

Susan May  
WARREN

*She's out to prove herself, one case at a time . . .*

*Double Trouble*



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*Double Trouble*

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## What readers are saying about the PJ Sugar series

“Warren does it again with an excellent blend of humor, romance, [and] mystery. . . .”

—*Romantic Times*, Top Pick

“With an enchanting heroine, witty dialogue, and a puzzling mystery, *Nothing but Trouble* is a satisfying start to the PJ Sugar series.”

—Rel Mollet at [Titletrakk.com](http://Titletrakk.com)

“I had the pleasure of reading this gem, and PJ is a kick. I think a lot of us out there could relate to her more than we want to admit.”

—Julie at [The Surrendered Scribe](http://TheSurrenderedScribe.com)

“If you like fiction that is fun, stories that are full of mystery, and characters that remind you of yourself, you’ll LOVE this book.”

—Heather at [Mumblings of a Mommy Monk](http://MumblingsofaMommyMonk.com)

“PJ is such an interesting character, and I guarantee you will see yourself just a little bit in PJ.”

—Amy at [Amy’s Random Thoughts](http://Amy'sRandomThoughts.com)

“The characters were fantastic, fully developed, and authentic. . . . I’m already looking forward to the next book in this series.”

—Tanya at [In the Dailies](http://IntheDailies.com)

“Susan May Warren quickly became my favorite author last year. Her books are fun, uplifting, and just fantastic reading. *Nothing but Trouble* definitely fits that description!”

—Kate at A Simple Walk

“[*Nothing but Trouble*] captured my imagination and my attention in the first chapter and held on to the very end.”

—Mindy at Ponderings of the Heart

“Susan will have you in stitches one minute and tears the next. Make sure you free up a day or two if you open this book. You will NOT want to put it down.”

—Lynetta at Open Book

“Mystery, romance, humor, and a fun, spunky character combine for a great start to a promising new series.”

—CeeCee at Book Splurge

*For Your glory, Lord*

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## Chapter ONE

PJ Sugar had been born to sneak up on people. She clearly possessed the instincts of a panther, with the ability to find her prey and slink up to them in the shadows, pouncing only when they least suspected.

Alleged adulterer Rudy Bagwell didn't have a prayer of escaping.

"I'm telling you, Jeremy, we're going to nail him this time." She wasn't sure why she felt the need to keep her voice to a hoarse whisper into the pay phone—or even to press herself closer to the wall of the ancient one-story motel. It wasn't like Rudy or his cohort in crime, Geri Fitz, would hear her. Still, what a time for her cell phone company to cut off service. Just because a gal happened to be short on funds . . .

PJ glanced at her watch—2:14 a.m., a resounding gavel bang to Rudy's guilt. After all, who would be sneaking around after midnight?

Without, er, a good reason. Like a *stakeout*.

“I followed him to the Windy Oaks Motel off Highway 12,” PJ continued. She glanced toward the soot-dark picture window next to the peeling door of Rudy’s room. A brass number 8, slanted at a corrupt angle, glared against the parking lot lights as if spotlighting the sin behind the closed doors.

If she were picking a location to have a tryst with her old high school sweetheart, she might have aimed higher than a graying yellow motel edged with weeds, a broken swing set, a muddy sandbox, and a Dumpster stuffed with a ripped prison-stripped mattress. Oh, the romance.

Just standing in the greasy parking lot made her itch, as if she might be the one engaging in the skulduggery.

Now that she was a PI in training, she got to use words like that. She had even highlighted this one in the *Basics of Private Investigation* manual Jeremy had assigned her to read as part of her apprenticeship. She had read the “Stakeout” chapter three times. And, if she did say so herself, had the “Tailing Your Suspect” techniques down to a science.

Nope, Rudy wasn’t getting away with cheating on his wife. Not with PJ Sugar on the job.

“Are you sure it’s him?” Jeremy spoke through the gravel in his voice, obviously dredged from a deep sleep.

She heard a faint siren on the other end of the line and did the math. “Are you sleeping at the office again?”

“I worked late. Are you *sure* it’s Rudy?”

“Of course it’s Rudy. He’s exactly the same dirtbag he was in high school—pockmarked face, a permanent scowl. He was even wearing his leather jacket, which seems suspicious given that it’s August and about seventy degrees out. . . .”

“PJ . . .”

She heard him sigh, could imagine Jeremy running his wide hand over his face, through the dark grizzle of his late-night shadow and over his curly, thinning hair. “I’m not sure that I’m up to your PI prowess tonight. Have I ever told you that you’re hard to handle?”

“Every day. Now, get out of bed and bring your camera equipment. Oh, Cynthia is going to be thrilled! I promised her we were going to take down her cheatin’ husband.”

And Cynthia wasn’t the only one to whom she’d promised results. She’d also made a plethora of private promises to herself. A brand-new job, a brand-new life . . . this time she wasn’t going to quit or take the fastest route out of town. She was getting this done, no matter what the cost.

“See, this is your problem, PJ. You make promises you can’t keep. Two weeks, and Rudy hasn’t been seen doing anything more notorious than ordering extra whip on his macchiato. I’m thinking Cynthia is dreaming his affair. And speaking of dreaming, that’s what I should be doing. And you too. Get home. Go to bed.”

“I’m on the case, Jeremy. A great PI follows her instincts, and I know Rudy’s hooked back up with Geri. You should have seen those two in high school—in the halls, wrapped in each other’s arms, making out by the lockers—”

“I don’t want to hear this.”

“I’m just saying, they were an item, and sparks like that never die.”

Silence throbbed on the other end of the phone.

PJ closed her eyes.

“Really.” The word from Jeremy came out small, without

much emotion, but PJ felt it like a jab to her heart, even put a hand to her chest.

*In some cases*, she wanted to add. *But not always. Or maybe, yes, always.* She wasn't sure, not with her return to her hometown of Kellogg, Minnesota, right into the bull's-eye of her high school heartthrob, Daniel "Boone" Buckam, bad boy-turned-detective, who had decided their old flames might be worth stirring up.

PJ had spent too many years roaming the country with his name still simmering in her heart to ignore the fire there.

But Jeremy Kane, PI, had given her a job, even though so far, two months into her gig, Jeremy still hadn't let her run with her instincts, hadn't let her handle her own cases. She knew she could be his right-hand gal if he'd just give her a chance.

So she couldn't find the right reply for him now, as she stood in the darkness, alone, knowing she'd been driven out of her bed and from a sound night's sleep by the stirring desire to prove herself. And maybe something else . . . something she didn't especially want to talk about. At least not with Jeremy, her boss.

*Boss.* She needed to write that word on her hand or something. Jeremy was her *boss*.

"We got 'em, Jeremy. And if we can get pictures, then we'll have done our job. So get over here."

"PJ, sometimes . . ." But she heard silence on the other end before she had a chance to tell him that she would surely appreciate some Cheetos and a Diet Coke. Investigative work made a person hungry.

Thirty minutes later Jeremy tapped on the window of her VW Bug, looking bedraggled and annoyed.

But because he could read her mind, he held in his hand two cold sodas.

“Scoot over,” he snarled as he climbed in beside her, handing her a soda. His scowl only enhanced his hard-edged former Navy SEAL persona, all dark eyes; wide, ropy-muscled shoulders; trim waist; and long legs. He wore a black T-shirt, a pair of dark jeans, and black Converse shoes that made him melt into the night.

In fact, he sort of matched her.

“Is this Sneaky PJ? Black from head to toe? Where are your Superman pants?”

“Hey, a girl has to dress the part. You taught me that.”

Only, in her black leggings and oversize black sweatshirt, she looked more sloppy than dangerous. Apparently only Jeremy could pull that off. She’d first discovered the black ops side of Jeremy Kane the night he’d cajoled her into sneaking into the Kellogg Country Club. She’d nearly been caught when she froze in the bright lights of near discovery.

On the spot, Jeremy, the person she’d believed to be a pizza delivery guy, had morphed into GI Joe, scooping her into his arms and hiding her behind boxes of golf shirts, gripping his flashlight like a lethal weapon.

The memory still sent a forbidden thrill through her, one she didn’t know how to interpret.

And she still, on occasion, called him Pizza Man.

Jeremy didn’t smile, just opened his own soda with a hush, took a swig, and wiped his mouth with his hand. “So, any changes?”

“Rudy hasn’t ordered out for pizza, if that’s what you mean. Did you bring the camera?”

He shrugged a strap off his shoulder and dumped a bag onto her lap, then levered his seat back and closed his eyes. "I've created a monster."

PJ opened the bag and began fitting the long-range digital camera together.

Three hours later, she nudged Jeremy awake. She'd quietly sung through the score of *The Phantom of the Opera* as well as her complete knowledge of the Beatles and ABBA repertoires, then played "I'm going to the beach and I'm bringing . . ." from A to Z twice and tried to read the chapter titled "How to Find Missing Persons" with the neon blue light attached to her key chain.

She'd even rummaged through her canvas purse that Jeremy referred to as "the abyss," found a bottle of pink polish, and refreshed her pedicure.

Still, a gal could sit in silence for only so long.

"Smile, this is for posterity." PJ held the digital camera out as far as her arm would reach, leaned her head in toward his, and depressed the button.

Light flashed like a bullet, shooting her vision with dots against the gray pallor of morning.

"What are you doing?" Jeremy whipped out his arm and snatched the camera from her hand. "Are you trying to get us made?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure they're glued to the window as we speak."

He scrolled through the previous shots. "What is this—pictures of your toes?"

"I have cute toes. And I was bored. Delete them if you want."

Outside, dew glistened on the car hood. She'd rolled up her window, wishing she'd brought along a jacket when she tip-toed out of her sister's house in the wee hours of the morning,

and now shivered. She clamped her hand over a yawn. “I hope they’re not late sleepers.”

“I can’t believe he hasn’t snuck out back to Cynthia yet.” Jeremy popped his seat up and reached for his now-warm soda. PJ said nothing when he noted it was nearly gone.

“Is that what the cheaters usually do—sneak out for their trysts and then back to their wives before dawn?”

“Sometimes. Depends. The ones who work downtown usually disappear at lunchtime.”

“Is PI work always so . . . slimy? I feel a little dirty, like I need a shower or something.”

“I have news for you, PJ. You *do* need a shower.”

“Seriously, don’t we get to solve a real crime? like a murder or something?”

In the receding shadows, Jeremy looked less menacing, although she’d once seen him shoot a man. “Be thankful for the boring ones. They don’t hurt.”

She didn’t respond. But she had thought that being a PI—or rather a PI’s assistant—might be more, well, fun. Instead, she’d spent two tedious months parked behind a desk, filing reports, answering Jeremy’s calls. Only recently had he invited her to keep him company on his stakeouts.

She longed for high action. Undercover ops and maybe even some karate. In fact . . . “Maybe I should sign up for one of Sergei’s tae kwon do classes. I think it would help.”

“What—in understanding Korean? or maybe Russian so you can help Connie with the in-laws?”

“Very funny. No, in taking down criminals.”

Jeremy ran a finger and thumb against his eyes. Sighed. “Why don’t I send you on a mission?”

“A mission? I’d love to—”

“Get us some donuts.” He glanced in the rearview mirror. “Good Mornin’ Donuts’ light just went on.”

“Is that all I am to you—a delivery girl?”

The minute the words left her mouth, PJ knew she was asking for trouble. Jeremy wore the inklings of a very devilish smile. “Oh, don’t get me started.”

Perhaps Boone wasn’t the only one trying to kindle a flame.

Jeremy held her gaze and shook his head. “Maybe stakeouts aren’t such a great idea.”

“I’ll get the donuts.”

Since she’d parked next to a wall deep in the shadows of the Chinese takeout place, she had to wait for Jeremy to climb out of the Bug before she piled over the driver’s seat. He held open the door for her and she scrambled out without looking at him.

“I’ll take a bismark.”

“What is that—the battleship of all donuts?” She laughed at her own joke.

Jeremy rolled his eyes. “A donut covered in chocolate and filled with custard.” He shook his head as he climbed back into the Bug and closed the door.

Sounded like a long john to her. If they were going to work together, they’d need to nail down their donut terminology.

The cool air raised gooseflesh on her skin as she jogged across the parking lot toward the donut shop. The sun, just a sparkle of hope on the horizon, edged into the metal gray sky, and she smelled summer in the tang of grass freshened by the morning dew. Her Converse slapped against the concrete as she hustled to the doors.

The reception area inside remained dark in the early morning shadows. Lifeless. Void of donuts. She cupped her hand over her eyes and peered through the glass, her stomach clenching in dismay. “Hello in there!”

No one. She knocked on the glass door and then spied someone inside wearing a white apron, moving around in the baking area.

“Hello! We need donuts!”

From the back, a body appeared—a teenager with dyed black hair, a lip ring, and darty black eyes, his apron strings wrapped twice around his noodle-thin body (the boy needed to consume his own product). PJ banged on the window, and he jumped as if she might be wielding a rocket launcher.

Good grief, she just wanted a donut. “Are you open?”

The boy drifted toward the front of the store almost surreptitiously, as if he might be letting in the Mongol horde through the gates of the castle.

He unlocked the door, cracking it just wide enough for his lips to fit through. “We’re not open yet.”

PJ wrapped her arms around herself and tried to appear as waiflike as possible. “Oh, please, please, I’m starved.”

He eyed her warily.

“I spent the night in my car.” She added a little shiver. Looked pitiful. Smiled.

He might have believed her—and now her less-than-dangerous attire might have actually worked in her favor—because he opened the door. “Quick. In the back.”

PJ slunk in, the ever-present danger of a raid hovering over the moment. But never let it be said that when Jeremy sent her on a mission, she returned empty-handed.

She scampered into the back room, where she discovered trays of glistening amber donut holes, freshly glazed. The entire room smelled of baking bread, sugar glaze, and the heady indulgence of chocolate. “I’ll take a dozen holes and a bismark—” she glanced at his name tag—“Phillip.” She held out a ten-dollar bill, intimating that he keep the change.

After all, that’s what PIs did . . . paid for information. Or donuts.

Whatever it took to complete the mission.

Phillip boxed up the holes and the bismark, took the ten, and honest Abe that he was, headed to the front to make change. He stopped short at the threshold to the front parlor. “It’s my boss,” he whispered. He turned and, for a guy already sorta pasty, went even whiter. “Hurry, please . . . go out the back.”

She’d never been kicked out of a bakery before. But to save her new hero . . . she turned and pushed on the metal door, letting it swish shut behind her.

PJ was standing in the back alley next to a Dumpster, a beat-up red Honda, and a pile of old, broken pallets, holding the donut box and giving serious contemplation to digging in right there, when she spied him—Rudy Bagwell, sneaking out a back window of the Windy Oaks Motel.

Oh, she was good at this job.

From this angle she watched Rudy hit the ground and skirt along the back of the motel unit, on the way to freedom.

Sneaky. But not too sneaky for her, the Panther.

PJ hiked the box under her arm and crossed the road, hoping Jeremy saw her angle toward her quarry. Even if he couldn’t spot Rudy from his angle, a guy with an eye out for his donuts should know to wake up and grab his camera.

Rudy had stopped at the edge of the motel, leaning away from the wind to light a cigarette.

She slowed her pace and strolled up to him as if she'd just been out early for a donut run. "Hey there."

He glanced at her, and for a second she wondered if he would recognize her—after all, she did have one vivid recollection of a wild high school beach party when he'd passed out and she and Boone had buried him to his waist in sand.

He grunted at her and blew out a long stream of smoke.

"Beautiful morning."

He grunted again, rolling the cigarette between two fingers. He didn't look like a man who'd spent the night in the arms of his beloved high school sweetheart. In fact, he had a rather ugly welt on his chin, and also, if she looked closely—although she didn't make it obvious—a splatter of blood down his white shirt, maybe from a bloody nose. Or his lip—it looked a little puffy.

She took a step back, glancing toward Jeremy. Movement in the VW parked in the shadows across the lot was too difficult to discern from here. But Rudy would have to cross in front of the motel to retrieve his Camaro. Jeremy could get the shot then.

So why had Rudy come this way—around the back, away from his wheels?

"Is there something you want, babe?" Rudy cocked his head at her. "Don't I know you?"

She shook her head. "No, I—"

His eyes widened. "PJ Sugar." He said it slowly, with a hint of a snarl—maybe he did remember the beach party—and pushed himself away from the building. "I'd heard you were

back in town. Cynthia said she saw your picture in the paper. You solved Hoffman's murder . . ." His gaze went from her to the parking lot.

"Want a donut?" She shoved the box toward him.

Rudy turned back to her, his smile now gone. "What are you doing here?"

"Getting donuts." Only it came out more like a question. Oops, she'd have to work on her lying.

He took a step toward her . . . and that's when she saw it. Right above the waist of his jeans, small and black, hidden by the leather jacket that, despite the chill in the air, didn't belong in an August wardrobe.

A gun. As if it had claws, it tore at her gaze and PJ couldn't wrench it away.

A gun.

Blood on his shirt. A bloodied lip. A crime of passion? She added up the facts as quickly as it took Rudy to move another step toward her and snake out his hand to grab her.

But he wasn't the only one with a weapon. She shoved her hand into the box just as Rudy's grip closed around her elbow.

With everything inside her, PJ slammed the bismark into his face. Pudding squished between her fingers as she crammed it into his eyes. Then, clutching the box to her chest, she yanked her arm from his grasp and ran.

"Jeremy!"

Footsteps slapping the pavement behind her made her dig into the box again. Her hand closed around a donut hole, and she pitched it behind her as she raced across the parking lot. "Jeremy!"

Another hole, followed by an expletive from behind her.

Thankfully, Jeremy had finally come alive, because he emerged from the Bug, staring at her as if she'd lost her mind.

"He's got a gun! He killed her! He killed Geri!"

Another naughty word from Rudy and the footsteps changed direction. She turned to see Rudy flinging himself toward his Camaro. He Bo Duke'd across the hood and climbed in the window, turning the engine over even as PJ threw another hole at him.

It landed with a splotch of sugary goo on his windshield.

He gunned the hot rod across the parking lot.

PJ dropped the box, her breath wheezing out of her even as she watched him escape.

Or maybe not. As Rudy mowed over a parked Kawasaki and smacked against a Ford Fiesta, she heard another car gunning to roadblock him.

She turned too quickly, wishing she had more time to brace herself.

No.

*No!*

She nearly flung her body in front of Jeremy as he screeched past her in the VW, a laser streak of lime green on course to intersect with its target.

"Jeremy, stop!"

But Jeremy didn't know that, one, she hadn't paid her insurance for over a month, and two, the brakes on the Bug were a little on the spongy side, because he didn't even slow as he T-boned Rudy's Camaro and pinned it against the metal pole hosting the Windy Oaks sign.

The sound of metal ripping and the dying whine of her beloved Bug buckled PJ's knees. She went down hard in the

gravel, gulping a breath, watching Jeremy leap from the car, dive over her hood, and rip the gun out of Rudy's grip before he could even clear his head.

Pinned, he screamed at the top of his lungs.

PJ slumped in the gravel of the lot. Not the Bug. Her Bug. The one remaining possession big enough to hide inside. She reached into the box and pulled out her remaining donut hole, considering it for a long moment as her mind faintly registered the wailing police sirens in the distance. Or maybe the noise came from her, from the keening inside.

Jeremy sauntered toward her, a smug smile in his evil eyes, shaking his head. "I don't suppose there's a bismark in that mess, is there?"

PJ leaned back, cupped her hand over her eyes, and hurled the donut hole at his arrogant smile.

## Author's Note

A few years ago, I brought the wrong child to camp. It wouldn't have been a big deal except camp is six hours from my house (one way), and I'd made a big production of packing and making sure my son was all ready. Instead, my daughter should have been the one with the clean sleeping bag and the fresh socks. Somehow (through the graciousness of a good friend), she made it to camp, but the story lives in infamy in our family as an example of Mom's tendency to overcommit.

And it wouldn't be as funny if it didn't happen all the time. Yes, in my head I think I *can* write four books a year, redecorate my house, run the children's church program, write and produce a children's musical, run a story-crafting service, teach at conferences, speak at women's retreats, help my hubby with his business, and be the kind of mom who throws huge prom parties. It's just that they *all* sound like great ideas! And I like being at the center of the fun!

However, it doesn't get pretty when I miss events or perhaps lose my temper or wind up in bed with a migraine or a cold. Worse, I'm my own accuser—why can't I get it right? I hate my own mistakes, my own tendencies to get in over my head. I hate looking backward with a wince.

I brought this frustration to the page in *Double Trouble*—in PJ's desire to be the Greatest PI on Earth and her tendency to both overcommit and see trouble wherever she turns. I

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wanted her to fall, to scrub her chin on the ground, and to taste failure. Because only then could I tell her what I long to hear myself—that God doesn’t expect us to be perfect or not to make mistakes. He longs to forgive us . . . and then to empower us.

*“Draw with confidence to the throne of grace, because I promise you’ll find mercy.”* I love that message, because it’s when I am most distraught that I must remember God is the best friend I can have. He’s not going to love me less after He saves me than before! He longs to reach out and pull me close, despite my perceived ugliness, because He is crazy about me, as hard as that is for me to believe sometimes. *“Draw with confidence. . . .”*

The PJ Sugar series is all about discovering that God has great plans for even messy girls—like PJ, like me. He likes them! He made them this way, and He doesn’t expect them to be perfect. I hope you’ll continue PJ’s journey with me in the next book, tentatively titled *Licensed for Trouble*, due out later this year. Thank you for reading. Draw with confidence, friend!

IN HIS GRACE,  
*Susan May Warren*

## *About the Author*

Susan May Warren is a former missionary to Russia, the mother of four children, and the wife of a guy who wooed her onto the back of his motorcycle for the adventure of a lifetime. The award-winning author of over twenty books, Susan loves to write and teach writing. She speaks at women's events around the country about God's amazing grace in our lives. Susan is active in her church and small community and makes her home on the north shore of Minnesota, where her husband runs a hotel.

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