Men's

QA

Mixing Room

The Paperwhite Girls

Bluebell's Stalker

Chapter One

The man watched the mark park her car in the parking lot of the grocery store and walk towards the entrance.

This was the easiest job he'd ever had.

All he had to do was follow the mark long enough to figure out her schedule, find out where she lived, and report back to his new boss.

Easy.

Besides, he'd volunteered at her company a few months ago, and he loved watching her anyway.

Maybe after the boss got what he wanted from the woman, the boss would leave the mark to him and he could take what was left.

That would be fun.

He'd like to play games with her...his kind of games.

He licked his lips in anticipation.

He left his car and entered the store well behind the mark.

Last week she hadn't turned around even once to realize she was being followed.

He smirked.

It was the easiest money he'd ever made.

Chapter Two

The hairs on the back of her neck felt like they were sticking straight out, as though they were trying to warn her of danger.

Pretending to look at the food on the shelf in front of her, Bluebell Tucker surreptitiously looked behind her but didn't see anyone looking at her or paying extra attention to her.

She rounded the corner, quickly skipped the next aisle in the grocery part of the store, entered the next aisle and checked behind her again. The two people who'd been behind her in the last aisle didn't follow her to this new aisle.

She took in a breath of air and let it silently leave her lungs. Was she going crazy? This was the second week in a row she'd had the feeling of being followed when she did her shopping.

In the little over seven years she'd been doing the shopping for her dad and herself since her mother died, she'd never felt like she'd been followed at the grocery store. Was it simply a case of being more aware of her surroundings now that Dad died and she was alone with less to occupy her after-work thoughts?

Bluebell shook her head to clear those ideas and headed for the milk and orange juice, the last things on today's list. She was glad she didn't need anything from the non-grocery section of the store today. With Dad gone, her shopping list was much smaller, not only for food, but also in the pharmacy department.

Dealing with her Dad's medical conditions had taken up her time every night after school before she graduated from high school, and after work since her graduation, but the two of them had enjoyed such a good relationship, she'd never felt like he'd been a burden to her.

Bluebell missed her father.

Truth to tell, she still missed her mother. They'd been close. She missed Mom more than ever now because she had a few questions about the Paperwhite Trust money she'd be entitled to receive when she turned thirty, but Bluebell was reluctant to bother Granny Rose about it. Maybe she'd bring it up the next time they were together.

Although she lived alone, she didn't particularly feel lonely. There wasn't too much family close by. Most of her relatives lived in the New York area where the Paperwhite Nurseries were well known.

In the 'western branch of the garden' there was her Granny Rose, a few second and third cousins, and a new fourth cousin she'd only met at Dad's funeral. Other than Granny Rose, she hadn't seen them often because Dad's health had kept them from most social activities.

When no one followed Bluebell to the dairy section, she relaxed and cleared her thoughts of being stalked.

She had chosen the country style orange juice and put it in her cart when the hairs on the back of her neck began waving at her again. Bluebell looked around, but no one was even

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near her.

She must be losing her mind to be this paranoid just because Dad was gone and she was now an orphan.

She shook her head to mentally refocus her thoughts, walked to the next case over, grabbed her milk and headed to the checkout stand. The sooner she paid for her food and left the store the happier she'd be.

Chapter Three

“Why do I have to go? You have enough people already signed up...half the Sunday School class, so you don’t need me to go.”

“I do need you.”

“Why?”

“Because you need to have the opportunity to volunteer and serve, Reid.”

“You just want to get me out of the office for five minutes.”

“That, too.”

Reid looked at Richard; his boss, his friend, his mentor, his sanity break, and his Sunday School teacher. “What if I don’t have time?”

“You do. You haven’t taken any personal time for over two years. You need to do this.”

“I have taken time off.”

“When?”

“Two months ago.”

“Going to the dentist isn’t taking personal time.”

“It is for me.”

Richard sighed. “Look, Reid, you need to do this. You’ve got to get back some focus in your life other than work. Trust me on this. Headquarters has been after my hide to make you take time off, too. Besides, Julia would hate it if she knew you were stagnating by turning into a workaholic.”

Reid stared Richard down before he softly said, “That’s hitting below the belt.”

“Not really, and you know it. You can’t go back and undo the accident. It wasn’t your fault the quake came at the critical point of her descent over Devil’s Hump. Geez, man, half the mountain came down with her. She’d want you to keep living – doing important things.”

“I am living. Plus, I’m making a contribution...a good contribution to this company. That’s important.”

“Not the same thing, and you know that, too. Look, it’s only for a measly four hours. You can do this. I promise you it will be good in a hundred different ways. Besides, most of the jobs you get to do there are easy enough you can be anywhere in your mind you want to be and still get the job done. At least it’s at the cannery and not at the food bank outlet next door where you’d have to make smiley faces at all the indigents who come in.”

“Big whoop.”

“Tighten your belt loops and go. Do it for me if you can’t do it any other way.”

Reid’s sigh came from the bottom of his shoes. “Buy my pizza tonight and you’ve got yourself a deal, if only to get you off my back.”

Richard grinned. “That’s a deal.” He hastily scribbled down the address and handed it to Reid. “You’ve got just enough time to get there. See you after lunch. Oh, and if they have any salsa available to purchase, buy me a case of it. I’ll

reimburse you tonight. I'll even give you your very own jar – at no charge – if you do this for me today.”

“You drive a hard bargain, but I love your salsa, and I’m going to order the most expensive pizza on the menu!”

Richard laughed as Reid shut down his computer. “You’ll be thanking me for today, Reid. I know it. I wouldn’t be surprised if you wanted to kiss my shoes for sending you there.”

“What do you mean by that?”

Richard just shook his head. “Talk to you tonight, Buddy.” He turned and walked away from Reid’s cubicle, whistling a tuneless song.

Reid shook his head, picked up his keys and left, the scrap of paper with the address on it in his hand.

Even though he understood the need and applauded those who were totally involved in it, producing food for the disadvantaged of the world wasn’t really his cup of tea. He did his part by generously donating money every month to a charitable organization. They helped folks around the world and did it without requiring Reid to use a single muscle to further the work along...or more than three seconds of his time, either.

Richard had something up his sleeve but Reid knew the man wouldn’t reveal anything until he was good and ready. He sighed as he headed for his car. This was a price Reid willingly paid to honor their friendship. They both knew he’d do this simply because his friend had asked it of him.

About the Author

A M Jenner is a mother and grandmother who lives in Gilbert, Arizona with her family, a car named “Tardis”, and around 5,000 books. A self-professed hermit, she loves interacting with her fans online, and was last seen entering the library.

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The hairs on the back of her neck insist someone's been following Bluebell home from work. She feels it at the grocery store, too. Unless it's just nerves from living alone since her father's recent death. Finding a squatter's nest in the back of the warehouse doesn't help.

And then there's the new guy who recently started volunteering at work. Why does electricity shoot through her when they touch? She can feel it the moment he walks into the room with her. Could he be her stalker? Is it the squatter? Why would anyone be interested in following her around, anyway? It's not like she's someone rich or famous.

Who is Bluebell's Stalker...and why is he after her?

