

The Ghost of Copper Creek Road

Jenn & Kelly Mystery 3

First Passage



“The National Weather Service has issued a severe winter weather warning for the entire listening area,” reported the local radio station, WHST. Toby Wendle, the DJ, gave further details about what Willsborough could expect over the next 36 hours. “A wintry mix of rain and snow is falling. The temperatures will drop well below freezing, causing the wintry mix to change first into ice then into snow. I expect us to get 6-8 inches of snow by noon. The remaining hours will see patches of continued snow for an additional accumulation of 4-8 inches. So, bundle up, get something warm to drink, a good book or movie, and stay home!”

Normally, I shut my alarm off as soon as it plays the radio station. Today, I allowed it to play until Toby finished the weather report. I did not leave it on for

any school closings or delays. For that, I could use my smartphone and the WHST app to see if anyone was being proactive. Using the app would not awaken Eli, my husband, the way listening to the radio could.

This storm sounds bad. The first big one of this winter season. I went to the phone-charging carousel and opened WHST's app. Sure enough, there were schools already closing; Liam, my son, did not have school today. His school was one of the first to call off; based upon the order they were in. The news station from Rivermouth puts them in alphabetical order; WHST does not. WHST lists the schools in the order they call in to report a cancellation.

Then I checked to see if the sheriff had issued any snow emergency levels for the roads. When I opened the Sheriff's website, I found we were already on a level one. *I may need to close The Corner today.*

I turned off my son's alarm clock. There was no reason to awaken him at 5:30 a.m. on a snow day. His internal clock may still awaken him on time. Usually, he just rolls over and goes back to sleep; most of the time, anyway. He definitely takes after me; prefers to stay up a little late and then get his eight hours of sleep.

I have introduced the rest of my family I should probably introduce myself. I am Violet. I mentioned my bookstore, The Corner. I have been running this

bookstore for just over five years. Because our town has no library, I do a high volume of sales and I have many visitors that use my seating corners to read books or to study.

Those coming in to read a book usually read something from the shelves at The Corner. This is okay because The Corner specializes in used books.

I chose the name not because of the location of the bookstore, within a city block, but in memory of my dad. He did his reading in the only room of the house where he could get any privacy and he called it “the corner”. Just like my bookstore, Dad’s reading corner was also not in the corner of our home. I installed a plaque in the front window of the bookstore to help explain how The Corner got its name. Some find the name honorable and some find it humorous.

The seating corners are the only things in a corner. Comfort of the readers was the theme for the design of the corners; soft and supportive chairs, bright reading lamps, and an end table for holding books. As with most buildings, The Corner has four corners: I decorated each one in a different color. The corners at the front of the store are lemon on the left side of the store and salmon on the right side of the store. The corners at the back of the store are fuchsia on the left side of the store and royal blue on the right side of the store.

The condition of the roads could not prevent me from opening The Corner.

Especially, since we have a snow day. This will bring several students and moms with wee ones in to look for books, study, or just visit with others at the bookstore. The students enjoy staying the entire day so they can jokingly tell everyone they “spent the day in the corner”. This is our town joke and was unintentional on my part when choosing the name for the bookstore.

Besides the students and moms with wee ones, I also have regulars that stop by either every day or on a reliable schedule. One group stops by only about once a week but nearly always brings along coffee and donuts. Today is their day to stop by. I will just need to be extra careful with my drive into the bookstore. Everyone will expect The Corner to be open unless we hit a level 3, then only emergency personnel will be out. Willsborough was strict on this and the sheriff, his deputies, and our police department were not afraid to ticket anyone out that was not emergency personnel. The townspeople take safety seriously and do not expect stores to be open. Only the hospital, fire department, police department, and the sheriff’s office.

To date, they have issued only one ticket. The news was so big that *Our Paper* had an article telling about the ticket. It was an attempt to spread the news that

safety is a serious thing. I think it may have worked, especially since there have been no additional tickets issued.

I let Liam sleep an extra hour and got him and Eli up at the same time. I used that quiet hour for remotely accessing my computer at The Corner from here at home. I needed to check on some books that have been on the Watch For List longer than three months.

The Watch For List is just as it sounds, a list of books that some of my customers want me to get for them. So, I watch for books. I wanted to search the Internet to see if someone else has them for sale at a price that will allow me to re-sell them for a profit.

Sounding greedy is not my intention; selling books is how I make money. My prices are fair; I base them upon the original sales price or current value if the book is rare or unique. I sell non-rare books for 50 percent of the original sales price and rare or unique books at the current value.

Having remote access to the bookstore computer is a new feature since my last adventure, *Night Terror*. I cannot imagine how I ever got any work done without this feature.

I quietly left Liam's bedroom and went to my special desk to open my computer. My special desk sits in front of a bay window atop the legs from two TV trays. For Christmas, Liam and Eli made me a single tabletop where I used to have the two TV trays. This gives me more working space and is portable. I can just take it down and fold up the legs when I do not want it set up. The top is nearly three feet wide and shaped similar to a teacher's kidney table. They also cut out an opening to work as a carrying handle.

As I sat down, my eyes took in the weather event that was hitting our area. The freezing rain had just stopped and now I was looking at snow. Lots of snow, covering the frozen rain. Travel will be difficult.

Earlier this season, we had snow, but this storm looks like it will be a terrible one. At least the snow will not affect my ability to search for those books, unless we lose power.

I spent the entire hour looking up the titles I needed to fulfill my Watch For backlog. I could get three of the ten oldest requests on the list. Once they arrive, I will call my customers to schedule a pickup day. Even if they no longer want the books, the titles are just popular enough I am sure they will sell.

In that one hour I was searching out those books, the snowfall looked like a blizzard. Our accumulation was up to at least three inches. I checked the sheriff's snow emergency level. We were still at a level one, but I will guess we were moments away from a level two. The only difference between a level one and a level two is the recommendation not to go out unless you think it necessary. Both levels have hazardous roads with blowing, drifting, and icy conditions; that was here this morning!

I disconnected from the bookstore's computer and woke the boys. Then we began our usual morning routines.

"May I go with you to The Corner?" Liam asked during breakfast. It is amazing how his eating habits have changed over the last couple of years.

He used to eat little and only select foods. Now he eats a lot and just about anything in view. He is truly the proverbial "growing boy". He is literally growing, two inches taller just this school year. His shoulders have also broadened because of being a swimmer. However, his waist is still very tiny. He has what they consider the typical swimmer's build.

“Yes. I figured you would want to come along. I was hoping you would. Bring your backpack and Chromebook so you can do your homework and the Anti-Drift Work,” I reminded him of the new curriculum addition this year.

Last year we exceeded the state maximum snow days, not due just to weather but to other issues like electricity, plumbing, illnesses, and even a break-in by some criminals from Rivermouth. This left us with many make-up days.

One of the high school language arts teachers assigned a writing assignment for the students to address this problem and suggest a solution.

The suggestion for Anti-Drift Work was from a very unlikely source; not an honors student but from a student that was struggling in the class. His writing grade was terrible. Yet he suggested all grades, K-12, have work to be available on Google Classroom. The material was to be work that did not require an instructional lesson from the teacher but would tie in with current lessons. The teachers could just assign the work from their homes, so they did not need to go to the schools either. This way, the material was always relevant to what they were studying at the time of the snow day. Once they shared the assignment back to the teacher, Google Classroom would send the answer key so that the students and parents could see the correct answers for the assignments.

When the teacher read this student's essay, he promptly showed it to the principal, and then to the superintendent. It took effect nearly immediately.

Well, immediately after going through all the proper channels and paperwork.

Mrs. Kennedy, the fourth-grade teacher, had shared some feedback with me when she stopped by The Corner. She was searching for more weather-related books for her classroom library. She reported that there were some initial grumbles from a few teachers, but with the support of Eli's company, the negatives stopped.

To make Anti-Drift Work a possibility, Eli's company funded the schools with a Chromebook for every student K-12 and made the entire town Wi-Fi; for free.

This ensured they would use Anti-Drift Work without further reducing the school's already limited funds. It also helped all the families by not needing to purchase a computer that may not have been in their budget either.

The school could hire a full-time IT person to keep the computers functioning properly. They decided on Harold, the former student with a degree in computers responsible for the town joke of "spending the day in the corner". He did most of his studying at The Corner and told this joke to everyone. That was the first year the bookstore was open.

“All loaded and ready to go,” Liam responded to my direction about what to bring to The Corner.

“Good. We need to allow extra time to get in town due to the road conditions,” I directed as we were putting on our coats, gloves, and our version of boots. Hiking boots for Liam and insulated, ankle-high tennis shoes for me. Once the snow gets too deep, I drag out my “true” boots. Looking at the depth of the snow, I put my “true” boots into the car in case I needed to wear them today.

The drive in was extremely slow-going. The biggest problem was not the ice but the three-plus inches of snow on top of the ice. In some spots, the wind had drifted the snow much deeper than the actual accumulation. The drifting made it more difficult to get traction and the ice below only added to this problem.

Therefore, I drove slowly and listened to Liam describing the view in areas I could not look, for fear of having an accident. It was the same as being on a bus tour with a tour guide telling us to “look to your left and see... or look to our right and see...”

“The Jones’ swimming pool has so much snow on the cover it looks like a sundae without the cherry on top!” Liam chuckled at his own joke.

"I wonder if their heater went out," I speculated. I could not remember seeing snow on it before. I also could not remember ever looking for snow. They were home, so they would know if there was a problem to investigate. However, I had Liam call them just to be sure.

"Hello," Mr. Jones answered the phone.

"Hi, Mr. Jones, this is Liam Planes," Liam introduced himself.

"Good morning, Liam! How are you?" Mr. Jones inquired.

"I am fine. How are you and your family?" I knew Liam was eager to get to the point but, he also knew how to speak to his elders and how to carry on a proper conversation. The Jones' were a couple that appreciated young people who could communicate the way they had grown up. They were teaching their girls proper communication skills. They had a set of triplet girls they had adopted. The girls had just started kindergarten this year.

"All fine. What can I help you with?" Finally, Mr. Jones was getting around to the part of the conversation where Liam wanted it to go.

"Snow has covered your pool. It looks like a sundae without the cherry on top."

Liam sounded serious and finished with a giggle.

Mr. Jones looked out his patio doors and sure enough, the pool was just as Liam described to him. "I see what you mean. The cover may have malfunctioned, or the snow fell too fast to melt. I will check into the situation. Thanks for the call. Tell your folks hi," Mr. Jones showed old-fashioned neighborliness.

"You're welcome; it was no problem. I will tell them. Please tell your family hi. I am going to The Corner with Mom. I can stop by this evening if you need any help," Liam offered.

"Thank you. I think I can handle it. I will call if not," Mr. Jones responded.

"Okay, have a good day. Bye," Liam concluded.

"Bye," Mr. Jones also signed off.

Liam filled me in on the details of his conversation with Mr. Jones as I continued our drive into town.

The drive took about twenty minutes longer than usual. This really means it doubled my drive time. Having Liam with me helped it seem to go by faster.

Even though it took longer to get to The Corner, we still opened on time. All because we left early.

While I was doing my opening routine, Liam charged back to the royal blue corner. The males regularly use this one corner. While the females use the front two, but there are always exceptions. I prefer the fuchsia corner. Which is why I added it instead of using green. Green was my alternate color choice for the fourth corner.

“Mom, there is a book on the end table in the fuchsia corner. Did you forget to do your clean-up last night?” Liam called to me from the back of the bookstore.

I totally forgot that it was about time for another of the Jenn & Kelly books to show up. So far, I had not mentioned these little, homemade, hardback mysteries to Liam and Eli. Mainly because I had a hard time believing they were just appearing in the bookstore. How could I explain their mysterious appearance to my son and husband?

I needed to find a way and quick! “No, Liam, I did my usual closing last night,” I answered as I walked toward him. Once I had a visual of Liam, I knew he had found the latest Jenn & Kelly book. It was the same size as the others and had the same glossy cover made of contact paper.

Liam was flipping through the pages when I arrived at the fuchsia corner. “This book is weird Mom,” he said.

"I know," I responded. However, he kept speaking.

"There is no author's name, no publisher's name, and only a Postal Copyright date," he continued.

"I know," I said again.

"The cover almost feels like plastic," he added.

"I know, its contact paper," I added to my repetitive comment.

"What? Wait, you know? How?" He looked confused.

"This is the fifth such book to show up on this end table," I answered.

"What do you mean by 'show up'?" Liam asked.

"Just like I said, they just show up. The first two I sold, then I read those that followed. After I sold the first one, the second appeared. After I sold that one, the third appeared. After I read that one, the fourth one appeared, and so the pattern goes," I explained.

"But where are they coming from?" Liam still did not have the answers he was seeking; nor did I.

"I do not know where they are coming from or who is putting them on the end table, or who they belong to," I gave the only explanation I had.

“How can that be?” Liam was on a roll.

“I do not know,” I answered. “These books are mystery stories, but their origin is also a mystery to me.”

“Does anyone have a key to come in after hours?” He kept searching for clues.

“No extra keys, I changed the locks after purchasing the bookstore, and no one has the code for the security system either,” I added before he could ask what may be the next logical question.

“This is impossible,” he concluded.

“It would *seem* impossible and yet you are holding the proof it is not,” I pointed out.

“It looks interesting; the introduction describes the story as a road haunted by a man killed in a car accident 50 years earlier. I am intrigued. Maybe I’ll read this one.” Liam sounded genuine. He handed me the book and went back to the royal blue corner. As his friends would show up, they would head to the royal blue corner because they knew this was Liam’s favorite spot.

I looked at the little book. Flipped to the title page and introduction. It was another Jenn & Kelly book. Just like the others, it was about their adventures as a

mystery-solving team. I took it to the front of the bookstore and placed it behind the counter. As soon as I officially opened the bookstore, I would read *The Haunted Road*; in between customers, as I had the two before.

I turned the sign to “open” and just stared at the park across the street.

Yesterday the grass had been visible; today the park was a glittering field of white.

Grabbing *The Haunted Road*, I sat down on my barstool and read Jenn & Kelly’s latest case.

Second Passage



“9-1-1, what is your emergency?” Jamie answered the call.

“Hi, Jamie, this is Vinton Stone. I am out here on Copper Creek Road going to show a house for Mariah over on Lover’s Lane. I saw Old Man Verde, lost control, hit a tree, and now I am stuck in the car. The steering wheel jammed onto my legs; I cannot get out of the car!” Vinton explained his emergency to Doc Cutter’s daughter, one of the 9-1-1 operators.

I recognize Old Man Verde's last name to be Spanish for "green". I also knew the word to be pronounced /BEHR• deh/. I love to read but always get annoyed when an author uses names I am unsure of how they wanted it pronounced. Therefore, I am giving you the proper pronunciation.

"Hi, Vinton, are you injured or just stuck?" she asked so she could dispatch the correct emergency personnel.

"I can move my feet; I feel pain in my legs where the steering wheel is pushing on them. I cannot move the steering wheel out of the way; the release lever is not working," he continued with more details. "I also cannot move the seat back. The airbag deployed, and I got it out of my way."

"Okay. I have called for the police, a squad, and a tow truck. The fire department will also arrive for safety measures. Stay on the line until one of them arrive," she directed Vinton. "Do you want me to call Delilah?" she was referring to his wife.

"That would be a good idea. I will need a ride home from here or from the hospital," he requested.

This was not the first call that 9-1-1 operators took regarding accidents and sightings of Old Man Verde on Copper Creek Road.

About 50 years ago, there was a terrible accident on this same stretch of Copper Creek Road. The driver of the car lost control and wrapped his car around the same tree that Vinton just hit. The only tree where people report seeing Old Man Verde. That driver was Rolan Verde; he had a reputation for driving faster than the speed limit; most of the time. The town joke was that he drove so that no moss could grow under his tires. He always seemed to be in a hurry.

His accident was in 1964 before cell phones and 9-1-1 service. There was a farmer plowing his field and he heard the crash; he called the police.

When the police arrived, Rolan was already dead. Ever since, on certain days, they see a waving white mist across from the sight of Rolan's accident. It has also caused several more accidents, but so far, no additional deaths. Many of the locals believe it is the ghost of Rolan Verde.

It was only a couple minutes wait, but since Vinton was in pain, it seemed longer than that for Officer Olbit to arrive on the scene. Vinton and Jamie had been chatting to pass the time.

"What house were you showing on Lover's Lane?" Jamie asked to keep Vinton talking about a subject not dealing with the pain he was experiencing.

“The Chatum Place; the big house just past Lookout Point,” Vinton answered. In true sales mode, he continued with the details, “Five bedrooms, six bathrooms, three-car garage, two-story with a finished guest suite in the basement, laundry suite, two offices, gourmet kitchen with breakfast bar and a formal dining room, living room, family room, two outbuildings, on five acres. Three acres are wooded. Three of the bedrooms are en suite with their own private bathroom. All appliances stay. They listed it for \$550,000.00,” Vinton concluded. It was obvious they had involved him in writing the ad for this property.

“Wow! Sounds fantastic!” Jamie answered.

“It is,” Vinton stated. Jamie was afraid that Vinton’s pain was getting to him. She hoped he was not going into shock.

She kept him talking more about the Chatum house.

“The police are here, Jamie. I will let you go. Thanks for your help,” Vinton thanked her.

“It’s what I do. Take care,” Jamie signed off.

“Hi, Vinton,” Officer Olbit greeted Vinton. “Jamie said the steering wheel has you trapped. Is that still the case?”

“Yep. The pain in my legs is growing the longer I sit here. The wheel will not go up and my seat will not move back,” Vinton updated the police officer on his situation.

“Okay. The squad and fire department are on their way. Oh! I hear them now. Not too much longer,” Officer Olbit reassured Vinton.

Two EMTs, Emergency Medical Technicians, jumped out of the squad with their bag of equipment to assess the situation.

While the EMTs were attending to the care of Vinton, Officer Olbit was giving details to the firefighters about the steering wheel having him pinned in the car. After looking at the situation for themselves, they grabbed the proper tools and cut the roof off the car and then pulled the steering wheel off Vinton’s legs. They found the car wrapped around the tree. The rest of it looked half eaten. There was a new car in Vinton’s near future!

Once they moved the steering wheel away from him, the EMTs helped Vinton get onto a gurney. He agreed to go to the hospital for a better assessment of his condition. In all actuality, he had no choice; he could not walk. He was afraid he had a broken leg.

Jamie had reached Delilah and notified her about Vinton's accident. Delilah then contacted the police department and learned that they had taken Vinton to the hospital.

While the squad was transporting Vinton to the hospital, Delilah was driving to the hospital. At about this same time, Wanda arrived with her tow truck from Push & Pull Towing Service. Her dad named the company decades ago when a push was sometimes used to solve an automotive problem.

After Officer Olbit gave Wanda the okay, she hooked up her tow truck to Vinton Stone's car and pulled it out of the ditch and up onto her truck. This almost took longer than getting Vinton out of the car.

Officer Olbit finished his inspection and was the last to leave the scene. He glanced into his rearview mirror as he drove away and was certain he saw the same thing Vinton had described. *Could it really be the ghost of Rolan Verde? It resembles what people describe as a ghost. This is just supposed to be an urban legend.*

Officer Olbit went to the hospital to go over his report and get a signature from Vinton. He found Vinton in a bed in the emergency room and his wife, Delilah, and their daughter, Kelly, both in attendance.

“Hi, Vinton, Delilah, Kelly,” Officer Olbit greeted all three Stones, taking the time to make eye contact with each one individually as he called them by name.

“Hello, Officer Olbit,” the Stones repeated in triplicate.

“What is the verdict?” Officer Olbit asked Vinton.

“Two fractured femurs, thigh bones,” advised Vinton. “Luckily I had my cell phone to call for help and cancel my showing. I will be down for a while.

Something about an intramedullary nail going into the marrow canal of each femur, maybe a stabilizing frame on the outside, with pins and screws going through the bone to keep them in place while I heal,” Vinton reported. He was not sure he had the details correct, the nurse at the ER had given him the pain medicine that Doc Cutter ordered and Vinton was feeling better, but his head felt a little mushy on all the technical details.

“We are waiting on the x-rays to know what the exact treatment will be,” Delilah added.

“Sorry to hear that, Vinton. Will Doc Cutter do this?” Officer Olbit asked.

“No, a specialist from Rivermouth is on his way,” Vinton responded with the sound of disappointment in his voice.

“Off the record, as I was leaving the scene, I saw him, too,” Officer Olbit stated as he was finishing the paperwork for Vinton. “I have always considered the sightings of Old Man Verde to be just an urban legend. Now I am not so sure,” Officer Olbit continued with an explanation that contained some personal conflicts of thought.

“Saw whom, Daddy?” Kelly asked Vinton Stone.

“Old Man Verde,” he said.