

Ain't Love Grand?



Best First Book Golden Quill Award

Dana Taylor

AIN'T LOVE GRAND?

By Dana Taylor

Booklist Review--

“love will have its way in this charming tale of opposites attracting.”

Foreword Magazine—

“a fresh voice, an impeccable sense of comedic timing, vivid narrative, and fascinating characters.”

Golden Quill Award for Best First Book

The set-up: Persephone Jones is the owner of a health-food store Peeler, Oklahoma. She recently had a run-in with her new neighbor, lawyer Jason Brooks.

It was a Saturday, two months later in August when a lively gray-haired lady and her overly-made-up preteen granddaughter came into the shop.

“Let’s just see if they have anything for these stiff hands.” The lady looked up at me with sparking, china blue eyes. Her skin feathered into fine parchment lines. A twinkling expression and fluffy coif of white hair revealed an impish spirit.

“Good morning”, I said. “Would you like a cup of herbal tea?”

“Oh, that would be delightful! How about you, Valerie?”

The granddaughter, Valerie, made a face and rolled her eyes. “Maybe later. What is that weird smell?”

“It’s essential oils. I just finished a massage. That oregano oil is a little stout.” I handed the lady her tea. “I’ll have to diffuse some peppermint and clove to overcome it.”

Valerie wrinkled her nose. “Smells like weeds.”

I opened a vial. “Here, take a whiff of this. It’s much better.”

The girl leaned toward the counter. She was probably about twelve, wearing hair chopped into one of those bobs that spiked out at the neck, supported by lots

of hair goo. She had on full foundation, powder, four coats of mascara and sparkly eye shadow. Her clothes hugged her budding little body, and I'm sure she'd have been thrilled if I'd asked her if she was a junior in high school. She gingerly sniffed the bottle.

"Better?" I asked.

"Yeah, but it's not exactly *Heiress* from Paris Hilton."

"No, but did you know essential oils have been used for centuries to heal the sick, bless babies, and make perfume? You've heard that the Magi brought the baby Jesus frankincense and myrrh?"

"Yeah," she eyed me suspiciously.

"Did you ever stop to think what they were?" She shrugged, but I had captured her interest. I pulled two more vials. "This is frankincense, and this is myrrh. Two of the most precious essential oils used throughout history. The oils are like the blood of the plants, full of powerful healing properties."

She sniffed them. "This is what they brought Jesus? Awesome."

I turned my attention to the woman, who was watching us with amusement. "Is there something I can help you with?" I asked.

She smiled at me. "Yes, my dear. I wake up with the stiffest hands, and I was just wondering if you've got something that might help."

"We've got various formulas to relieve arthritis." I guided her to that section of the store, and we discussed several alternatives. The granddaughter browsed around, and let her adolescent guard down just a bit.

As I rang the woman up, the front door burst open, and a male voice boomed, "There you are! I've been in every antique shop on the block."

It was my new neighbor, Mr. Brooks. Today, he wore suit pants and a dress shirt, sans a tie that he'd probably tossed due to the sweltering August heat. He looked at the females, jutting out his strong chin. Razor sharp eyes filled with irritation. The store suddenly seemed smaller with him inside.

Valerie spoke up. "Well, if you weren't on that cell phone all the time, you'd have heard Grandma say we were going to the health food store."

Grandma finished writing her check. "I did tell you dear, and you even nodded your head, but you weren't really paying attention."

Mr. Brooks was paying attention now. To me. He got sort of squinty-eyed and tipped his chin back, trying to place me.

With an exaggerated Okie accent I said, “Howdy neighbor. Ya’ll probably don’t recognize me without twigs in my hair.”

He snapped his fingers, and approached the counter. “The weed lady.” Looking around, he took in the surroundings. “So, this is what that weed garden was about. I thought maybe you were part of the witch covens I’ve heard about around here.”

I pursed my lips in irritation at the word “witch.”

Mrs. Brooks heard the exchange. “We’re neighbors? How wonderful! You’ll have to come over and visit. Jason hasn’t constructed the most welcoming place in the world, what with the gates and security system and all. Not a soul has braved coming by. I told him he should have gone all the way and put in a moat and drawbridge.”

“I think the spiked iron gate and stone wall do the trick,” I said.

Lots of folks in Peeler don’t even lock their doors. Mr. Brooks’ fortress showed a definite lack of trust in his fellow man – or woman.

He leaned across the counter on his forearm, invading my personal space. Powerful male energy ruffled my usually peaceful aura.

“I’ve been waiting for my chocolate chip cookies,” he said, with a low resonance that fluttered my stomach.

“Oh, I forgot.” *Liar*. Brooks transmitted some unspoken challenge. I glanced around. “Here’s a box of carob cookies with high fiber. Much better for you.”

He caught the box and tossed it back and forth between his large hands. “I’ll bet these taste like cardboard.”

I raised my eyebrows. “They are an *acquired* taste.”

He handed back the box. “I think I’ll hold out for the real thing.”

Were we still talking about cookies?

Mrs. Brooks put her hand on his arm. “Miss Jones has me all fixed up. I really hope this helps, my dear. I’ll send all my friends to you if I improve. Why, Jason could probably use your help too.”

Brooks straightened up, “Mother...”

Valerie piped in, “Yeah, he pops those antacids like Life Savers.”

I couldn’t resist. “Maybe we could start him on a colon cleanse. That’s the first step to good health.”

Brooks looked at his watch. He knew when he was outnumbered. “I’ve got a conference call in half an hour. Let’s go.”

Valerie moaned, “Oh, Dad, I wanted to check out that new boutique!”

Brooks glowered. “Yeah, you need more clothes all right. Your room looks like your closet exploded.” Val rolled her eyes. “Outside. Now.” He headed toward the door.

“You’ll have to forgive him, my dear.” Mrs. Brooks whispered, as if telling a terrible secret, “*He’s a lawyer.*”

He yanked the door open impatiently, and held it as they scurried out. Looking back over his shoulder, he pierced me with his steel-blue eyes. “I’m looking forward to trying out your cookies, Miss Jones.”

Gulp.

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