

**NAKED CAME THE
ROGUE**
A SERIAL MYSTERY
**SET IN SOUTHERN OREGON'S
JACKSON COUNTY**

By Tim Wohlforth
Morgan Hunt
Mary Robsman
Lyda Woods
Carole Beers
Caren Caldwell
Ed Battistella
Maryann Mason
Michael Niemann

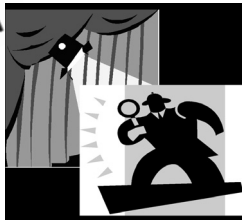
A topographic map of Jackson County, Oregon, showing terrain, roads, and towns. The map is oriented vertically with the Rogue River flowing from the top left towards the bottom right. Towns labeled include Ashland, Talent, Phoenix, Medford, Jacksonville, Central Point, Eagle Point, and Butte Falls. The Rogue River is labeled on the left side. The title text is overlaid on the map.

NAKED CAME THE ROGUE

A SERIAL MYSTERY SET IN SOUTHERN OREGON'S JACKSON COUNTY

By Tim Wohlforth
Morgan Hunt
Mary Robsman
Lyda Woods
Carole Beers
Caren Caldwell
Ed Battistella
Maryann Mason
Michael Niemann

available in
.epub .mobi .pdf at
AshlandMystery.com



Naked Came the Rogue
A Serial Mystery Set in Southern Oregon's Jackson County

privately published

c2011 by the authors, Jackson County Library Services
and Ashland Mystery Readers Group

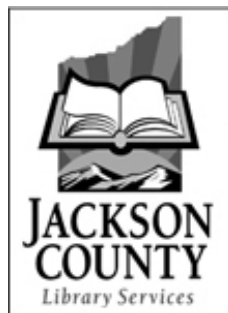
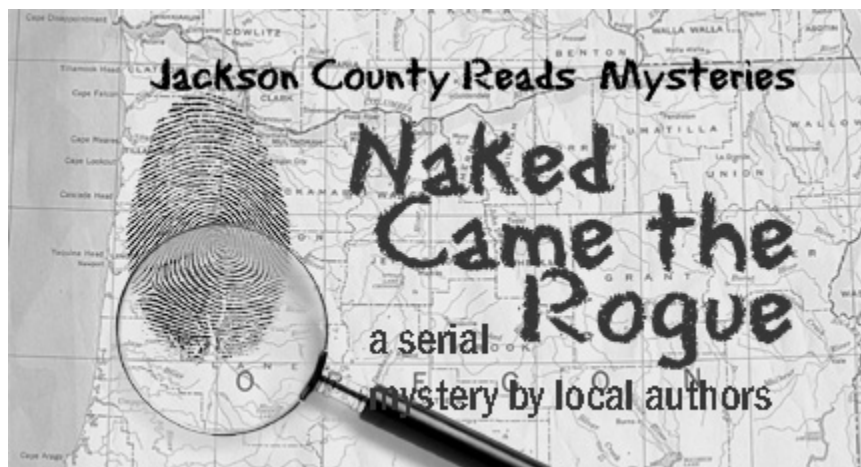


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	ii
Chapter 1. Tim Wohlforth. Ashland, OR.....	1
Chapter 2. Morgan Hunt. Jacksonville, OR.....	8
Chapter 3. Mary Robsman. Talent, OR.....	14
Chapter 4. Lyda Woods. Ashland, OR.....	21
Chapter 5. Caren Caldwell. Medford, OR.....	29
Chapter 6. Carole Beers. Central Point, OR	37
Chapter 7. Ed Battistella. Rogue River and Gold Hill, OR.....	46
Chapter 8. Maryann Mason. Prospect and Butte Falls, OR	56
Chapter 9. Michael Niemann. White City and Eagle Point, OR...67	
Chapter 10. Tim Wohlforth.	77
The Writers	84



INTRODUCTION

The serial mystery intrigues most mystery and crime fiction authors. It's a master-level challenge to write well-crafted, well-clued crime fiction, largely dependent on the work of those who have come before you. There's a loss of control imposed by the serial mystery that both terrifies and excites the author.

For readers, the serial mystery offers an intimacy and awareness not often available in crime fiction. The serial mystery setting can be so personal that the reader imagines herself driving along this road, or stopping off with the protag at the local, and it's easy to consider one's self as a character in the plot. There's also the knowledge and familiarity of the writers' technique and style that adds to the read, as each writes seamlessly in concert with their fellows.

Here in the fog of the 2011 Southern Oregon winter, nine mystery and crime fiction writers rose to the challenge. Tim Wohlforth set the scene with the first chapter, and agreed to write the last. Each participant, with glee and trepidation, produced a brilliant piece of writing to pass along to their associates as *Naked Came the Rogue*. Editor of the work and author of chapter 8 (Butte Falls and Prospect), Maryann Mason, smoothed the way and coordinated each writer's work. Michael Niemann, author of chapter 9 (White City and Eagle Point), formatted

the chapters for digital delivery. Carrie Prechtel, Outreach Coordinator for Jackson County Library Services, managed the website that delivered chapters to readers. Jackson County Library Services, JCLS librarians and staff promoted the serial everywhere.

The title of the serial, *Naked Came the Rogue: A Serial Mystery Set in Southern Oregon's Jackson County*, suggests layers of plotting, character and geography, and each chapter reveals just a bit more as the mystery moves from the opening, to mid-game and finally denouement. There's even a macguffin to catch the reader's attention and draw you in further. I worried about public reaction to nakedness and murder. The authors laughed hysterically.

The first popular serial mystery was *The Floating Admiral*, written in 1931 by Agatha Christie and eleven other Detection Club members. The contemporary serial mystery, and use of "Naked Came...", had its origins in *Naked Came the Stranger* by Penelope Ashe (Lyle Stuart, 1969). It wasn't long before the work was revealed as a literary hoax written by twenty-five Long Island Newsday reporters to parody Harold Robbins and Jacqueline Susann's sex-bomb best-sellers. Now a much-loved mystery tradition, *Naked Came the Stranger* gave rise to *Naked Came the Manatee* by Dave Barry, Carl Hiaasen and other Florida authors (Putnam, 1996), *Naked Came the Farmer* by Philip Jose Farmer and nine other Central Illinois writers (Mayfly, 1998) and *Naked Came the Phoenix* edited by Marcia Talley and written by women mystery writers (St. Martins, 2001). *Naked Came the*

Flamingo returned the serial mystery to Florida as a Murder on the Beach publication in 2004. Locally, mystery writer Mary Robsman edited *Canine Capers: Mystery in Oak Valley*, set in Talent, Oregon, written by the Rogue Reader Writers and privately published in 2008.

Naked Came the Rogue, A Serial Mystery Set in Southern Oregon's Jackson County was written in support of Jackson County Library Services' 2011 Jackson County Reads initiative to entertain and, we hope, delight the many mystery and crime fiction readers in Southern Oregon. It's also written to honor the public libraries of Jackson County, Oregon and the librarians that organize and deliver services, to acknowledge the many ways our public libraries enrich our lives.

-- Maureen Flanagan, Facilitator
Ashland Mystery Readers Group
www.AshlandMystery.com
2011 February 27



*Ashland Mystery is sponsored by
Friends of the Ashland Public Library
Standing Stone Brewing Company
Bookwagon New and Used Books*
Thank you!





CHAPTER ONE

By Tim Wohlforth

Annie Brandon relaxed as she looked over her domain, the main room in the Ashland Public Library. She liked working Monday nights largely because no one else did. She felt in charge even though she was the youngest on the staff, still working on her library science degree. In time she would get her degree, move up to librarian, perhaps right here in Ashland.

Tonight she was completely on her own as Liz had called in sick. “No matter,” she had told her, “nothing ever happens on Monday night.” Curled up in an easy chair that gave her a view of the street a gray-haired lady read a book. A young man in a Grateful Dead tee shirt, who could use a shower, stared at the screen of one of

the computers lined up in a row behind the easy chairs. Homeless? Probably.

A middle-aged woman wearing a peasant blouse and flowing full-length skirt drifted out of the children's section to her left. She clutched a tow-haired boy – she figured around six-years-old – who in turn clutched a large picture book. The pair headed her way.

“No, Randolph give your book to this nice lady and she will check it out for you,” the mother said. “Then you can take it home.” Randolph did not agree. He held the book in a vise-like grip, and the mother tried to pry it loose. When she finally wrested it free, Randolph let out a howl. Annie smiled at the mother and checked out the book while Randolph watched her every move, not trusting that the book would be returned to him. A fellow book lover.

The pair left by the front entrance and the library reverted to its quiet, almost somnolent, state. Annie glanced at her watch. 7:30. She would be closing up the place in half an hour. She knew she should be looking over her library science textbook, but she could not focus her mind.

Annie's green eyes rested on the long bookshelves stuffed with current fiction that separated the entry area from the open stacks on the right. The mysteries were her favorite. She did not read them for puzzle or plot. The characters are what intrigued her. Stieg Larsson's *Dragon* series swept her away. She had read the trilogy virtually nonstop and while she couldn't remember much about the plot, she could not forget

Lisbeth. She admired her toughness, her brilliance, her lack of interest in what others thought of her, her single-minded pursuit of her goals.

It's not that Annie was like Lisbeth. It was more that she wanted to be like her, more independent, stronger. She had no idea what she wanted to do with her life beyond getting her library degree and reading books. Perhaps that was enough. No, there was more. She just didn't know what it was.

She heard the front glass door open. She looked up and focused her eyes. A young woman walked in, about thirty. She was entirely naked. Annie looked around the room. No one else had noticed her. The woman walked straight up to the counter with a wide smile on her face. Was she taunting her? Demanding that she call the police or attempt to throw her out? Perhaps. The disturbing aspect of it all was that the woman didn't seem to notice that she had no clothes on.

Before Annie could speak, the naked lady said, "I would like to check out a book."

"You can't come in here that way."

"What way?"

"With no clothes on."

"Oh, but I have clothes on." She pointed to a string bikini. "I've checked Ashland's ordinances. All that is required is to cover the genitalia."

"Barely."

"It's made from hemp. Very natural."

"I'm sure it is," Annie said, "but we do have our own regulations."

"Check them. I'll wait."

Annie had opened herself to that one. She actually had no idea if there was a library regulation referring to nakedness. She vaguely remembered something about bare feet and this lady definitely had bare feet. Where were the regulations kept? Should she look them up on her computer? Might be faster.

Why was she so worried? So uptight? This is not the way Lisbeth would have reacted.

"Why?" Annie asked.

"Why what?"

"Why do you go around naked?"

"Why do you wear clothes? Certainly not to keep warm. It's been over 90 degrees all day. Still hot."

"Because I'm not an exhibitionist. I don't want people staring at me."

The naked lady smiled again. Not actually laughing at her. Teasing, impish. A short-statured woman, she had close-cut brown hair, matching eyes, bushy eyebrows that reminded her of Frida Kahlo, perfect white teeth, large hoop earrings, curvy body, and a marvelous all-body tan.

"Why not? The human body is a beautiful thing. It should be exhibited. Admired. You should try it. You're tall, thinner than me, but

about my age, and that lovely red hair. You should be proud of your body.”

“Aren't you just a bit worried walking about town with no clothes on?” Annie asked.

“About what?”

“Perhaps someone might want to hurt you.”

“Who would harm a naked lady?”

Annie was about to answer, but decided not to. It seemed to her that a central qualification for becoming a naked lady is a sense of invulnerability. A sentiment she did not share. Somehow the discussion was getting out of hand. She had been placed on the defensive. The simplest solution right now was to get her a book and then out of here.

“What book are you looking for?”

“I've been a vegan but I have just switched to a raw food diet. Need some recipes. Do you have *Everyday Raw* by Mathew Kenny?”

“Check in the cookbook section in the back.”

“You mean the un-cookbook section.”

In two minutes she was back with the book.

“Library card?”

The naked lady reached into her bikini bottom and pulled it out from behind the hem. Annie gingerly took the card and read it. Lindy Hansen. She checked out the book. That smile again. Just being playful. Damn it, she liked the naked lady. Once you got over her nudity, there

was this fun-loving, intriguing woman. She would like to get to know her. Perhaps Lindy could be Annie's path to the adventure so much missing in her own life.

"Got to get out of here now," Lindy said. "Your air conditioning is on too high."

That's when Annie noticed the goose-bumps. Then Lindy strode out the door, swinging her raw foods book. Annie checked her watch. 8:00 pm. Time to shoo people out of the place.

* * *

It was 8:30 by the time Annie had completed the closing up of the library and could head home. She stepped out into a sultry July night. No wind and no one in sight. Quite an evening. She had been startled, offended when the naked lady first appeared in front of her counter. Another Ashland weirdo out to bother her. They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover but this book had no cover. Then they began to talk and Lindy became more than some freak. An interesting young woman, a bit of an exhibitionist, perhaps, yet certainly not dull. Playful, happy.

A new friend? Possibly. She knew she needed friends. She had had a tendency of late to retreat into her books and avoid human contact, except for businesslike exchanges at the library. Ever since she broke up with Bob. She needed a free spirit after that anal, controlling head case. His idea of an exciting date was going to a restaurant where she could watch him wipe the silverware with a cloth napkin. After-

wards they would split the bill. Exactly, to the penny. Enough. She was not about to think about him tonight when she was in such a good mood.

Lindy had certainly brightened up a normally dull late-night library stint. And she did have a point about dressing for the weather. Her light summer suit clung to her body as she made her way down the steep steps to the sidewalk.

Annie turned right and headed up Siskiyou Boulevard and home. It was still light enough for her to make out the peace wall with its individually designed tiles. She had made it a practice to pause as she walked past the wall, so that it would not be an indistinct blur. Each night she read a different single tile. Tonight it was "War is not healthy for children and other living things." The incident with the child Randolph came to mind. One of the pleasures of library work was being exposed to such a variety of vital kids just beginning to discover the magical world of literature.

As she approached the end of the wall, Annie noticed something out of place on the low hill beyond it. A dog? Some rubbish? No, it couldn't be. But it was. A naked foot! She rushed to the spot. Lindy lay splayed out over the ground cover. A look of horror frozen on her face, her hemp bikini bottom wrapped around her reddened neck.



CHAPTER TWO

By Morgan Hunt

Annie wished she could recall the impish twinkle of Lindy's eyes with the same clarity with which she remembered their terrified bulge.

She felt acutely aware of the gulf between her literary heroine, Lisbeth, and her own quirky self. When Annie discovered the body, she didn't feel empowered with butt-kicking stamina; she felt queasy and nervous and sad. "Guess that's why they call it fiction," Annie reminded herself. She did, however, register intense curiosity about the book. "After all, I'm a librarian, or I will be when I finish my degree," she assured

herself. "Naturally I'd wonder about the book."

Where was the raw foods book Lindy had checked out just before she was attacked? Had her murderer taken it as a souvenir?

The Ashland police did not find the question as compelling. Annie felt somehow deficient in her interactions with them. The only question she'd been able to answer for them with any certainty was whether Lindy Hansen had been nervous or afraid. Lindy's words rang in Annie's memory, "*Who would harm a naked lady?*"

No. Lindy had not been afraid. Clearly she should have been.

Annie felt grateful for today's assignment. One of the benefits of working as a substitute circulation clerk was that she never stayed at any location long enough to grow bored. She steered her MINI Cooper along South Stage Road, past pastel orchards and pastures of the Rogue Valley. In the distance she could see that Mt. McLoughlin's snow cone top had finally melted.

When she approached Jacksonville's town limits, she slowed. After her brisk cruise along country roads, 25 mph felt like a crawl, but the local police revered speed limits with the same devotion the Vatican lent to papal bulls.

At the intersection of California and Oregon Streets, she turned right, made a quick left onto C Street, and pulled into the public parking lot near the library. The same lot served the needs of the Britt Festival, and many of downtown's strolling tourists.

Annie strode quickly up the steps to the library's entrance. A glance to her right took in the sculpture of a gold miner panning for his glimmer of fortune. Behind him in bronze, a member of Jacksonville's historic Chinese community labored.

The sun felt pleasant on Annie's skin. The temperature had calmed to 77 degrees. Even the humidity was low, which had allowed her to apply more than wishful thinking to the taming of her red curls this morning. She felt more than ready for the distraction she hoped today would bring.

It wasn't just the change of scenery from Ashland; it was the possibility of seeing Stills. She knew where he usually ate lunch; perhaps...

The first half of Annie's work day included locating the last copy of *Goodnight, Moon* for a harried father whose toddler seemed composed of vocal cords and saliva, and listening to a local, Edna, complain about the performance of bluegrass banjo picker Wichita Wendy at the Britt Festival last night. "She's the daughter of Freddy-the-Fabulous Fratt," Edna said. "You've heard of him, haven't you? Freddy Fratt and Teddy Tubbs? Banjo pickers extraordinaire! You'd think Wendy would show more respect for her heritage."

Hesitantly Annie asked, "Why? What'd she do?"

"Wichita Wendy is a, er, well-endowed woman. And last night at the Britt, she wore a blouse that was so low-cut, well... let's just say the only men in the audience who could concentrate on her banjo picking would be blind or gay."

Annie smiled to herself as she scanned two romance novels for Edna.

Toward the end of her morning shift, Annie had to explain to an

offended Asian-American gentleman that the reason the Chinese man depicted in the entrance sculpture was so much smaller than the Caucasian man was a matter of perspective, not prejudice. Libraries offered more on-the-job challenges than people realized.

Time for her lunch break! Annie sprang down the stairs, through the parking lot, and around the corner to the Bella Union restaurant. Stills was just finishing his pizza.

“I go from one extreme to the other, don't I?” she mused as she hesitated a few feet from his table. Her ex, Bob, had dark hair and eyes. He was serious, fussy and demanding, and he smelled like Polo after-shave. Stills' blond hair hung in a style reminiscent of Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings*. The grace with which he moved showed ease with his own body. He spent his day working cow, elk, deer, and ostrich leather into purses, belts, saddles, gloves, and, yes, even whips. And Stills' body emanated a primal earthiness, like the mink oil and saddle soap he worked with. His leatherworks shop was on the second floor of an historic building on a nearby side street; she'd browsed it on a previous visit. Named after a folk singer his parents admired, Stills made the stars twinkle in Annie's heaven.

She was trying to work up the nerve to announce her presence when he caught her in his peripheral vision. “Hey, Reds,” he greeted with a delighted smile, using the nickname he bestowed her when they met two months ago.

Before she could object, he invited her to join him for a jaunt to

Jacksonville's historic cemetery. "There's a section of Masonic graves. The artwork there is fantastic. I saw a design I want to incorporate in one of my pieces. Let's go!"

Annie glanced at her watch, then in the direction of the steep hill they'd have to climb to reach the cemetery grounds. "I'd love to, Stills. Honest. But I have to be back at the library in forty minutes."

"Follow me!" Stills took her hand and led her to a brick-colored bungalow down the street, home of Segway of Jacksonville. Within minutes, Stills and Annie were leaning their body weight forward as their paired Segways climbed the road to the cemetery. Tourists and looky-loos couldn't resist doing a double-take as they passed by. Annie hadn't ridden a Segway before, but the requisite movements came to her naturally, and she appreciated that the Segway's quiet hum didn't disturb those resting in peace.

When they arrived at the main grounds, Stills got his bearings. "Jewish cemetery. City cemetery. Paupers," he murmured as he read signs aloud. Annie looked around, savoring the lovely shade trees and panoramic view.

"Ah, there it is. Masonic!" Stills steered in the direction of the sign. He parked his Segway near a pair of old masonry fence posts. He pulled a small pad from his jeans pocket and began to sketch designs molded into the posts. The radiant eye — the one seen on dollar bills - along with various compasses and stars seemed ancient and eerie, fitting for their surroundings.

Annie spied a woman sitting on a nearby bench. She was the only person they'd passed who hadn't turned her head at the couple's curious mode of transportation. Annie steered her Segway toward her.

The woman bore more than a passing resemblance to Dolly Parton, especially in the bust line. Her hair, too, seemed more Dogpatch than J-ville.

With her head leaning against the back of the bench, the woman continued to stare out across the bucolic landscape. Her massive breasts did not heave. Her eyes did not blink.

The wire banjo string wrapped taut around her neck explained why. *Who would harm a banjo picker?*



CHAPTER THREE

By Mary Robsman

Wednesday morning, the sun rose as usual. Annie hoped the rest of the day would go as uneventfully.

Her calendar showed: 9 am meet Brenda in lot, breakfast with Nestor, 10-4 pm Talent Library (send alert about missing cookbook to all libraries), get veggies, etc. at farmer's market, 6 pm class attendance optional (project topic due.) She slipped the shopping list into her shoulder bag, grabbed the car keys, and left the apartment.

In just a few moments, Annie had navigated her trusted MINI through downtown Ashland and was cruising Highway 99 to Talent. Inside the quiet cocoon of her MINI, Annie thought about the events of the past hellish 36 hours. "Why me? Why was I the one to find two dead bodies?"

She was thankful the police kept her name out of the news.

That first night in Ashland, she pleaded with the chief investigator, "If my mother gets wind of me discovering a dead body, she'll come here on the next plane from Paris." At the second murder scene, Stills convinced Jacksonville police to withhold both their names. Stills was handy to have around sometimes.

Last night, the topic of her Library Science class at SOU was *Banned Books and Censorship*. The guest speaker, a lawyer whose specialty was constitutional law, addressed issues of free speech and freedom of expression. Visions of Lindy in the library gave double meaning to the lawyer's words. He also spoke of a librarian's responsibility to stand up for an individual's rights.

After class her classmates shared theories about the murders. They walked in a group, for safety, to the parking lot. Any one of them could be right. One said, "The MO, strangulation in both cases, indicates the work of a sicko serial killer." Someone else disagreed: "These are separate crimes of passion. There are two killers. Love, hate, greed, jealousy. They all cause a sane person to do crazy things. The person can be male or female."

Annie didn't know what to think.

A man with a graying beard in a tie-dyed t-shirt argued back, "The naked lady murder was a hate crime. Right-wingers couldn't get her to put on clothes or go away. A nutcase took up the cause and got rid of her permanently." Annie cringed at the thought.

Annie herself was a person of interest in the murder investiga-

tions. She was at both crime scenes. On television, police like Detective Kate Beckett and NYPD didn't believe in coincidence. Would investigators ferret out something in her past to implicate her? Annie read plenty of police procedurals and knew there were almost no boundaries when it came to an investigation.

Before the Monday night murder, everything Annie knew about murder came from CSI, and everything she knew about Jackson County law enforcement came from reading J. A. Jances's *Failure to Appear*. Since Monday she'd been questioned, fingerprinted, and released twice from police headquarters. The burly Jacksonville policeman with a gun in a holster at his hip cautioned her and Stills, "Go about your business as usual." He looked right at Annie when he warned, "Don't leave the county until these cases are solved."

The MINI hit a pothole on 99N and suddenly Annie became aware of her surroundings. She looked quizzically at the stoplight at Rapp Road. "How did I get here?" She'd driven the four miles from Ashland to Talent in automatic mode. "Watch it, girl. Your carelessness could get you killed," she counseled herself.

It was a great summer day. Blue sky, bright white clouds, sunshine bathing the lush green in its yellow warmth, temperature tolerable. Too bad she couldn't get past the vision of Lindy with the hemp thong tight around her throat. Annie longed for the day she'd walk or bike from Ashland to Talent on the Bear Creek Greenway without a care in the world, but for the moment, she was going to stick with her MINI, and avoid the Greenway.

Talent was an agricultural community. She turned left on Rapp Road and took a right onto Wagner Creek Road at the historical marker where Jacob Wagner obtained the first water rights in Oregon in 1852. His series of hand-dug ditches from the creek to irrigate his crops led to the Talent Irrigation District's canal system that now supplied water to family farms and commercial growers throughout the southern valley. Annie was researching the TID for her friend Brenda, a local licensed private investigator.

Annie continued along Wagner Creek Road, where, way in Talent's past, spiritualists lived and held séances. There was a Universal Mental Liberty Hall for free thinkers including those who advocated free love. Talent was a pre-Ashland Ashland.

At five minutes to 9, Annie was in the library parking lot. Brenda drove in and parked her RAV4 beside the MINI. Brenda was a member of the Strong Woman Fitness group who met in the library's Community Room an hour before the library opened for book business. Dressed in a florescent-green sports bra and hot-pink tights and wrap skirt, Brenda stepped from her SUV. The ponytail atop her head bounced as she moved toward Annie. "Hi, Sweetie! I got your email last night. You've fallen into deep doodo." "

"Brenda, you're looking good." Annie spoke from the front seat. "You're a P. I. Can you help me out of this mess?"

"I'll try, but you know I'm leaving for Portland at noon... got me a case of industrial espionage. I may be undercover there for a month."

"I'm scared and worried that the police think I'm involved," Annie shared with her friend.

"Yes, police suspect everyone," said Brenda. "They collect evidence, sort out the facts, and then, they arrest the bad guys."

"I'd like to contribute to solving these murders." Annie looked up at Brenda.

"You're no Lisbeth," Brenda warned. "This is outta your league. Big guns from outside law enforcement agencies will come in for the Wichita Wendy investigation. Her murder is national news."

"But Lindy's murder deserves the same attention. Think about it. I was the last person to see the Naked Lady alive."

"Except for the murderer."

Annie covered her eyes with her hands.

"I'll see what I can do for you." Brenda handed an envelope labeled TID to Annie. "Here's what you can do for me. I'm working on a water right's case. Use your Boolean logic, those ands and ors, to set up an Internet search. If you have time, check for documents at the courthouse and the Historical Society. Let people think you're an interested student."

"I am an interested student. I'll explore the library systems and government databases for you," Annie said.

"Text me, don't post to Facebook. Watch what you say and

how you say it." Brenda slapped the side of the car. "Good luck." She trotted to her exercise class.

Annie put the envelope in her shoulder bag. She needed breakfast before she tackled any serious work. The Downtowne Coffeehouse was two blocks away. She left the car and walked between the library and the old library building, now home to the Talent Historical Society.

As she neared the intersection of East Main Street and Talent Avenue, a man emerged from the shadow of the Camelot Theatre. He stripped the paper from his cigarette, let the tobacco flutter to the ground, and pocketed the wad of paper.

"Something about him is familiar." Annie thought, "Is he an actor in Camelot's next theatrical production, or something else?" The man pulled the fedora down over his eyes and retreated into the shadows.

At the coffeehouse Annie weaved her way through the breakfast crowd. She saw Nestor at his favorite table in the corner. From that vantage point he could see everyone who came in the door and the action on Talent Avenue. He was wearing the boat neck shirt she liked and the shirt's thin blue stripes matched the color of his eyes. The white accented Nestor's summer tan and his coal-black hair. When Annie approached, he stood and helped her with her chair. "Hiya, Beautiful. What's happening?"

"Do you have an hour?" She knew Nestor from the library. She had helped him with an inter-library loan request for a book on sculp-

ture. They met for breakfast every Wednesday since then. He was an artist. Having lived with an art colony in Guanajuato, he spoke the language like a native. He sat in a different coffeehouse each morning and knew everything that went on in southern Oregon.

“Whatever it takes,” Nestor said reassuringly. “You seem worried.”

Annie looked out the window and saw the fedora man who just performed the military field-stripping technique. “Do you know that man?”

Nestor looked out the window. “You can’t mean the guy in the fedora making a cell phone call?”

“Yes!”

Annie’s cell phone in her bag began to ring.



CHAPTER 4

By Lyda Woods

Annie's younger sister was on the phone. Charisma, an Ashland therapist, specialized in sexual dysfunction, hypnotherapy, energy circles, and past life regressions. Annie had already told Charisma about the bodies, but she needed her sister's help. Although Annie was wary of her sister's weird lifestyle, Charisma had compelling intuitions about people.

"Hi Charisma. What's up?" Annie got up from the table and went outside to the patio for privacy.

"Hey Annie Fanny, I was wondering if you wanted to go to a release party at the Ashland Springs Hotel tonight."

"What exactly is being released?"

She's up to something.

Annie knew that Charisma had contacts in the local acting community and occasionally trod the boards herself.

"It's an independent, low-budget movie, with paranormal aspirations, and a friend of mine is giving a talk about hotel ghosts. There's some great local talent in the picture. Come on, you'll have fun." Charisma used her most soothing voice.

"I've got a class tonight."

"You need a night out, with all that's happened. Come on loosen up a little."

"Well, OK. I need to talk with you about something anyway," Annie said. She looked around for the guy in the fedora, but he was gone.

"Great. Meet me in the lobby at 7 pm tonight. There's someone I want you to meet."

"See you then." Annie ended the call. Her quiche was doing a two-step in her stomach.

* * *

Annie watched the crowd of people in the Ashland Springs Hotel lobby as she sat in a chair by the fireplace and sipped her Roxy Ann Pinot Gris; the wine was her favorite and tasted cold, sharp, and fresh. The boutique hotel was built in the 1920s, when Ashland advertised itself as a healing resort, where visitors could renew their well-

being by drinking the mineralized Lithia water. Under the slowly-turning palm fan, Edna was getting a handsome actor to sign something. Near the shabby chic display case, filled with fossilized starfish, Annie recognized a woman who did fire-dancing in the plaza. She gulped her wine.

I don't know if I can handle this.

As she scanned the crowd, looking for Charisma, Annie recognized an actor who played Falstaff last season at the Shakespeare Festival. She spotted Charisma with her husband, Jamison, an Ashland Police Officer. They were getting their picture taken with some actresses dressed up in zombie costumes. Charisma, never one to miss an acting opportunity, set up the shot so that the zombie tarts wrapped her in a ravenous hug.

When Annie caught her eye, Charisma whispered something to Jamison and then floated over, holding a glass of wine. She was resplendent in a beaded, translucent, lavender sheath, with a plunging neckline, and ivory, silk under dress. Her auburn hair was rolled up in a French twist, her long, silver earrings sparkling in the firelight.

“Come with me. I’ve got a surprise for you,” Charisma said. She grabbed Annie’s hand and drew her from her seat.

Please, not another embarrassing aura reading.

Annie blushed as Charisma patted the OSF actor on the butt as they walked through the crowd. They entered the Crystal Room behind the main lobby. The chandelier in this banquet space always took An-

nie's breath away. It floated above like the welcoming spirit, glittering and glowing. Seats were set up for some kind of presentation that apparently had just ended. A slender, curly-haired woman in a silk kimono of green, gold, and fuchsia shuffled papers behind the podium.

"Annie, I'd like you to meet Veronica Loodle, spiritualist and author," said Charisma. The woman in the kimono smiled at Annie, but her intense gaze brought out goose bumps on Annie's arms.

"Pleasure to meet you, Veronica," said Annie, her smile frozen on her face.

What has Charisma gotten me into now?

"Nice to meet you too, Annie. I've heard wonderful things about the Jackson County libraries and some interesting things about you. Please call me Nica." Her bracelets tinkled as she shook Annie's hand. Then she pulled Annie into a fierce hug.

"Let's sit down," Nica said, and launched into the main event.

"I've felt some unusual vibrations and Charisma tells me that you recently had some firsthand experiences with death. I think the two may be connected." Nica's fingers brushed the amulet around her neck and something moved across her face.

"I encountered a presence this morning; a woman's face appeared in that mirror behind the bar, and she spoke to me."

"Wow. Did you recognize her?" asked Annie.

"Yes, I think it was Lindy Hansen. I saw her photo in the Ashland Daily Tidings," said Nica.

Cold, watery fingers traced up Annie's spine; she wrapped her sweater around herself tightly.

"I understand that you're trying to help, but I'm not a big believer in ghosts, Nica, and I'm not sure what I can do anyway. You should tell the police," said Annie.

"She will be. I asked Jamison to join us. He's on the case now." Charisma got up to get him from the main lobby.

"But he's a patrol officer, isn't he?" asked Annie.

"Not anymore. He's been promoted to detective," Charisma responded as she left the room.

"Then he should be on the case. I should really go home and study." Annie didn't need any more frightening experiences.

"But Annie, she said your name." Nica paused for dramatic effect. Annie's eyes grew huge; she felt frozen to her chair.

"She wants to talk with you." Nica's leaned forward to grasp Annie's hand with both of hers.

"This hotel seems to be a safe place for spirits," Nica explained. "Every time I come here, I've had a supernatural experience. In this very room, I saw a man in black Victorian garb, holding a buggy whip, but when I looked again, he was gone. And over in that corner, I heard a woman giggling and smelled cigar smoke but no one

was there.” Nica smiled warmly at Annie, and stroked her hand which she wasn't letting go of.

“That's amazing but I'm not sure what you want me to do.”

Annie frowned at her empty wine glass, wishing for a shot of something, anything, tequila, vodka, gasoline, whatever.

“We need you Annie. The spirit needs you.”

“Just trust her, Annie Fanny. I arranged for a private séance!” said Charisma, grinning wickedly. She and Jamison walked over to join them. Jamison looked uncomfortable.

I really don't need this right now.

Before the session began, Charisma led the group through a vigorous, energy circle ritual to charge them up for better receptivity. Holding hands and humming and ahing, the group pranced around in a circle, while Charisma made whooshing sounds and pulled aura spots off Annie, claiming negative energies.

Why do I let her boss me around like this? She's such an attention hog. How can I get out of here?

Annie glared at her sister as Charisma violently pruned her aura. Charisma looked positively thrilled while Annie was filled with dread.

Seated at the table, holding hands, with a single candle flickering in the darkness, Nica began the summoning spell.

“Lindy Hansen, we feel your energies; manifest to us, oh, honorable spirit. We feel your pain and summon thee.” Nica swayed and

squeezed Annie's fingers.

For a moment, nothing happened. Annie stared at the candle flame, seeing its blues, reds, and yellows. Then the flame grew taller and swayed; the chandelier shuddered and chimed as if something had swum through it. Nica's face changed; she sat forward in her chair, turned to look at Annie and smiled just like Lindy had in the library.

"Annie, you're here," said Nica/Lindy.

Annie felt her world tilt. She couldn't breathe.

"Killers have strong hands, cold hearts, and a manifesto. They are not as they appear. You know them, Annie."

Annie gaped. Charisma squeezed her hand. Jamison cleared his throat. Something was moving in the corner of the room. Whatever it was had arms and was waving goodbye.

Nica slumped, jerked up, and sucked in a huge breath. She looked pale and confused.

"What happened?" asked Nica, her eyes glittering. "Did I go under? Did something come through me?"

"Yes. It was so exciting. Lindy came through! She gave us a sign! God, Nica, you are amazing," said Charisma.

"That's one word for it," said Jamison.

Annie got up and turned on the lights to break the mood. It was time to sober up, time for some pragmatic problem-solving.

“What does it all mean? How can I possibly know the people who killed Lindy and Wichita Wendy? That’s horrible,” said Annie.

How can I trust this information? A séance? Give me a break. Madame Blavatsky is not Sherlock Holmes.

“Sometimes we remember more than we think. I could try hypnotizing you to see what else you remember about the night that Lindy died. Who knows, maybe there was someone lurking in the library corners,” said Charisma.

“Oh Faulkner!” said Annie, indulging in her favorite swear word. “I’m freaked out, Charisma. I feel taken apart inside. I’ve had enough for one night. I can’t escape these murders, no matter what I do.” She picked up her purse.

“Well, think about it. I bet you might remember something,” said Charisma.

Nica, strangely silent, nodded in agreement. Jamison wrote something in his notebook.

“I need to talk with you, Annie,” said Jamison.

“I’ll call you,” said Annie over her shoulder as she left the Crystal Room.

The only way I’m going to get out of this nightmare is to solve these murders. Whom could I possibly know that would be capable of such a thing? And a manifesto? This is nuts.



CHAPTER FIVE

By Caren Caldwell

Annie woke from a troubled sleep in which whispering ghosts, barely-clad bodies, and mystery men in fedoras cycled through her dreams all night. Daylight, even though it heralded another scorching day, came as a relief.

She disentangled her legs from the tumbled sheet and picked herself off the bed. A cool shower failed to clear her head. As she towed herself dry, she paused to study the reflection of her body in the mirror.

Unlike the tanned Lindy, Annie's pale figure gleamed under the rosy highlights of her hair. A sparse trail of red freckles wandered up her arms and across her chest

where she usually got some sun. Her breasts, which never saw sunlight, appeared creamy white under the delicately pink nipples.

She pushed a lock of wet hair off her cheek and pictured herself walking naked through town and up the wide library steps toward the main entrance. But just before she could imagine herself throwing open the door and stepping through in her exposed state, she remembered the sight of Lindy's bare foot beside the peace wall.

"Damn!" She sucked in a breath, covered herself in her robe and went into the kitchen to boil tea.

An hour later, Jamison found Annie in the computer lab on the second floor of the Medford Library. The lab was situated at the end of a dim hallway in the non-public section of the building reserved for Rogue Community College students.

"You're not at circulation this morning, Fanny?" said Jamison.

Annie looked up from the monitor. "Hi, Jamie. Yeah, I came in early to do some research for Brenda. My shift doesn't start for half an hour. Aren't you out of your jurisdiction?"

"I'm working the murder cases. Annie, I need you to come over to the Sheriff's office for a while. There's a county detective who wants to ask you some questions."

"Again? I don't know anything more today than I knew on Monday."

"It's routine. I'm afraid you're going to miss part of your shift. I'll wait while you tell your boss."

Minutes later, Jamison led Annie to a police cruiser parked behind the library.

"Jeez, can't I drive myself, Jamie?" Annie said.

"I promise to bring you back." Jamison held the back door open for her. Annie glared at him.

"I'm riding in front," she said, jerking open the passenger door.

* * *

"I'm sure you understand, Ms. Brandon, that during an investigation of this kind, it's necessary to ask some questions that you may find irrelevant or even ridiculous."

Detective Cary Roses smiled as he spoke, holding Annie's eyes with a commanding gaze. He leaned against the edge of the conference table, his hands relaxed in his lap.

Annie didn't dare look away from his face for fear she would appear shiftily to him. *Just look at his teeth*, she told herself.

"But you know where I was on Monday night," she said. "I was at the Ashland P.D. answering questions and giving my statement."

"After you gave your statement," said Detective Roses, "where did you go?"

"Home. It was late. I just wanted to get home and lock the door behind me."

"What time was that?"

"I don't know. I lost track of time after I found the body. Everything seemed to drag on like a movie in slow motion."

"Did you call anyone?"

"No. Well, yes. I called my sister, Jamison's wife. I talked to them both until I felt calm enough to fall asleep."

Roses shifted from the edge of the table and seated himself across from Annie. His gaze never moved from her eyes.

"Alright. The morning you discovered the second body. What made you approach the dead woman?"

"I didn't know she was dead when I approached her. Besides I've already told all of this to the Jacksonville police."

"That's fine," Roses said evenly. "Now tell me."

"Why can't you read my second statement for yourself?"

Roses' smile disappeared. His voice took the tone of a firm, but patronizing school principal.

"Ms. Brandon," he said. "It's my job to review the ground already covered by the Ashland and Jacksonville police because these two murders appear to be connected—not just because you discovered both bodies. My department must now bring all the information together. That makes sense, doesn't it?"

His smile returned. Annie nodded involuntarily.

Just look at his teeth.

“So,” Roses went on. “Please tell me why you approached the woman you did not yet know was dead.”

Annie leaned forward. “I don’t know. There was something strange about her, about the way she was sitting. She was so still. She looked . . . unnatural.” Annie sighed. “I just had to check on her. That’s all.”

Roses held Annie’s gaze without speaking. She watched his chest rise and fall beneath his shirt and tie as he sucked in a deep breath.

“Annie,” he said, “I understand that feeling. You say, ‘she looked unnatural.’ I want you to know I get that.”

She looked him in the eye.

“Thank you,” she said.

“One more thing,” said Roses as if the question had just occurred to him. “How did Mr. Tipton react to your discovery?”

“Stills?”

Annie thought back to Tuesday, the cemetery, the tombstones Stills was sketching before she found the woman on the park bench. The moment when she realized the woman was dead, strangled. She had turned towards Stills, shouting his name in a panic, and saw that he was already watching her, the hand holding the drawing pad and pencil hanging limply at his side. His expression—what? Not surprised exactly. But scowling, as though he was watching something distasteful.

She had screamed at him again, “Stills! She’s dead!”

Only then had he walked deliberately towards her, pulling his cell phone out of his pocket as he came.

Roses repeated his question, "How did Mr. Tipton react to your discovery? Miss Brandon?"

"He reacted just like I did. He was in shock."

* * *

Annie slid the cursor over the words "Wichita Wendy Bio" and clicked. The computer screen blinked, then refocused on a glamour still of Wendy in a hot pink cowgirl-fringed gown and big blond hair reminiscent of Marie Antoinette.

The website was the twelfth Annie had explored since Jamison returned her to the library too late to take her shift at the circulation desk. She now considered herself the county expert on the life and career of Wichita Wendy, banjo plucking diva, famed star of the Grand Ole Opry and bluegrass venues coast to coast.

Annie's compulsion to learn everything she could about Wendy ignited when she shook Roses' hand at the end of their interview.

"Have you found any connection between Lindy and Wendy?" she had asked the detective. "Besides me, that is."

"Not yet," he'd answered.

So far, her online search had scored her few interesting leads. The singer, she learned, was born in Lubbock, Texas, began performing in churches at eleven, and wore a size 5½ shoe. But apart from appear-

ing at Britt every three or four years over the past two decades, Annie could find no link between Wendy and anyone in the Rogue Valley.

She was scrolling through the twelfth biography when her cell phone vibrated in her pocket. She pulled out the phone, glancing at the caller ID just long enough to recognize Stills' number. She flipped it open.

"Hey, Stills. I'm so glad to hear from you."

"How're you doing, Reds? I hope I'm not interrupting anything." His voice was low, anxious.

"Of course not. I'm fine. Are you alright?"

"Sure." The phone crackled causing Annie to miss the next few words.

"Where are you, Stills?" said Annie. "I'm having trouble hearing you."

"I want to see you. Let's have dinner tonight, okay?"

"Sounds great. I'm in Medford right now. I could meet you at Howiee's Bar and Grill."

"Perfect." Stills sounded relieved. "I'll be there at five. See you then?"

"Yes." Annie snapped the phone shut, savoring the anticipation of seeing Stills soon. Her watch read 3:47 pm. Time enough to search one more website.

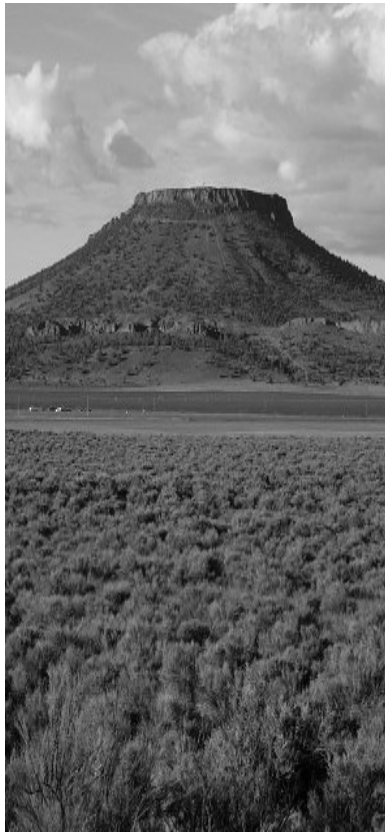
The thirteenth site featured an early black and white snapshot of

Wendy standing between her parents in front of a clapboard farmhouse near Lubbock. An array of other family shots followed. Annie scanned each picture and read the brief captions.

Wendy in a group of teens: *Lubbock Baptist Church Youth Group, Lubbock TX, 1973*. Wendy and a tall man posing before a chapel: *Wendy and Willie Tipton on their wedding day, Wichita KS, 1975*. Wendy with a baby in her arms and a towheaded toddler hanging onto her jeans-clad leg: *Wendy and sons, Crosby and Stills, Wichita KS, 1977*.

Annie reread the last caption five times.

“Oh my fucking Faulkner!” she breathed.



CHAPTER SIX

By Carole Beers

Annie heard the jubilant roar and smelled the roasting meat a full block before Howiee's on Front Street. It was only a bit after five, but already the younger crowd, pierced and tattooed like some African or Maori tribe, gathered under the red and white awning. Starting early, happy to be off work or classes. Maybe rehearsing grooves for Saturday's "Hot August Ink" night.

Annie felt exposed, out of her league, as she watched the talkers and gawkers in front of the restaurant. Even if she had a tattoo she sure wouldn't flaunt it in a party at this Medford hotspot. What was she thinking, that Howiee's at happy hour would be a sweet place to meet, and quietly pick Stills' brain on the delicate matter of his mother's murder?

At that moment the glass door swung open, and Stills pushed out of the building. He grinned broadly and held up two bulging white bags.

“How about take-out on Lower Table Rock?” he said. “Dinner with a sunset view? A snuggle under the stars?”

Seemed that he'd read her second thoughts about eating here. But Table Rock? The spot that inspired Jacksonville's first name, “Table Rock City”?

Annie hesitated.

“You mean, hike up there? It's still pretty warm out. And I don't have the right shoes. . .“

He looked down at her sturdy, rubber soled sandals. Then he reached out one of his tanned, strong hands to stroke her arm.

“Oh, you'll be fine, Reds. I have extra socks in my van if you need them. Anyway, there's lots of shade on the path. Not much more than a mile each way. And the views--they're killer!”

Still she was unsure. They might run into a rattlesnake on that ancient mesa--one of two eight-hundred-foot-tall remnants of an ancient lava flow. The two of them might even surprise a bear or cougar, both known to hunt at dusk.

But dusk wouldn't come for a few more hours. Stills seemed amped up to go. This was another chance for Annie to be spontaneous and adventuresome. And she'd find a way to talk about his mother. Learn if he had any theories about the killing. Or why he didn't seem concerned, even now.

“Um, you got lots to drink in those bags?”

“Affirmative.”

They walked around the corner to Stills' black van. He looked at her sideways as he shifted the bags to one arm, and unlocked the doors with a key-click.

He was sex on wheels. What might happen on Table Rock?

“Mind if we swing by Central Point on our way, Reds? Only take a minute. Got some business to do.”

“Sure,” she said, climbing in on the passenger side. “What is it?”

“Deliver product, collect payment.” He fired up the van, and eased into traffic.

As the air-conditioning took hold, Annie smelled rich leather and oil. It wasn't the upholstery. Probably Stills' handiwork in those boxes in the back.

They drove down Old Highway 99 a few short miles northwest of Medford. Car lots and repair stores, a grain tower, railroad platform, warehouses, motley shops and food joints jerked past in the rush-hour traffic. Soon they were in the farmer and workingman's community of Central Point. Modest homes and old street front buildings peacefully coexisted with sleek banks and groceries.

Stills slowed the van as they approached what looked like a squashed possum in the middle of the lane. Then he drove over it with a soft bump.

"When you're dead, you're dead," he said calmly.

Annie felt queasy. But Stills did have a point.

The next moment they'd turned right onto Oak Street, and right again into striped parking along the glass-and-brick façade of Central Point Branch Library. The modern building shared a concrete courtyard with City Hall. An old cast-iron street clock stood in front.

"Be a minute," Stills said, sliding out.

Annie slid out, too. She'd always wanted to check that clock. Now she saw its base held a plaque with the date, "1889." The date of the city's founding.

She walked toward where Stills had gone, down the paved and planted alley between buildings. Though closed for the day, the library--spied through the tall windows of the children's section with its castle-and-smiling-crocodile rug--appeared inviting as always. Bright, open, and booked-up spaces with reading tables circled the checkout desk. One of her favorite places to work.

The window now reflected Stills' image, to her left and behind Annie. He was feeling around a life-sized turn-of-the-century bronze sculpture of a boy pushing a pigtailed girl on a swing.

"Damn!" Stills said, again running his right hand under the swing.

Annie stepped toward him.

"What?"

“Something was supposed to be here, and isn't.” He rose to face her. His usually expressive face looked still as a mask. “Typical of him.”

“What's typical? Who's 'him'?”

“Later, Reds. We better get a move on.”

* * *

Annie glanced at the rearview time-readout as they drove back over I-5 toward Table Rock Road. Six o'clock. Still lots of time. More than enough for her questions.

But what was this about Stills' looking for something at the Library? Odd place to leave his product, or get paid. Was it something illegal? Hopefully not. Stills was a rare bird, but she doubted he was into drugs. He was too smart, too good, and too productive an artisan.

She shrugged. Maybe it was just how the man worked.

But something else made her stomach knot. What was up with his being so seemingly unaffected by his mother's murder? That was weird.

With Jackson County Fairgrounds off to the northwest and suburban sprawl framing their vision, they made for the steep-sided mesa. It sat lower along the Rogue River path that included Upper Table Rock, a half-mile upstream.

Past pear orchards thick with ripening fruit, and along hay fields and scattered farm homes they drove. A left onto Tresham Lane, then onto Wheeler Road, brought them to the Lower Table Rock parking lot and trailhead with its restroom and interpretive signs.

Several cars and a white pickup sat in the lot. Most of cars were empty. Inside the pickup sat a shadowy figure with a brimmed hat. There was a rifle in the back window.

Probably some macho cowboy or wannabe. Had to have the rifle though it wasn't deer or elk season. Anyway, you couldn't hunt on the Rocks. They were protected by the Nature Conservancy, and Bureau of Land Management. The rocks were home to native peoples for thousands of years until the 1850s, when Indians were "relocated" a few hundred miles north.

Outside the air-conditioned van the hot air hit Annie like a furnace. But there was a breeze, nicely scented with pine and a sage. It helped that this northeast shoulder of the oak-studded mesa was already in partial shade.

"We'll take it slow," said Stills. He handed Annie a water bottle. He stuffed the food bags into a backpack.

"Good," said Annie. Before beginning she pocketed her cell phone and a tube of pepper spray. The latter was to ward off bears. Or, heaven forbid, anything worse.

They gained altitude slowly, plodding mechanically and stopping often to catch their breath on the gravel path. It wound upward through oak, Indian plum and wild honeysuckle. Spaces between branches offered glimpses of the patchwork valley. Sometimes other hikers passed them going down.

Once Annie's feet slipped on the gravel. She skinned her knees.

But she soon found a slim, dead Madrone branch, stripped it and used it as a walking stick.

They didn't talk much. They needed their breath. But Stills hummed a tune that sounded a lot like the soft-rock oldie, "Love the One You're With" by Crosby, Stills & Nash.

Indeed! thought Annie. He's guessed I know who he is. So now what does he have in mind? Might as well lay it out.

"So. Stills. How are you feeling? You holding up OK?" *Casual approach. Be a little ambiguous. Wait for him.*

"I assume you mean after my mother's death," he said matter-of-factly, not missing a step.

He knows I know, then. Is that good, or bad?

"Yes." *Be cool. Say as little as possible.*

"I am still in shock," he said, clambering up the last bit of rocky trail onto the black hardened lava of the plateau. He extended a hand to help her up.

They kept walking awhile, savoring the view. They picked their way over rock, drying wildflowers, and scrub, toward the edge of the mesa. The sun still had heat, but was ready to drop behind mountains to the west. It cast a red hue over everything. But the wind was strong. Annie was glad for its cooling effect on her sweaty skin.

They reached a circle of rocks with sticks of charred wood and a crushed beer can in the middle. About twenty feet beyond stood the

jagged tops of columns of andesite that had broken away, or were about to break away, from the mother rock. At least once a year, some person, emboldened by chemicals or ego, fell to his death off the cliffs.

Annie sat on a large rock near where Stills stood in the circle. She took out the turkey-bacon-Swiss sandwich he gave her. He sat. They ate in silence for a few minutes.

“Talk about your family,” she began. “Were you close?”

“Never saw my real dad,” he said. “Not close to my brother or my sister. My friends are my family now.”

“You have a *sister*?”

“Thought you knew from sleuthing, Reds. Named Nash.”

“You’re kidding! Your mom was seriously into CS&N.”

“Sis changed her name, and I can’t remember it. We lost track. Real free spirit.”

Annie drained the last of the water from her bottle.

“Any theories, then, on who killed your mother?”

The wind caught a leaf and flipped it across his feet.

“Can’t say.”

Can't? Annie thought. Or won't?

It was growing dark now. The sun was down. The trees where they’d left the trail were black.

Stills stared over the graying mesa as he finished eating. He

talked of a new leather project. But he paused often. He seemed to be listening for something.

“The sandwich was delicious,” Annie said.

“Howiee’s does a good job,” he said, turning to her. It was hard to make out his features. But his eyes reflected the last light to the west. “What do you know?”

“I will ask you the same thing,” she said. “And more.”

Suddenly she started at a sharp clatter of stones over near the trees. Then came a heavy step. A manlike figure stood facing them.

Holy shit! A bear! Annie fumbled for her pepper spray.

Stills rose. He stared at the figure. His voice was raspy, but calm.

“Crosby. I knew you’d come.”



CHAPTER SEVEN

By Ed Battistella

This guy's a giant, Annie thought to herself. Crosby was about six foot six and closing in on 300 pounds. He had on motorcycle leathers, heavy boots and a black bandanna around his head. Tattoos, of course, and his blond hair tied back in a ponytail. His face was grim, almost menacing, and Annie gripped the pepper spray tightly, her thoughts racing. Stills' brother looked like a killer. Or maybe Crosby and Stills were in it together. Was she headed off of Table Rock by the express route?

Annie swallowed and tried to picture what Lisbeth Salander would do.

Spray the giant in the face, kick backward into Stills' crotch, and then...

And then Stills said, "Crosby, this is my friend Annie. I call her Reds."

The giant smiled crookedly and said "Pleased to meet you, Reds." His voice was high and gentle, and he held out his paw to shake hands. As they shook, and Annie said "Nice to meet you too, Crosby." She took a step back and looked at Stills. "What the Foucault is going on?"

"Crosby, uh, doesn't like closed spaces and he doesn't like to be around too many people. When we meet, it's usually up here." Stills looked at his brother, "Cros, I've got some bad news about Wendy. She's dead."

Crosby blanched and sputtered "She dead? Our mother's dead? How? She just wrote to me ... She can't be dead." Then he exploded, "WHAT HAPPENED?"

"Dunno, exactly. Annie and I found her on a park bench Jacksonville. She was murdered."

"Who--who would do that? When... Oh, my God." He started to cry in massive heaving sobs.

"It's a mystery, Cros." Stills said, too coldly for Annie's taste. She put her arm on Crosby's back--he was too big to hug. Then it registered. "Wait a minute. You said you heard from her."

Crosby's giant head bobbed up and down.

"What did she say?"

"I didn't open the letter," he sniffled. He was regaining some control.

Stills had been silent, but jumped in now. "Well, we need to read the letter and see what she wanted."

Crosby seemed worried all of a sudden.

Looking at his brother, Stills said, "Are you okay to walk back with us?" The giant nodded.

As they headed back down the trail, Stills told Annie a little about Crosby. He had a social anxiety disorder and because of his phobia, he lived in the wilderness, away from people. He had a cabin in Gold Hill but spent most of his time outdoors, reading. He made weekly trips to the Gold Hill Library to stock up on books, but otherwise tried to stay away from strangers. "He's okay with family," Stills said, "and he likes librarians. But otherwise, he's not a people person."

Annie squeezed the giant's arm and said, "I'm studying to be a librarian, Crosby. I'd like to be your friend too."

Crosby smiled and nodded, "Thanks."

When the trail narrowed, Crosby started to hyperventilate. Then he began singing to calm himself, "Our house is a very, very, very fine house. With two cats in the yard . . ." Before they were halfway down, Annie felt like she'd been at a Britt concert--"Wooden ship on the water, very free and easy," "Hello ruby in the dust, Has your band begun to rust."

Annie turned to Crosby and said, "You really sing well." As she turned, she twisted an ankle, and after she hobbled a few steps, Crosby offered to carry her the rest of the way. The trail was too narrow for him to cradle her in his arms so Crosby hoisted her over one shoul-

der, and she bounced her way down the trail, butt in the air, thumbs hooked in her waistband.

As she felt the dirt change to pavement under Crosby's feet, Annie heard a familiar voice. "Put the librarian down, or I'll shoot."

Stills yelped, "Whoa, Whoa! Don't shoot."

Annie was thankful that Crosby didn't drop her. He bent at the waist to lower her to the ground and put his hands up in a practiced motion. As Annie turned around, she saw Brenda in a shooter's stance, pointing a gun their way.

"Jumpin' Jack Kerouac!" Annie exclaimed, "What are you doing here, Brenda? I thought you were in Portland."

Brenda shook her head at Annie's exclamation. "I was worried. I saw you in front of Howie's and followed you here. Obviously I finished my Portland job in record time. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, uh, this is Crosby, Stills' brother."

Brenda was about to make a comment when Stills said, "You can put your hands down, Crosby."

Annie explained what they knew to Brenda. "We've got to find out what's in that letter," Annie said.

Crosby reddened. "Umm. The thing is, I lost it."

Crosby explained that he had been picked up the letter at the Gold Hill Post Office on the same day he had gone to the library. He stuck the

letter in one of the books he checked out for safekeeping. "I forgot all about it," he confessed. "And I returned the books a few days ago."

Stills was annoyed. "Why would you stick an important letter in a book you returned to the library?"

"I didn't know it was important. And I just forgot about it." He added sheepishly, "And I guess . . . I just I didn't really want to open it."

Annie jumped in, hoping to break the tension. "Well, you'd be amazed at some of the things I've found in books that are returned to us. Why, once I found a . . ."

Brenda sighed and rolled her eyes at the same time, a maneuver that Annie had never mastered.

"Oh sorry, focusing now." Annie said, chastened.

"So what book did you put the letter in, Crosby?" Brenda asked. "Maybe we can find it."

"I don't remember," Crosby said, looking at his boots, "I check out a lot of books. From all over."

Stills and Brenda both looked frustrated now. But Annie had an idea. "There might be a way to find out what Crosby has checked out." Annie explained that the library didn't routinely keep records of what people checked out for privacy reasons. But library patrons could set up their accounts to keep track of what they checked out. "The default setting," she explained, "is not to keep track. That way there are no records for the FBI to subpoena under the Patriot Act." Way too

much information, she realized. "Anyway, Crosby, do you remember how your patron account is set up?"

"The librarian helped me log on and set it up," Crosby said, "I think I asked her make it to keep track, so I would know what I already read."

Annie smiled. "This may work then. I'm at the Rogue River Library tomorrow," she began, and then she quickly outlined her plan.

After they agreed, Stills looked at his watch and then at Annie. "It's getting late," he said. "We should get out of here."

Annie jumped in and said, "Why don't I catch a ride back with Brenda. You and Crosby may want to catch up some more. We'll rendezvous at the Rogue River Library at 1 pm tomorrow."

Brenda laughed, "Shall we synchronize our cell phones? C'mon, let's get gone."

On the ride back, Annie confided her worries to Brenda. Stills was oddly secretive. Crosby had anxiety attacks. As she tried to puzzle out the day's events, Annie continued "And what was the deal at the Central Point Library swing set?"

"Maybe he's a seat sniffer." Brenda replied, wrinkling her nose. "What I want to know is what happened to this Nash, their sister?"

Annie laughed, "Me too. And there better not be any more of them."

When they picked up Annie's MINI Cooper, they decided to stop for a drink at Roscoe's BBQ in Phoenix. Annie followed Brenda down Highway 99 to a couple of parking spaces in front of the Ephemera novelty button company. They crossed the street, entered the old red building that was now a barbeque, beer, and music stop, and plopped down into a couple of chairs near the bar. They ordered local microbrews and perused the menu, just in case.

"Be right back," Brenda said.

When Brenda went to rest room, Annie checked her cell. She saw her sculptor friend Nestor's number and her brother-in-law Jamison's was there twice. And she saw a text from her sister Charisma: JMSNS PO'D!

She decided she could return the calls tomorrow.

When Brenda returned, Annie raised her glass and said "I never thanked you for not shooting me in the butt, by the way."

"It's my job to watch your ass, not blow it off. What have you gotten yourself into, anyway?" They talked through another round of drinks and a basket of fries, speculating about Wichita Wendy's mothering skills.

Finally, Brenda said, "I've got to be at the gym at 5:30 tomorrow. Time to call it a night."

Annie overslept the next day and barely made it to Rogue River on time. She usually liked to stop at the nearby Cottage Café for a

Rogue River Scramble, but had to skip that indulgence today. As she zipped into the library parking lot, she waved at Carmen Bearanda, the lipsticked dancing bear on the sidewalk. At least her ankle felt better.

Annie loved the spacious and well-lighted library on scenic East Main Street. As she worked the morning away reshelving books, she couldn't wait for the library to open so that Crosby could stop by. She went to check the time, only to discover she'd left her phone at home. *Oh, Pearl Buck!* she thought to herself.

At 1:05 pm, she was at the circulation desk, under the sculpture by local artist Charles Smith, when Crosby nervously shuffled in. Annie was struck again at how imposing he was and she imagined him as one of the Rogue River bear statues—"Crosby, the sad-eye bear." It could be a children's book too, she thought, except for the motorcycle leathers. When it was his turn, Crosby stepped up to the circulation desk and said, "Could you help me access my circulation record?"

"Certainly," she replied, pretending not to know him for appearances sake. "I'll just need your library card." Crosby reached into his leather vest pocket and pulled out his card. She scanned it, and handed the keyboard to Crosby to type in his password.

Annie pulled up his record and printed out a copy of the list for him. She glanced down the page. Crosby was quite a reader, she noticed. She made some mental notes on his list: essays by Ben Hur Lampman, poetry by Lawson Inada, and maritime histories by Dennis Powers. There were biographies of Ginger Rogers and Kim Novak.

There were political books--*On the Edge: Political Cults Right and Left* and *The Animal Manifesto*. There were food books--*Everyday Raw* and *Jam Today*. And there were mysteries galore: *Little Blue Whales*, *Blinded by the Light*, *Satan's Chamber*, *The Alchemist*. The list went on and on.

Crosby read way more than she did.

She handed him the sheets and picked up his card to return that as well. As she did, she noticed his password written on the top of the card, so he would remember it: WICHITA.

Her hand trembled a bit as she gave the card back. Crosby thanked her and headed outside. From her vantage point at the circulation desk, she watched as he shared the list with Stills and Brenda, who were waiting in the parking lot. The three of them took off—SUV, van and truck, a gas-guzzling parade heading to the Gold Hill Public Library. The plan was that they would find Crosby's most recent check-outs and, she hoped, find the letter from Wendy.

At 5:01 precisely, Annie waved goodbye and rushed out of the library. As she went into the parking lot she smelled something and glanced to her right. Standing by the totem pole outside the library was a thin man in a fedora, smoking a cigarette. *Where have I seen him before?* She thought. But Annie didn't have time to ponder. She wanted to get to Gold Hill as quickly as possible.

Annie turned right out of the parking lot, passed the Ben Franklin drug store, and piloted her MINI Cooper down North River Road to

Gold Hill, enjoying as always the scenic route paralleling the railroad tracks. She suppressed an urge to stop at Del Rio Vineyards and made her way into downtown Gold Hill. The library on Dardanelles Street was closed, and she kept going to Miguel's restaurant in the old Gold Hill Hotel.

As she walked in at 5:18 pm, she was greeted by Crosby, Stills and Brenda, hunched over a plate of nachos. Stills was rolling a bottle of Corona between his hands. Crosby clutched a glass of water and looked claustrophobic. Brenda was sipping black coffee. All three were facing the door.

"What took you, Reds?" Stills said.

Annie laughed. She had made record time. "Well? Did you find it? Was the letter in any of the books?"

Crosby shook his giant head from side to side.

"No," Brenda added, "We struck out. It wasn't in any of the books he checked out from Gold Hill."

"We even checked the lost and found," Crosby said.

Stills tipped up his bottle. "What now, Reds?" Annie watched his Adam's Apple bob as he swallowed the last of his beer.



CHAPTER EIGHT

By Maryann Mason

“Stills, would you order me an iced tea?” Annie pulled a small notebook and a pencil out of her purse.

Stills walked over to the bar and bought himself another Corona as well as the ice tea. After collecting the drinks, he stood there chatting with the attractive bartender.

“Crosby, when did you return the books?”

His eyes rolled back a bit as he thought. “Tuesday, I think, Annie. I know the library wasn’t open, and I shoved them in the building’s return slot.” Crosby wasn’t quite

meeting her eyes, and he fidgeted with his watchband.

“Did you ask the librarian to check the area around the book drop in case it dropped out?”

“Affirmative,” replied Brenda, “we checked everywhere it might have fallen.”

Stills returned with the drinks, plopped in his chair, and tipped back on its back legs. He picked up the napkin and started tearing patterns around its edge.

“Good. That means that the letter is probably still in the book. Brenda, did you ask to see all copies of each book?”

“Well, it is a small library and they only had one copy of each.”

“I don’t see why we need the letter,” Stills said. “Wendy is dead, and she was probably just bragging about her concert last Sunday anyway.”

Annie studied Stills. Today he was definitely going for the Bad Boy look. His blond hair was hanging in his face instead of tucked behind his ears like he usually wore it. His torn black tee shirt was outside his blue-jean shorts. She loved the way he normally wore his shirts snug and tucked in to show his well defined six.

“Well, there are a few places I might look. But I have a few questions here that might help us make sense of this disaster. Guys, when was the last time you saw your mother?” Annie fiddled with her notebook, after glancing at a page of notes.

Crosby looked at Stills. Stills sipped his beer and glared at Annie.

“Annie, neither of us have talked to Wendy in years. We weren't a close family.” Stills had always been a man of few words, but his inflection suggested it was not a topic for discussion.

“No concert Sunday night?” Annie asked.

“We grew sick of her music and ego years ago.” Stills ended the conversation by finishing his beer and slamming it solidly on the table. “Come on, Crosby. I'll take you home.”

“Will I see you tomorrow, Stills?” Annie brushed her red hair out of her eyes. *What is with him today? Perhaps he is just being protective of Crosby. Why is he just sitting there, deciding what to say?*

“Yeah. Great. When are you free?” He seemed tired. Or disinterested. He shoved his chair back, standing impatiently.

“I work tomorrow from ten to two.”

“Okay. Maybe a late lunch, then.”

“Wait. You don't know where I'm working. Way up in Butte Falls.”

“Whoa. I had no idea they even had a library,” Stills said.

“A very nice one actually. I have never been there before because the Prospect librarian usually substitutes, but their librarian came down with the flu on Thursday and both librarians are unavailable. The Saturday hours are a Special Event Request approved by Jackson County.”

“Whatever. Okay if I meet you at the library at two?”

“Sure. I’ll scout out some good food. See you then.”

Stills motioned to Crosby who obediently stood and followed him to the door, walking as if he held the problems of the world on his shoulders. Crosby looked back sheepishly and waved at Annie and Brenda. They piled into Stills’ van and drove away.

* * *

“You are so naïve. Why are you encouraging him? You don’t really know that much about him,” said Brenda.

“Right. I don’t know that much about him, but we need to know more to solve this crime,” Annie replied. “Were there any books on his list not in the library?”

“Oh, there was one. It was *Worth Dying For* by Lee Church. No. . . Lee Child.”

“Now that’s important. That’s a new book, and there’s probably a “hold” on it. Those are books the library sets aside and delivers to readers on a reserved list. I’ll definitely track that down and do more research on Wendy.”

“Annie, that’s what you do best. But you’re out of your league with Stills and his brother. They know something about his mother’s murder. I just feel it.”

“It’s not like you to be so irrational, Brenda. You’re my ‘let’s see the evidence, first’ person. Let’s call it a day. I need to run some errands and get home to do some laundry. All of the murder discussions have left me seriously behind in my housework.”

"I have some reports to write up, so I should go too. But first, I need to confess that I postponed the industrial spying job because I was worried about you. Will you promise to call me if anything new happens?"

Giving her friend a goodbye hug, Brenda grabbed her backpack and left the restaurant.

* * *

Saturday morning Annie was determined to have a good day working and pursuing leads. As she gathered her GPS and purse, she stopped to send Charisma and Jamison a text message. "CY. CUL8R. Working." Hopefully that will hold them until she got a chance to explain what is going on. She needed to start for Butte Falls early because driving time was a little over an hour. According to the reserved list and courier logs at the main library, the courier had dropped off the Lee Child book at Butte Falls Thursday. With her luck, the book will be checked out all ready, but at least she could check.

The forty some miles seemed like a hundred. Crater Lake highway was packed with cars. Finally traffic began to move as she drove her MINI Cooper past Eagle Point. It was a beautiful day. Mt. McLoughlin popped out of the landscape majestically. The Woods house. Plenty of Open Range signs. *Wonder if there are ever cattle on the road. They would really mess up this car.*

As the third log truck passed her, she mused that she had never seen so many log trucks in her life. A cattle guard. Not only was Butte

Falls one of the smallest towns in Oregon, it was possibly the only one with a cattle guard at the town's entrance. It was 9:30 am. Thankfully she had a half hour to read instructions and orient herself to the library. Ahead there was a huge banner over Main Street advertising the folk festival. Turning right toward the library, she passed a football field full of small town excitement. A stage held fiddlers warming up. Stands featured food vendors and artisans. Parking her MINI Cooper in front of the library, Annie shoved the GPS into the glove compartment and grabbed her purse. She pulled the paper with the code for the back door out of her pocket, punched the numbers, and she was in.

It was a small, beautiful building full of light.

Above the front door, logging pictures from Butte Falls' history were arranged below big windows. Moving to the desk, she powered on the computer and picked up the instructions on the desk. The furniture had already been arranged for today's talks and chairs were set up in the entry space. Coyote stories at 10:30 am; Tales of the Loggers at 12:30 pm. Annie walked around the room's perimeter, finally stopping behind her desk. There, shoulder high, was the shelf of held books. She pulled each one out, and there, next to the last, was Child's *Worth Dying For*. Annie flipped through the book. The letter. Swirly, cursive handwriting: Crosby Tipton, P.O. Box 232, Gold Hill, Oregon. *This will have to wait until later*. She shoved it deep into her backpack.

The day flew by. People in this town were charming. She had checked out twenty books, including *Worth Dying For*. She had been asked everything from where the falls were (*she had no idea*) to when

the Bugs Are Us program would be (*the poster on the wall said next Thursday.*) There was standing room only for the programs. Before she knew it Stills was standing at her desk, hair neatly pulled back, in handsomely snug jeans and a tight tucked maroon pocket tee.

“Hey, happy to see you. You’re looking good.”

“You too, Annie. I had no idea that Butte Falls would be such a happening place today. Are you ready? I’d like to check out the crafts across the street. I’m sorry I missed a chance to sell my leather here. Great music too.”

“I have to turn off the computers, lights, do a few things. They want me to leave the chairs where they are. Give me five minutes.”

* * *

After wandering around the field past pottery stalls, wood crafters, and food vendors selling everything from fry bread to dolmas, Annie suggested lunch at the Butte Falls Café. *There is no way we can have a serious conversation out here with all the noise and crowds. Besides I hear they have great pies.*

Inside, the green checked curtains and tablecloths gave the small café a homey feeling. Most of the action was outside, and there was just one couple in the corner, finishing up their lunch. Annie and Stills took the other corner table by the front window and ordered Rubens with onion rings.

“Who’s in charge of Wendy’s funeral, Stills?”

“Her agent made arrangements back in Texas and they tell me

her body was just released yesterday. Crosby and I don't have anything to do with it."

"So did you grow up with your mom or your dad?"

"Dad's been out of the picture since we were five. He divorced mom after a fling with the town waitress. So mom said anyway. Barely remember him."

"What about Nash?"

"Nash had a different father. Some guitar player from one of her tours. He didn't hang around long either."

"So did Wendy raise all of you?"

"Hell no. After playing local bars in Lubbock, she left us with Grandma to go on tour when we were in elementary school. Nash went to live with the guitar player dad, so we lost track of her. Grandma died about ten years ago."

"I'm sorry. Sounds like a tough beginning."

"It's true that Wendy's mom didn't pay that much attention to us either. She was so proud of Wendy. Told us of every concert. Played her records constantly."

Annie dipped her onion ring in some catsup. She was debating the huckleberry pie while Stills finished his sandwich.

"Annie, why are you so interested in Wendy?"

"No special reason. Finding her was a shock. But mostly I just wanted to know you better."

"I'm a simple guy, just trying to perfect my craft and stay out of trouble."

"To me you appear to be the strong, quiet type, Stills, but definitely not simple. But tell me about the product you were really placing in Central Point yesterday."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not street smart, Stills, but that stop the other day was not about leather."

"Okay, Annie. But it is not as bad as it looks. I'm not pushing drugs, but I do deliver some oxycontin and pick up payments once in a while for a friend. I get a small cut, and it helps keep my craft going in a bad economy."

"Aren't you afraid of getting picked up in a drug bust?"

"No. I never meet the dealer, and I have a prepaid I use for all communications. I'm careful, I swear."

After a long lunch, Stills went back to listen to the fiddlers, and Annie drove home. By late afternoon, the log truck traffic from Medco Pond had stopped, and the curvy drive was not so stressful. Annie thought about that letter jammed in her backpack. What to do. Give it to Jamison? Give it to Crosby?

* * *

Sitting at her kitchen table Annie slipped her sharpest knife under the flap of Crosby's envelope. *This is not like me. I have never*

ever snitched someone's mail. She stared at it before pulling the two handwritten pages from the envelope. Oh, there were also two tickets. And a back stage pass.

Dear Crosby,

Forgive me for writing you, but since you are without a cell phone or computer, it was my best shot, Sweetie. I want you to have these tickets to my concert Sunday, and this Backstage pass for two. Your mumsy misses you and would love to buy you drinks afterwards. I want to tell you more about my wonderful news. I hope that Nash can be there too.

I came to the valley early to pick up a temporary drummer. (My last drummer quit, just before my tour. Can you believe that?) While I was staying in Ashland auditioning drummers, I saw Nash's picture in the paper. It had been a few years since her dad Greg Hansen sent me a picture, but I recognized her immediately. We had coffee, and she promised to come to the concert this weekend. She's calling herself Lindy these days. Nash is really making big news with her bike riding. She always was a showoff.

My big news has to do with this fabulous ranch I bought in Texas for my retirement. It is 40,000 acres with whitetail, mule deer, wild turkeys, waterfalls, Trujillo Creek. It's like the ranch Great Uncle Harry had, only 100 times larger and it has a river rock fireplace. It was a steal for

\$15,000,000. I will need lots of help running it. Hint. Hint.

Hope to see you Sunday.

Your mom,

Wendy

P.S. Just got off the phone with Stills to bring him up to speed.

We are all going to have a great reunion in Jacksonville.



CHAPTER NINE

By Michael Niemann

“With nights like this, who needs days,” Annie said to no one in particular when she crawled out of bed on Sunday morning. The night had been awful, her sleep fitful. Every time she woke up, she ran through the implications of the letter until she was so exhausted she fell asleep again.

When morning finally came, she’d made no progress, except for one conclusion. The two murders were connected. There was no doubt in her mind.

But that just raised more questions. Who’d kill mother and daughter? Why didn’t Stills mention his sister at all, even after she was murdered? Not to mention, why didn’t he tell her that the dead Wichita Wendy was his mother? And what about Crosby? He seemed like a big teddy bear, but could she trust her instincts? Maybe he had more severe mental issues than social anxiety disorder. Hey, the guy lived in a cabin out in the wilderness. Or was there someone else who had an axe to

grind with the whole family? Like that father who disappeared a long time ago. Or that man with the fedora.

Outside, the air was already hot. Her skin felt sticky. She started the electric kettle and hurried into the shower to rinse off the sweat and nightmares.

Looking into the mirror afterwards, she saw her face was even paler than usual. She grabbed the washrag and rubbed her cheeks until they were red. There. That was better. She pulled on her robe.

In the kitchen, the kettle's thermostat had clicked off. She grabbed a chamomile teabag from the cupboard. Her hand stopped in mid-air. Chamomile tea wouldn't do at all, she thought. Not after a night like that. Lisbeth Salander wouldn't drink Chamomile tea.

She dressed, grabbed her bag and headed for the Key of C coffee house for a large coffee and a bagel.

She felt the warmth of the first sip of coffee course through her body and wondered why she'd given up coffee in the first place. Probably some Ashland thing. This town had a way of making strange things seem perfectly normal. Lisbeth would have lit a cigarette, but Annie drew the line there.

With her wits somewhat restored, the questions returned. Stills' role in all this bothered her. He'd never been one to open up. Not exactly rare for a man. Their relationship could be rocky, especially when Stills was in a bad mood. But the tiffs never lasted long, and he could be so loveable and gentle afterwards.

Still, he'd never behaved as he did during the past week. His silence about Wendy and Lindy was just plain bizarre.

Her cell phone beeped before she could finish the thought. A calendar reminder flashed on the screen.

"Oh, Faulkner!" she swore. In all the turmoil, she'd forgotten that she had signed up to help out with the shelving backlog at the White City and Eagle Point libraries.

* * *

The stretch between Medford and White City was her least favorite drive, especially having to drive it for the second time in as many days. Nothing but big box stores, lumber yards and RV dealers.

After opening the library, she stood still and took in the cool silence. She loved the interior of the White City branch, the soaring wood ceiling supported by white steel beams. A calm oasis on a hot day. She sized up the carts with returned books. It would take her a good hour.

Shelving was tedious so her mind returned to the unsolved questions. As strange as Stills' behavior had been, he couldn't be the killer. He'd been with her when they found Wendy. But he was hiding something.

Crosby? He could have been at both places. But why? She knew so little about him. He was an outdoorsman who read voraciously but without any direction. She'd met people like him at the Ashland

library, homeless men—usually older—who spent many hours in the library.

She pushed the cart to the next aisle to shelve a stack of non-fiction books. Mechanically, she scanned the first three digits of the call number—959—searched the shelf for the right spot and slid the book into its place. One title caught her eye, *Our War: What We Did to Vietnam and What It Did to Us*.

Good title, she thought. No doubt the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would spawn similar books in a decade or two. The funeral of the soldier who'd been just killed in Afghanistan came to her mind. What a shame. So many interrupted lives, so many veterans who couldn't fit in after coming home.

Could Crosby be a veteran? He was too young for Vietnam and too old for Afghanistan. There was the first Iraq war, but that, too, was quite a while ago. Maybe Crosby was older than he looked.

Don't be silly, she thought. You don't know if he is a veteran. It's pure speculation.

But he could be. She knew from conversations with some of the vets in Ashland that the VA Rehab center just across Crater Lake Highway catered specifically to mentally ill and homeless vets. Maybe Crosby lived in the area to have access to VA services.

* * *

Annie knew it was a dumb idea the moment she drove into the VA

grounds. It was a Sunday, for God's sake. No office would be open. Even if they were staffed, they wouldn't tell her, an assistant librarian, anything.

If only I could hack computers like Lisbeth, she thought. I'd be in their system in no time and would have found out if they had any information about Crosby.

The VA facility was well maintained; the two story buildings were neatly aligned on freshly cut lawn, even fresh white paint on several door and window frames. She slowly drove past the administration building. Closed. The whole installation seemed very quiet.

She reached the western end of the grounds and saw a bunch of people practicing their shots on a putting green and on a driving range. Who knew they had a golf course at the VA. The thought of asking them about Crosby made her uneasy. It was such a long shot.

Damn it, she said to herself. I've got a hunch and I'm going to follow it.

She got out of the car.

"Good morning, gentlemen," she said when she reached the green.

"Ain't nobody call me a gentleman in a long while," a tall black vet said with a big smile. "But a good morning to you, little lady. Here for some golf?"

"No, just looking for a long lost friend. He's a vet and I thought he might come here. His name is Crosby, you know, like the singer."

“Almost cut my hair, eh?” a vet with a buzz cut said. The men laughed.

Annie didn't get the joke.

“It's one of David Crosby's famous songs,” the vet said.

“Oh, well, he's a big guy, blond hair, over six feet and wears leather clothes. Have you seen him around here?”

The black vet shook his head. So did the others.

“Maybe some of the folks at the driving range have seen him?” he suggested.

Annie followed his suggestion and repeated her question to another group of golfers. Most shook their heads, but a vet with long hair frowned.

“I might have seen him,” he said. “Blond ponytail and lots of tattoos?”

Annie's heart skipped a beat.

“Yeah, that's him. Does he come here often?”

“I don't know, maybe twice a month. He's not much of golfer. Comes to hang out a little, get his meds, and then he's gone again.”

“What are his meds for?”

“Not sure. He ain't the talkative guy. I'd reckon PTSD, like most of us here. He was in Mogadishu when those Rangers got killed. Barely got out.”

"When did you last see him?"

The vet thought for a while. He shrugged.

"Has been a while. At least three weeks."

"Thanks a lot, I'll find him somehow. Enjoy your game."

The men nodded and Annie got back into her car. So she *was* right. Crosby was a vet, and he has more than the social anxiety disorder. And he might be out of meds. Before she could follow that thought, her cell phone rang.

"Hey Reds, it's Stills. Where are you?"

"In White City."

"You want to have lunch?"

"I can't, Stills. I'm on my way to the Eagle Point library. It'll be at least an hour and half before I'm done there."

She didn't really want to have lunch with Stills, not until she knew more.

"Oh," he said. "Eagle Point? Hey, I could pick you up and we could go rafting on the Rogue."

"I don't really feel like rafting. I need to get my work done and I need some time alone."

There was a long pause.

"OK, I'll talk to you later."

His voice sounded a lot colder.

* * *

The rows of white grave markers, each marked with a name, date of birth, date of death and theater of war, stretched along the lawn around the hilltop that marked the center of the Eagle Point National Cemetery. The vistas were breathtaking, especially the gorgeous view of Mt. McLoughlin to the east.

Stills had surprised her—it felt more like an ambush—when she locked up the Eagle Point library. She didn't want to go for another picnic, and lunch at a cemetery felt just a little too macabre. But Stills begged, and he did have two bags of yummy looking food. So she gave in.

Stills was very solicitous, spreading out a blanket and getting the picnic ready. The coldness she'd heard on the phone was all gone. He could be that way, withdrawn and moody one moment and then totally nice the next.

But she was tired of those mood changes. Time to confront him, she thought. I need to know what's going on with him, with us.

“Why didn't you tell me that Lindy was your sister Nash?”

“Oh, you must have found the letter.”

His face showed no emotion.

“Yes, but that doesn't answer my question. Listen Stills, I'm sick and tired of all this secrecy.” Her voice rose a few decibels. “I've found two dead bodies. I've been questioned by the police. I have nightmares. My whole life's been turned upside down. Meanwhile,

your family is all wrapped up in this mess, but you don't tell me anything. What kind of a relationship is that?"

Stills' face grew dark as he finished chewing the bite he'd just taken from his sandwich. He raised his hand, but Annie was on a roll.

"And what about Crosby being a vet with PTSD and needing meds. You could have told me that. For all I know, he killed Lindy and Wendy. I just don't get why you keep silent about all that."

"Do you think I enjoy dealing with my fucked-up family," he shouted back, his face red with anger. "It's not exactly a family to be proud of. I've got a fat mother who screws around, a sister who rides her bike naked, and a brother who either isn't all there because he's on meds or half crazy because he's off them." He caught himself and took a deep breath. His face changed from angry to pitiful. "I just want a normal life with you. When all this happened, I panicked and tried to pretend I wasn't part of my family. I'm really worried about Crosby."

Annie felt her anger melt away. Of course he was right. That family was totally screwed up.

She scooted closer and put her arms around him.

"There, there. It's ok, Stills. I know it can't have been easy."

The silence lasted only a moment. Then Stills looked up, all smiles again, took her arm and kissed her hand with a gallant gesture.

"Thanks. So, how about that rafting. It's burning hot and the Rogue is nice and cool. It'll be fun."

“Stills, I don’t know.”

“Don’t be a spoil sport, Reds. It’s hot; you need a break from all this trouble. Let’s just kick back and float. Maybe squirt some of the other rafters. I know you have a swimming suit in your car.”

He was right. She liked doing laps at the Ashland YMCA and always carried a spare suit in her car. And, yes, it was hot and she did need a break. Besides, they needed to make a plan and floating down the Rogue gave them a chance so sort that out.

“OK,” she said after a moment and the knot in her stomach relaxed a little.



CHAPTER TEN

By Tim Wohlforth

Annie tried to relax as Stills allowed the raft to float down the river, occasionally dipping an oar to correct their course. They passed through an unpopulated area. Here and there an oak or a willow clung to the bank. Then grassland, now burnt brown by the summer's sun. It was a hot day, quiet except for the buzz of insects and the rasping screech of a scrub jay that chased them, hopping from tree to tree along the bank. No bikini for her, she wore the Speedo suit she used while lap swimming.

Annie had followed Stills' black van in her MINI Cooper as

he drove to a small cove where they planned to pick up the raft. "This is the last retrieval spot before the rapids," he had commented. He had parked the van and then joined her in her car as she made her way back to the raft rental place in Gold Hill.

He seemed upbeat, the Stills she really liked. Unpredictable, such a relief from rigid Bob, her old boyfriend. Always good company. Just what she needed. Funny, his lightheartedness made her actually miss Bob. Difficult as Bob was, there was something there that she respected. Character she guessed you could call it. Stills? It was like he was always conning her.

She had remained worried on the drive back. The two murders were not to be made light of. Stills didn't seem to care. He had lost a mother and a sister, yet he smiled and joked and chatted. She understood he was trying to lift her spirits. However, the effect was just the opposite.

They drifted silently down the river. She had come here to talk, but she was not talking. Finally she decided she could put off the discussion no longer.

"Stills, we need to talk."

"So talk, Reds." He smiled. Was he laughing at her?

"It's about Crosby. He must have murdered Wendy. Possibly Nash as well. You know that. I don't know if it was for the money or an old grudge. You know he's mentally unstable. You can't cover for him anymore. You've got to get him to turn himself in. You can do that. He listens to you."

“Yes, he does. He always has. You don’t get it, do you? You never did. You’re a believer, Annie. You’ve helped me from the beginning as I knew you would. Me, I believe in nothing, so I triumph.”

Annie looked aghast. Stills! The mask he hid behind now fell away. There was a different person staring at her. Not with hatred. Actually lacking in emotion. Analytical. Like a biologist preparing to dissect a bug.

“That letter,” he continued. “It’s too bad you opened it and read it. Now you’re the only one besides me and Crosby who knows that the naked lady was Nash. You’re the only one who can link the two murders.”

“It was you!” Annie shouted. “You killed them!”

“I couldn’t have. You are a witness to where I was when Wendy died. I never kill. I just reap the benefits of death. Just think of it. Millions, millions coming my way from that fat bitch. All to me alone. No Nash.”

“But there’s Crosby.”

“He was my tool, my weapon. When I told him to kill, he killed. First Nash, then Wendy. Like a pistol, a shotgun. I’ve finished with him and he’s no longer a problem. I saw to that before meeting you at the library. Now there is only you. I said I didn’t kill. I misspoke. I should have said I only kill when I have no one left to kill for me.”

The current picked up speed. Annie could hear the roar of rapids ahead. They shot past Still’s parked van, heading straight for a drop

off so sharp she could see nothing beyond the wall of water. Louder, louder became the sound of waves crashing against rock. Flotsam and jetsam made up of logs, tree branches, scraps of wood, flashed past. Stills started rowing hard.

“Stills, You’re crazy. We’re both going to drown.”

“I will survive. I have been rafting for years. You will not.”

Annie tried to stand up in the pitching raft. Swing at him with her paddle. The raft, caught in the powerful current, slapped her back into her seat. Instinctively all she could do was hold on as the rubber craft plummeted—down, down, down what had become a waterfall. Spray blinded her. She couldn’t see Stills. But she heard him. He was laughing hysterically.

When the raft reached the bottom of the waterfall, Stills steered it into an eddy. Then he abruptly turned the craft and plowed the bow directly into the rushing waters, flooding the raft.

Stills picked up one oar and swung it directly at Annie’s head. She grabbed it but was swung out of the raft and into the rushing current. Annie did not let go. Her momentum pulled Stills from the boat as well. She lost her grip on the oar and was swept down the river, banging into rocks.

Annie became just one more piece of flotsam, bashed sideways, then upside down, then swept under the water. A rock smashed into her head. Dizzy. She swallowed water. Darkness. *Was this the end?*

No! Not me! Not Annie! I must do what Lisbeth would do.

She knew she could not let the current propel her like a log bouncing off rocks until she drowned. She began to swim. She had strong arms, a perfect kick.

I am in charge of me! I must create my own momentum, force myself forward. Make my own way.

She narrowly missed the sharp point of an outcropped log. Then took a powerful blow to her side from a rock. Knocked the wind out of her lungs. She swallowed more water. But she was surviving, still in charge.

Gradually the current began to slow. She made her way to the shore. Grasped a tree root. Pulled herself out. She was alive. Darkness. She fell unconscious. A sound. Someone was hovering over her. She opened her eyes and looked straight into the face of the man with the fedora.

* * *

Annie sat at a large table on the deck behind the Standing Stone Brewery in Ashland. She'd spent two days at the Ashland Community Hospital, getting checked out for broken bones and a possible concussion. But she suffered only from bruises. Luckily she was the kind of woman who bounces. Lisbeth would be proud of her.

Directly facing Annie was the man with the fedora. He had introduced himself as Ed Barton, an investigator who worked for Brenda. The second she heard of the murder of the naked lady, her good friend

had asked him to keep an eye on her. Also at the table were Brenda and Annie's sister Charisma with her policeman husband Jamison.

No one had told her anything when she was in the hospital not wanting to upset her. Of course, being in the dark is exactly what did upset her. While Annie sipped her pint of amber and chomped away on a large juicy hamburger, Jamison filled them all in on the murders.

"We got a call from Ed here when he found you. I went up there and joined a search party from the sheriff's office. We found Stills farther down the river entangled, along with a rafting oar, in a tree trunk. Drowned. We figure he must have hit his head on a rock. You don't know how lucky you were, Annie."

"What about Crosby?" she asked.

"We found him dead in his cabin. Shot in the head, surrounded by a pile of books. On top was the book Linda/Nash had checked out, *Everyday Raw*."

"That's so sad. He could murder as his brother directed, but he had to have another book."

"We found a 9mm Glock in Stills' van," Jamison continued. "We're doing the ballistics test now, but we are pretty sure it's the murder weapon."

"It's just as Nica foretold during her séance," Charisma said. "The murderer was someone close to you, the strong hands, the cold heart."

"What about the manifesto?" Annie had to ask.

“Well, that letter. That’s kind of like a manifesto.”

This was not the time nor place to deal with Charisma. Annie took a long sip from her ale then another bite of her burger while Charisma filled in the rest on the wonders of Nica’s vision.

Annie retreated into her own thoughts, blocking out her table mates and the now quite noisy Standing Stone scene. Jamison’s accounting of events caused her to think about the whole experience. Something had changed in her. Something fundamental, irreversible. Of course she felt betrayed. That scoundrel Stills played her like a Steinway. He said she was a believer. And so she was and will remain. She knew that meant she risked betrayal again. So be it. She had no desire to cut herself off from people so as not to be hurt. That is not what had changed.

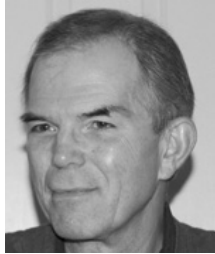
The Naked Lady. Annie had so admired her strength, her self-confidence, her refusal to bow to the prejudices of others. All characteristics she had felt were missing in her make-up.

But no more. I learned bouncing around in that river that I can be strong. I have earned my own respect.



THE WRITERS

ED BATTISTELLA



Ed Battistella teaches English at Southern Oregon University. He is the author of four books, most recently *Do You Make These Mistakes in English? The Story of Sherwin Cody's Famous Language School* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Battistella is the author and facilitator of the popular local blog, LiteraryAshland.org, reporting on writing and reading in Southern Oregon. He's frequently seen on community television where he interviews visiting mystery and crime fiction writers on *Ashland Mystery rvtv noir*.

CAROLE BEERS



Carole Thompson Beers is a retired journalist and avid horsewoman living in Grants Pass. She is crafting a final draft of *Blood Rider*, a young-adult mystery novel that moves between the Old and New West. The Monday Mayhem Mystery Writing Group headed by Tim Wohlforth keeps her focused.

Beers began writing at age seven, penning Western stories inspired by cowboy and mystery radio shows and novels. She earned a journalism degree at the University of Washington, and sold stories to romance and confession magazines. Beers' main writing experience was writing stories, columns and arts reviews for The Seattle Times newspaper. She interviewed scores of celebrities, from Microsoft honchos to Movieland icons, including Katharine Hepburn and John Wayne.

CAREN CALDWELL



Caren Hathaway Caldwell, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, taught high school as a Peace Corps volunteer in Samoa, worked in social service agencies, on community newspapers and is a long-time community activist. She writes plays and stories for children. Accounts of her experience raising an adopted son with special needs have appeared in *Cup of Comfort* anthologies. Caldwell developed early publicity for the Naked project.

MORGAN HUNT



Morgan Hunt is the author of the Tess Camillo mysteries, featuring a contemporary Odd Couple, two women -- one lesbian, one straight; one ditzy and dreamy, the other logical and linear-minded. They care deeply about each other through meals, jobs, love affairs, poker games and a bout with breast cancer. And then... they solve murders! Morgan Hunt was raised on the Jersey shore in Brigantine where she was fascinated with things like conch eggs and learning the Hebrew alphabet. Hunt played at college, enlisted in the Navy serving at Brunswick, Maine and San Diego, then worked for 25+ years in communications and public relations. She now hides out in the Pacific Northwest, twenty miles from the actual location of Einstein's brain. MorganHuntBooks.com

MARYANN MASON



Maryann Mason of Ashland Oregon, has taught history and English in the Midwest, Northwest, and Bolivia. She writes history spots for local public radio, interviews mystery writers for *Ashland Mystery rvtv noir*, and edits personal and family histories. Her poetry has appeared in *Sweet Annie & Sweet Pea Review* 1999, *Rain Magazine* 2007, and *The Third Reader, An Online Journal of Literary Fiction and Poetry*. In 2008 she published her first chapbook, *Ravelings*. Mason coordinated the *Naked* project, maintaining continuity and editing the overall work.

MICHAEL NIEMANN



Michael Niemann is a writer and teacher. Educated in Germany and the United States, he has a Ph.D. in International Studies from the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. He is a latecomer to fiction writing, although he has been a mystery reader for as long as he has known of John Le Carré. His first introduction to writing fiction was a 2002 summer course taught by his friend, the late Fred Pfeil, winner of the Pushcart Press Editor's award for his collection *What They Tell You to Forget*. After catching the fiction bug, he took an advanced creative writing class with Lucy Ferriss, author, most recently, of *Unveiling the Prophet: The Misadventures of a Reluctant Debutante* and five other novels.

Since moving to Southern Oregon from Connecticut in 2008, Niemann has been a member of a mystery writing group which includes author Tim Woforth. Niemann produced each *Naked* chapter as .epub and .mobi formats.

MARY ROBSMAN



Mary Robsman is a retired educator who taught elementary and junior high students in Illinois, California, Iowa, and Department of Defense schools in Germany. She was professor of education at University of Central Florida, Rollins College, and most recently Southern Oregon University. She is now a member of the Siskiyou Sleuths mystery book club and Friends of the Talent Library. She enjoyed her collaboration with local mystery authors to write a killer story to support the libraries' Jackson County Reads Oregon Mysteries program. However, she admits, "I've never in my writing career killed anyone."

Mary's first book of nonfiction is *What Made Us Who We Are Today, World War II Oral History*. She coauthored a series of adventure stories intended for school-age reluctant readers, published in the newspaper, *Florida Today*. She was an editor and contributor to *Canine Capers: Mystery in Oak Valley*, a chapter book featuring dog detectives in Talent, Oregon. Currently she is writing a creative nonfiction book based on the life of First Lady Julia Dent Grant who lived in Galena, Illinois, Mary's hometown.

TIM WOHLFORTH



Tim Wohlforth's thriller *Harry*, which deals with eco-terrorism and is set in the Northwest, was published in May 2010. *The Pink Tarantula*, a short story collection, was published in 2011 by Perfect Crime Books. A contemporary noir novel, *No Time To Mourn*, was published in 2004. Wohlforth has published over 75 short stories which appeared in *Hardcore Hardboiled* (Kensington), MWA's *Death Do Us Part*, (Little Brown), *Plots With Guns* (Dennis McMillan) and other anthologies. Two of his stories have made the "Distinguished Mystery Stories" list in Otto Penzler's *Best American Mystery*. He is a Pushcart Prize Nominee and received a Certificate

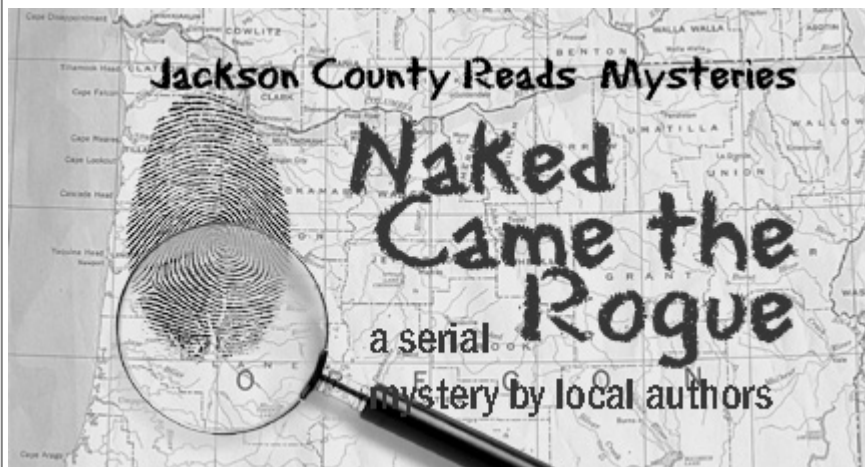
of Excellence from the Dana Literary Society. Wohlforth framed the *Naked* project by defining the first victim and describing the protagonist. For more information on Tim Wohlforth, visit TimWohlforth.com

LYDA WOODS



Lyda Woods, MFA, MA, runs the Gumshoe Gourmet, LLC, an entertainment production company that specializes in murderously-funny, slightly-historic mysteries. These interactive shows have entertained native Rogues for six years. Her Gumshoe clients include: the American Cancer Society, Ashland New Plays Festival, the Craterian Theater, Hearts & Vines, the Children's Miracle Network, the Medford Police Association and Harry & David.

Woods' MFA is from the American Conservatory Theater; her master's thesis was a solo piece that was produced at Life on the Water Theater in San Francisco. She has taught writing at City College of San Francisco, San Francisco State University and other Bay Area colleges and now at Rogue Community College. You can reach her at lyda.woods@gmail.com, or find Gumshoe Gourmet on Facebook, or at GumShoeGourmet.com. As with many writer/adjunct professors, she is looking for a job with health insurance.



available in
.epub .mobi .pdf at
AshlandMystery.com

Reader Reviews

Just got caught up on *Naked Came the Rogue*—Wowza!

Oh man, do we LOVE it!

I just love the series! Using other words than cursing is funny—it's like reading limericks—you don't know where's it's going and where it will end up!

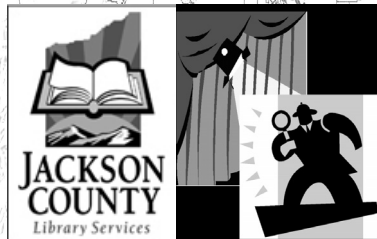
Love the Crosby, Still, Nash bit. So funny! What a project!

They have nailed the “interesting” patron experience, almost like they worked in libraries. A+

Can't wait for tomorrow to see what happens next in *Naked Came the Rogue*.

I loved the anticipation of the next chapter. Great ending! Thank you all for making this happen!

www.JCLS.org



www.AshlandMystery.com