

# CORPSE ON THE PORCH



**A M JENNER**

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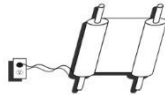
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# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Special thanks to my husband and soulmate, Cal, who daily lived with the challenges of wheelchairs, unfriendly ‘wheelchair accessible’ buildings, and other blockages to a normal life. I learned much about bus schedules, time lines, and an irrepressibly positive attitude that couldn’t be dampened or restrained by pain or circumstance. You were right, Cal; when you went, you left the chair behind! You are forever my strength. I love you eternally.

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## **BOOKS BY A M JENNER**

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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)

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## **FRIDAY AFTERNOON**

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Halfway up the steep wheelchair ramp, Candace's cell phone rang. She ignored it. The call would be from Elaine Jarvis again. Candace had lost track of how many times in the past three weeks she'd told her former client she no longer worked as a private investigator.

This April's heat index records were laughing as they soared past the high marks set three decades ago, and Candace felt every single degree of the scorching Arizona temperature. Concentrating on getting up the ramp, she tried to swipe her sweaty forehead against her shoulder. It didn't work very well, but at least she'd given the sweat a new pathway down the side of her face instead of straight into her eyes.

Her mom's neighbor had tried to be helpful when Candace moved in. He'd divided their wide front staircase in half, simply filling in one side with cement for a smooth ramp, leaving the other half to still be stairs. She was grateful for it, but the incline was so steep it was hard to get her chair to the top. Without the ramp, though, she couldn't get into the house on her own at all.

She finally reached the porch and paused, panting in the early afternoon heat. The phone quit ringing. Candace rested, caught her breath, and then pushed her chair close to the front door.



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She fished her keys out of her fanny pack—another sign of the changes in her life. She hadn't used one when they were in style, but not having to worry about a purse sliding off her lap or its long straps getting tangled in the wheels of her chair was worth the internet search to find one.

Candace unlocked the front door and pushed it open, feeling the rush of the air conditioning bleeding out into the neighborhood while she maneuvered her chair inside. She turned around and secured the door behind her.

Her phone emitted the voicemail chime. Rats! She'd have to listen to the message or the stupid phone would keep her awake with its periodic chiming to remind her that the message was there, waiting for her. After today's gym workout, the long bus ride home, and the half-mile trek from the bus stop, Candace was seriously ready for some sleep.

"Candace?" Her mother's voice echoed down the hall from the kitchen.

"Hi, Mom; it's me," Candace called back.

Her mother came halfway down the hall, wiping her hands on her apron, a smile decorating her face. She'd been baking; a good sign.

"What do you want for lunch? I just took some bread out of the oven."

Candace propelled her chair toward the formal dining room, where she now slept.

"Thanks, but I'm exhausted, Mom. I don't want food right now, just a nap."

Her mother nodded. "Big day today! I'm so excited you made it on your own, but I'm glad you're home safe. Tell me all about your adventure when you wake up, okay?"

Candace gave her mom a small smile and nodded, and her mother disappeared back into the kitchen.

Candace rolled into her room and parked in the corner by the stand-alone wardrobe she used as a closet. She flipped the footrests up, removed her shoes, and shakily stood. Her balance wasn't good at any time, but especially when she was beat from her therapy session at the gym.

She reached out and grabbed her walker. Putting most of her weight on her exhausted arms, she dragged her unwilling legs across the room

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to the bed and collapsed in a grateful heap on the soft mattress.

This was a landmark day. She'd made it to the gym and back all on her own, a first; but it allowed her mom some time to do the baking she so enjoyed. It had been worth the effort.

Candace took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Even the bright sun streaming through the dining room's lace curtains wasn't going to rob her of this nap. One of these days, she'd have to replace the curtains with something that would keep more of the light out and give her a little privacy. Not that anyone ever came up to the side of the house and peeked in, but still, it needed to happen.

The phone beeped the voicemail chime again. Candace groaned and pulled it from the pack still strapped to her waist. She laid the phone on her chest, then unbuckled the pack, slid it off and dropped it gently to the floor. She held the phone above her and poked at its screen. She'd been right; the missed call and message were from Mrs. Jarvis. The woman was getting to be a real nuisance.

Candace had done some work for Mrs. Jarvis last year; in fact, it was the last case she'd worked. She'd tailed Elaine's then-husband Goddard and collected evidence of his infidelity. Divorce cases weren't very interesting, but they'd provided her with a good living. Now the work was physically impossible.

Mrs. Jarvis was so focused on telling Candace that someone was trying to kill her and listing the reasons she was certain the culprit was her ex, that she didn't hear a word of Candace's explanation.

Candace listened to the recording with half an ear. Yes, this message was more of the same. She erased the voicemail, brought her phone back to the home screen and set it on the nightstand. She closed her eyes again, pulling a pillow over her head to block out the light.

The doorbell rang. Honestly, was the whole world conspiring to rob her of the sleep she so desperately needed? Her mother's footsteps clicked down the hallway, but Candace's curiosity roared into high gear. Who could it be? They never had visitors in the middle of the day, and their friends always called ahead.

The quiet, nearly private neighborhood rarely had salesmen or any street traffic apart from residents. She pulled the pillow away and lay still, listening.

The door opened, and she heard her mother's voice, and faintly,

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from outside, the voice of another woman, who sounded hysterical. Although she was somewhat muffled through the wall, it sounded like Mrs. Jarvis. Geez; the woman couldn't take no for an answer!

Her mother's voice was calm and firm as she tried to cut through the hysteria and inform the visitor Candace couldn't come to the door.

A car's racing engine was loud in the street, drowning out the voices. Brakes squealed and there were three loud bangs. Her mother screamed. There was a fourth gunshot and some thumps.

The sound of squealing tires was loud at first and then quit, but she heard the sound of an engine surging with power and picking up speed before it faded. Silence followed. Gunshot? Yes, those had definitely been gunshots.

"Mom?"

Silence.

"Mom!"

Silence.

Candace pushed herself up off the bed and grabbed the walker. She silently cursed her uncooperative legs and the fact it now took her minutes rather than seconds to cross a room. Candace dragged herself into the entry hall as fast as she was able.

Crumpled, her mother sprawled against the open half of the double front doors, her head tilted, resting on her shoulder. Mrs. Jarvis lay draped across the threshold, three bright spots of crimson on her back, her open brown eyes staring at Candace. The door and her mother were liberally covered in blood.

"Mom!" She screamed the word again, although it was plain her mother couldn't answer. Candace grabbed at her waist for her phone. Her hand encountered only empty space where her fanny pack and phone should be. Blast it! She'd left them by her bed.

Though her first desire was to go directly to her mother's side, she knew there was little she could do that would be helpful once she got on the floor. Getting back up would be a serious problem; she hadn't the strength to accomplish it without resting first.

Frustrated, she pushed the walker and dragged herself to the phone niche halfway down the hall; it was closer than her cell phone. The heat from outdoors was noticeably creeping into the house through the door before Candace finally reached the phone, snatched it from its cradle,

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and dialed 9-1-1.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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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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Newly-disabled ex-P.I. Candace Sweet's life revolves around recovering from each therapy session in time to go to the next. There's no way she can help her old client, no matter how often the woman calls. Then Mrs. Jarvis shows up on Candace's porch, and both she and Candace's mother are lying in a pool of blood. Several attempts on her own life show Candace the killer isn't finished.

The police are stumped, and seem unwilling to help. Can she push beyond the boundaries of her disability to solve the case before the killer succeeds?

