

Pure Amore

SWEET ROMANCE - PURE ENJOYMENT™

KRISTEN JOY

WILKS



Spider Gap

Spider Gap

Kristen Joy Wilks

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Spider Gap

COPYRIGHT 2018 by Kristen Joy Wilks

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author or Pelican Ventures, LLC except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

eBook editions are licensed for your personal enjoyment only. eBooks may not be re-sold, copied or given to other people. If you would like to share an eBook edition, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with.

Contact Information: titleadmin@pelicanbookgroup.com

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version^(R), NIV^(R). Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.TM Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Cover Art by *Nicola Martinez*

Pure Amore, a division of Pelican Ventures, LLC
www.pelicanbookgroup.com PO Box 1738 *Aztec, NM * 87410
Pure Amore Style and Flower Burst logo is a trademark of Pelican Ventures, LLC

Publishing History

First Pure Amore Edition, 2018

Electronic Edition ISBN 978-1-5223-0103-5

Published in the United States of America

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Maggie, my mother's spunky little Havanese dog. Though she was with us too short a time, the fierce love and even fiercer personality of this little dog will always bring us joy. Reading on top of bunk beds with us, zipping through the air as the boys held her leash, and of course that time we found out that she was "an excellent swimmer" are only a few of her adventures. This story is also for her master, my beautiful mother. Thank you, Mom, for not being anything like all of those evil mothers that I love to put in my books. Thank you for a thousand delicious meals, cups of tea, and long talks. Thank you for all those hikes across the meadow surrounded by a mass of tumbling dogs and boys and perhaps a frog or snake thrown in. I love you and admire you always.

What People are Saying

The Volk Advent was a breath of fresh air! The story line had both my 14 year old daughter and me (a 40 something mom) simultaneously sitting on the edges of our seats and laughing out loud. Kristen Joy Wilks is a gifted writer! Her amazing literary creations have the perfect mix of humor and suspense, with some love and life lessons mixed in. My daughter and I look forward to her next book!

~Jill Johansen, Washington

**

Confessions of a Non-Romance Dude on *Copenhagen Cozenage*: Sure, romance novels may not be my thing, but if more of them were like this they might be...

While the writing was solid, the story itself was what I found... well... romantic. But not in a sappy, silly, sloppy way - more in a surprising, intriguing, face-punching, mystery-at-every-turn, "I didn't know you could write that and call it a romance novel" kind of way...

On a personal note, I also loved the Christian tone of *Copenhagen Cozenage*. Today's fiction often panders to the baser instincts of our culture and character, which is a sad comment on our society and honestly just how far we've let ourselves stray from true storytelling. This novel was a breath of fresh air. While we all have a human side that is lured by base content, we also possess a more lofty sliver of soul that aspires to a something more pure - a sliver that

delights in passionate love instead of passionate sex, self-sacrifice instead of selfish lust and calling out to God instead of calling out curses. This book has that. It made me feel good.

So to recap: if you're looking for a fun, funny, nerdy, suspenseful, mystery-romance-action novel with a modern quirky twist, a big lovable slobbery dog, slapstick humor and a punch of passionate Christian wholesomeness, this one's for you.

~Chris Weedin Author of "Another Rotten Night"
A Christian Zombie Adventure of a Satirical Nature

**

Every time I read one of Wilks' books I want to eat the food she mentions. Ha. I enjoyed the setting. I felt like I was in the freezing cold Russian winter running from a bunch of wolves. Very nice message too. Wilks has a talent for combining humor and a Christian theme in characters who learn not to take themselves too seriously.

~Jennifer Dyer, Texas--A review written about "The Volk Advent".

1

Sixth Grade Psychosis

Lilly completed another head count. Twenty-five, still one shy. Had she directed anyone to the bathroom? She checked the yellow basket on the corner of her desk. Five hall passes on bright yellow lariats stared back at her, their laminated edges crisp and perfect. If only the rest of life were just as faultless.

“Miss Park, I’m finished!”

Lilly glanced up and started. She smoothed her expression and addressed a girl in a purple hoodie who had draped herself across her desk so that she hung upside down with her long blonde hair pooled across the carpet.

“Thank you, Emily. Would you please place your page in my turn-in basket and use the remaining time to read, while upright?”

Emily rolled her eyes and unhooked her toes from the back of her chair. Without something to brace against, the girl slithered to a heap on the floor.

Lilly waited.

Slowly, oh so slowly, Emily righted herself and proceeded to the turn-in basket. How the twenty-six students of class C could all universally despise mathematics after only a single week of instruction, Lilly couldn’t fathom. But despise they did, and this often took the form of agonizingly slow obedience

whenever she was blessed enough to get student compliance in the first place.

The online classes she'd had for her student teaching were so fabulous—each child relishing in the world of numbers, each parent waxing eloquent upon her fine organization and love of the subject matter. Even her accounting job with the IRS had not produced such difficulties. Lilly shut her eyes and counted to ten as Emily moseyed back to her desk. An image of Joshua's livid face flashed through her mind. Yes, accountants faced difficulties as well, but very rarely in the form of flips and summersaults.

The rest of the class sat hunched over their desks with pencils in hand, mostly. A few students had tucked their pencils behind ears, one girl speared hers through a massive pile of dark hair, and one boy looked to be using his writing implement to sketch a cartoon of a two-inch-tall school teacher being used as a soccer ball by a rampaging herd of troll-sized students. She should confiscate the masterpiece, but not right now. First, the missing student.

Class C would leave in less than five minutes and class D had the most unruly students by far. She had to corral the missing child before sending everyone on their way. Three minutes left. *Hmmm...If I were a twelve-year-old numberphobe, where would I hide?*

Lilly bent as unobtrusively as possible to peek under the desks. Only pencil shavings and a few dropped notes. She glanced under her own desk, behind the supply cabinet, and into the corner by the garbage can. Nothing. A movement caught her eye. Was that a shoe swinging back and forth above the supply cabinet?

A green high top with long, dangling laces was

indeed swaying back and forth, like one of those cat clocks, only the leg of a 6th grade boy counted off the seconds instead of a kitty tail.

Lilly marched across the room and stood below the offending sneaker. "Mason, are you finished with your division refresher?"

"Yep."

The green sneaker continued to swing. Would it be unprofessional if she seized his leg to make it stop? Lilly imagined the parent teacher conference.

"So, tell us one more time. How did our son get a concussion and two broken legs while working on a math page, Miss Park?"

Perhaps not.

She gazed up at her student, scrunched into the tiny space between the ceiling and the top of the cabinet. He was reading quietly, just as she had asked, and yet...the location was not ideal. "Then I must insist that you use your time expanding your mind and vocabulary with a book in hand and your body within the confines of your desk."

"But what if I fall?"

"You climbed up without mishap. I imagine that you are fully capable of descending with both caution and alacrity."

"Oh, dear, big words." Mason said using his famous Granny voice. The same voice that had caused more than one student to spray lunch punch from their nose in the cafeteria. "If I plunge to the ground and break all my bones, why, that would be all your fault, wouldn't it, Miss Park?"

The bell rang.

Lilly spun back to the class and shouted over the sound of desks scraping the floor as students rocketed

from their seats. "If you haven't finished that division review, have it in my basket on Monday morning and please enjoy an industrious and pleasant weekend."

No one answered.

Lilly sighed and turned back to the supply cabinet.

Mason grinned from his perch.

Lilly tried to put steel into her gaze as she addressed him. "Would you like me to call the custodian and secure a ladder for your descent?"

Mason rolled over on his back and braced his sneakers against the ceiling. "Maybe..."

The classroom door crashed open.

Lilly shut her eyes. She knew exactly which student had entered.

"Another sighting!" Logan Conrad shouted in his echoing radio show voice. Both the radio voice and Mason's granny voice had featured heavily in her nightmares all week, which made perfect sense as they were often heard together. "Our humble school has the honor of witnessing another sighting of the famous and fabulous Virgin Mary! What could it mean? Why are we, of all the students in the world, so very blessed?" Logan paused to hum in a dramatic fashion and then make jazz hands while gaping at her.

Mason cracked up and slid off the cabinet. "Nice," he said, punching his friend in the shoulder as he exited.

Logan plopped down in the front center desk and stared at her in feigned awe.

Lilly ground her teeth and ignored him. Why, why, why had she helped Grandma set up that accursed social media account?

Gran didn't realize the havoc she had wrought last Christmas during Lilly's first visit to Alpendale. No

one had volunteered to play the Virgin Mary for the living nativity at Grandma's church. Gran had immediately extolled Lilly's virtues to the pastor on the church's social media page. This had included an ill-considered joke about Lilly being perfect for the job since she actually was a virgin. That particular post had received a plethora of comments and less-than-romantic marriage proposals. It even inspired amused youth group kids to create an oh-so-hilarious video and accompanying rap.

Lilly had thought that students did not enjoy badly rhymed verse. She had been sorely mistaken. Apparently rhyme lived on, wherever there were blushing first-year teachers to shame. No, she wasn't ashamed, per se, just mortally embarrassed that something so personal was now in open discussion across the vast reaches of the social media world.

Class D took their seats.

Logan plopped his chin in his hands and gazed up at her with a raptured expression. Lilly pointed at his page and nudged the pencil across the desk toward his hand. With a sigh, he picked it up and looked down at the problems she had carefully selected.

After about ten minutes, Lilly roved the room, assisting students with the entry task. She had some fine mathematicians in the class, some of them were even friendly, but none of them contradicted the dissenters. That was her job as the teacher, but Lilly wasn't certain how to accomplish the task. What did one do when one's archenemy was a giggly twelve-year-old?

The last bell shrilled through the school, echoing down the beige hallways and causing every eye to stray toward the closest window. A warm breeze

danced through the aspen leaves and a patch of cerulean sky beckoned.

Lilly answered a few last minute questions, directed her students toward the turn-in basket, and wished everyone a pleasant weekend.

About half of the students rushed out the door, leaving the remainder loitering at their desks and chatting.

Lilly emptied the homework basket into her laptop bag so she could grade the papers at home.

A tall man ducked his head through the door. He had a scruffy goatee and his hair was pulled back into a hasty man-bun.

Somehow the affect was not as silly as Lilly expected.

Not at all like the fake bunches of hair attached to double-brimmed hats downtown that featured the slogan "I'm their leader, which way did they go" and were commonly worn by flocks of confused tourists. The aforementioned man bun was an interesting shade of nutmeg brown. Like coffee with multiple stir-ins. Cream, sugar, cinnamon, vanilla.

Lilly sniffed, spicy aftershave...no. Lilly seized her wandering mind and placed it firmly back upon the task at hand. No one wanted aftershave in their coffee, no matter how tastefully applied and delectably fragrant.

Mr. Man-Bun scanned the remaining students until his eyes stopped on Emily. "Hey Em, time to go." He held up a wad of nylon straps and metal bits, jangling the mass in the air as though this were explanation enough.

Lilly scrutinized his clothing ensemble, hoping for a clue about the tangle of equipment.

Cut-off jeans, a faded pink T featuring a grinning cartoon cat dumping a tray of lasagna into its open mouth, and tight neon shoes that hugged his feet like a second skin.

Emily rummaged around. "Just a sec I've got to find..." She plunged her arm deep into the desk.

Lilly knew for a fact that all it contained were three candy wrappers folded into little hats and a single square of purple gum. Lilly had determined that her students would clear their desks out every single Friday and so far, a week into school, she had succeeded.

Hmmm. What was Emily waiting for? In fact, why was she even here? Class C had vacated her room long ago. Lilly glanced around the room. No, no they had not. About a dozen children remained and more than one class C student was hidden among them.

Mr. Man-bun nodded toward the door. "The rocks won't wait, Em, and we have to get back in time to pack."

Emily continued to rummage.

Mr. Man-Bun gave a theatrical sigh. "Meet me outside. I'll be by the Jeep. Just make it snappy."

Emily spoke in a faux whisper to Cloe and Natasha, whose desks abutted her own. "My uncle is soooooo bossy about "the rocks." You would think they were alive or something the way he goes on. "Respect 'The Rock', Emily. Don't day dream when you belay. 'The Rock' doesn't take a nap, and neither can you. If you forget, 'The Rock' it'll jump out and bite you."

What on earth did Emily mean, "The Rock?" Surely this mysterious uncle did not intend to use that tangle of harness for rock climbing purposes? Not with

a twelve-year-old? He wouldn't drag a poor innocent child along on his dangerous pursuit of adrenaline, right? Not when they might plunge to her death at any second.

Lilly shut her eyes. No, the school day was complete.

Emily's foolish outdoor pursuits were no longer Lilly's concern. She grabbed up the adorable straw hat her mom had mailed from Seattle. At her movement, a strange paroxysm came over the remaining students.

Each child leaned forward slightly. Odd?

Lilly took a moment to admire the straw boater in her hands. It accompanied her favorite shoes so nicely her mother had mailed it express so the package would arrive during the first week of school. Even so, the lovely accessory had only reached her mailbox the night before. The straw was a crisp, golden yellow, and a silky ribbon brought in just a splash of color. Lilly took a deep, cleansing breath and set the new hat upon her head. The hat squelched as she settled it in place, like a PBJ sandwich in the fist of a rampaging toddler on a hot day. Lilly grimaced as the memory of that long-ago babysitting disaster resurfaced. She tugged her hat off.

Long strings of chewed gum stretched from the straw boater in her hands to the top of her head.

Lilly pulled harder.

The gum only stretched, firmly entangled in her glossy, black hair.

A giggle shattered the silence.

Lilly glanced up to see a dozen delighted smirks. She turned the hat over. Inside, about the same number of gooey chewed up globs of gum stuck to the delicate straw weave. Of course. The project probably took

Spider Gap

them all day. If they were this fascinated with the order of operations in their math work, with ratios and proportions, dividing fractions, rational numbers, and pretty much anything with a number in it, her students would all have A's.

2

Crisco and Curtains

Lilly crammed her spunky straw hat firmly onto her head and marched toward the principal's office. No, that collection of pre-teen pranksters was not going to thwart her this easily. The gum would come out with a bit of butter once she got to Gran's. She absolutely could not freak out, not here, not yet.

She had survived a year crunching numbers for the IRS. She had brought the high and mighty low with her ability to look deeply at the numbers and discover the terrible secrets hidden from everyday accountants and frauds. Lilly chewed on her lip and walked faster. Unfortunately, one of the aforementioned high and mighty companies had been newly purchased by her fiancée. Lilly had learned the hard way that her genius with numbers was not always a romantic asset. Student teaching at the online academy had been so refreshing, that after her breakup with Joshua, Lilly promptly decided to fall back on her second major.

Lilly neatly erased the gum from her mind and replaced it with a pleasing illusion. She was Anne of Green Gables, in a new hat, with fabulous shoes, going to the ice cream social, where she would gain useful information about sixth graders and their idiosyncrasies and change the trajectory of her teaching career forever. Surely the school principal understood these strange and confusing children.

But Lilly had to glean her knowledge without letting anyone discover how badly she and her students were getting on. No one wanted to discover that their brand new, fresh-out-of-college math teacher was being trampled by every twelve-year-old in the school.

She heaved the gray office door open and squeaked inside. Really, the school was made for Jr. High students. Why did the doors have to be so heavy? Lilly felt like a munchkin every time she had to wrestle them open. Although, at 5'1" she had noticed that several of her students already surpassed her in both height and girth. Perhaps the doors did not cause them as much consternation?

Besides, the students need not appear scholarly and in control like their teachers. Not at all. In fact, just today a whole gaggle of them had walked up to the library book drop, one at a time, opened the small door, looked inside, screamed, and run away waving their arms theatrically. A dozen kids had all perpetuated the same odd stunt before the librarian hustled out and shooed them off. Yes, appearing mature and in control was not high on her students to do list. That is, if they even had a list.

Mrs. Oropeza, the principal, was with a parent.

Lilly sat down in a small chair with polished oak arm rests and puffy mauve upholstery. There was time to update her goals for next week while she waited. She turned on her tablet and pulled up the document titled, "First Week of School—Goals and Achievements."

Learn about my students, lay a foundation for mathematical appreciation, and enchant the minds of the next generation with the wonder and orderliness of the

numbered world all around us.

Lilly considered a moment. She might have to bump those to next week. Although she had certainly learned a great deal about her students. They did not like math. A little part of her gasped inside, just from thinking the terrible thought aloud. But it was true. While several of her students had shown a fine aptitude for the subject, none of them delighted in the glory of numbers and their fabulous orderliness and predictability as Lilly had at their age. They seemed to prefer enacting crude pranks and commenting on Lilly's height to actual educational pursuits.

There, she *had* crossed something off that week. She knew her students and their goals in life: to hide all the pens in the teacher's desk up high where she couldn't reach them without a chair, and to create less-than-flattering caricatures of their math instructor being fried under a magnifying glass on a sunny day, like an ant. Well, now she could move on to her other goals.

Lilly moved all but that single accomplished task to the next week and sat nibbling on a strand of her hair as she stared down at the tablet. Now, how to lay a foundation for mathematical appreciation when she couldn't even get the little dictators, or large dictators, in some cases, to sit in their desks and apply their energy to a sheet of math problems? She did a search of the public library system and ordered a few books. *Sixth Grade Silliness: Squelching Rebellion and Expanding the Mind*, and the classic *Parenting for Incompetent Weenies*. There, no one could claim she wasn't trying her best.

The office door creaked open and a weeping parent stumbled out.

The tall, willowy mom had perfectly coiffed, blonde hair and puffy, tear-stained eyes. The immaculately-dressed woman snatched another tissue off the office counter and slid out the door in a graceful flow of elegance and sobbing. Perhaps being tall wasn't everything.

Lilly briefly wondered if the principal had made things better or worse. Would Mrs. Oropeza provide valuable insight into the strange minds of her students, or send her sobbing from the room despairing of her future as an educational professional? Lilly slid her tablet into her bag, held her head high, and marched into her boss's office.

Mrs. Oropeza sat at her desk, her glittery nails clacking across the keyboard at a fantastic pace.

Lilly sat, adjusted her hat, and crossed her legs at the ankle so she could look down at the 1950's inspired heels and gain a bit of strength from the fact that she was so nicely matched. The heels and the hat were perfection. She looked competent, and that was half the battle, right?

Mrs. Oropeza had added a few feminine touches that softened the institutional feel of the principal's office. The curtains were also practical as they filtered the bold September sun streaming through the windows. "Just let me finish up this last e-mail and then I'm all yours." Mrs. Oropeza clacked away for another moment, hit send, and then leaned back in her swivel chair and met Lilly's gaze. "How was your first week, Miss Park?"

Lilly opened her mouth, intending to emit a few gushing words about the fabulous year ahead and revel in the perfection of mathematics and inspiring the next generation to make the world a better more

organized place. Perhaps she had been overusing the word fabulous. Maybe another adjective nothing came to mind. Instead she managed a watery smile and mumbled, "Fine," in a less than convincing manner.

"I see."

Her boss's black eyes were piercing and intent. Gracious, this was hard. Mrs. Oropeza seemed to see everything. There was even the hint of a twinkle behind that bold stare.

Had the woman heard about the day that a fourth of her second period class had leapt out of their seats, and for no apparent reason, rushed across the room and flung themselves on top of a pile of stacked chairs in the corner? Like a school of salmon flailing upon the waters of a particularly troubling waterfall, each child landed on the chairs, rolled to the floor, and then just laid there, inert for a moment, before calmly returning to their desks.

No, surely she hadn't heard of the bizarre scene. Who would have told her? A student? No, the twinkle was imagined, although the intent gaze of her boss remained. Lilly shifted on the faded mauve chair, crossed and uncrossed her legs, and finally jumped up and paced in front of Mrs. Oropeza's desk.

"I was hoping you could suggest some articles on sixth grade students, their habits and unique ways of looking at the world. Also, perhaps something about different teachers who have inspired sixth graders to achieve greatness. Is there an anthology or something: *Great 6th Grade Teachers of the 21st Century and the Students That Have Changed Our World*. Or an article would do, but I'd prefer a book length investigation into the teaching habits of successful educators, if at all

possible." Something tugged at Lilly's hair. Breathless, she stopped pacing.

Mrs. Oropeza stared up at her with a raised eyebrow.

Perhaps, she'd been speaking too quickly. Too much info, too fast. Lilly swatted at the wispy curtains. The curtain clung to her hat. That was strange. She turned and gave the feathery bit of fabric a firm tug. The perky straw hat leapt from her head and dangled from the curtain. Lilly clapped a hand to her head, but it was not bare. Instead of her straw boater, the fragile curtain was plastered to her scalp, entrapped by maliciously chewed wads of gum. The hat swayed, suspended by stretchy strands between her tangled head and the rest of the gauzy curtain, which remained anchored to the wall.

Lilly covered her head with both hands and gasped in a breath. *Oh, God, I loved school and mathematics so much. I was supposed to be a fabulous teacher. Why won't the math add up for me? It works for everything else.* She turned to face her boss, attempting the kind of confident, professional smile that might make someone overlook the teeny weeny detail that one had just vandalized someone's personal curtains with ABC gum.

Mrs. Oropeza stood. Her black heels sounded a quick staccato across the industrial flooring as she came and stood before Lilly. "Ms. Park, You're not going to find those kids on a chart, or a scholastic article about tween angst. You can't just read through life, sometimes, it must simply be lived."

"Yes, but surely reading on the topic could help...smooth out the inevitable adjustment period that occurs in any new occupation."