

Naked Came The Librarian

Chapter 2

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Putting the phone on hold, I asked Tammy, “Who worked reference last night?”

“Lia,” answered Tammy. She had come in early today, after working the night shift herself. It was Monday, the beginning of a new week.

I returned to the caller to take a message. It was a student whom Lia had helped last night. I promised to put her in touch with him as soon as she came in. A quick e-mail took care of passing along the message. Normally, I would pass the call on to any reference librarian so the student would get immediate assistance, but he had referred to something specific from the night before and wanted to talk with the same librarian. Truthfully, he sounded a bit desperate. I knew Lia would respond quickly.

I sighed and looked at the list of reports sitting on my desk that needed to be run. It would be another afternoon spent with my computer. Sometimes I welcomed days when I could hole up in my office and run statistics on circ activity, but often it got lonely. As Head of Circulation, I was also “Michelle Jones, Reports Lady.”

Falling into library work was a bit of a fluke, really. With a B.A. in psychology, I didn't imagine that I would end up counting books and training students how to work with patrons. When my family made the decision to move here from Southern California, I needed a part-time job and ended up working weekends in this library. When the Head of Circulation position came open, I applied for it and got the job. Suddenly, I was managing a busy department in a college library and switching roles with my husband. I became the principal wage earner in our family of four, and he became the chief child-minder, errand guy, and bottle-washer. The prospect of free college tuition for my kids was pretty attractive, too.

The thing I love the most about this job is the contact with students. I hire them, train them, and, it turns out, listen to them. To think I wondered about the usefulness of my psychology degree! No more. Laurel, for example, struggled with roommate problems for the first part of the year. Man, do I remember how hard it was to live with other girls in college! Of course, I have three sisters, but it's different when they aren't related to you and you are forced into a close living situation. Laurel sat in my office on numerous occasions, with the Kleenex box close at hand, letting off steam. Finally, she was able to move into her own room and has been a different person ever since.

Then there was Joe. What a sweet young man, but terribly shy. It was surprising, actually, because males usually don't like to open up as much as females. But Joe came to me one day because he needed someone to talk to about his girlfriend back home. He was worried that she had met someone else at the college she was attending in Tennessee.

"She's having so much fun, Michelle," he said. "telling me about this party and that party. And she wants to join a sorority. It's like she isn't the same person I knew in high school."

And she probably isn't, I thought. I know how much change goes on during the college years; I certainly wasn't the same person at the end of my four years that I was at the beginning. But I also know how heartbreaking it can be to move away from our childhoods; even old friends and loves can drift away.

I didn't tell Joe these things in so many words, but I tried to encourage him to find his own place here at school. Try joining some clubs, I suggested. Think about a fraternity. Who knows? Maybe, I thought to myself, he'll find someone inside himself that he didn't know in high school either. Joe, of all people, joined SAFARI and started to come out of his shell. When that girlfriend from back home broke up with him, he was okay with it. By then he had like-minded friends, a major in art that he loved, and planned to study abroad in Vietnam. Mother, counselor--as long as I can separate myself from students' situations, I don't mind being called either one.

In my position, I hear a lot of gossip that circulates on campus. The students bring one perspective, while I hear another from the librarians. I know about Tammy and her faculty boyfriend, even though they try to keep it quiet. I think all of the library employees know, although no one really talks about it. A couple of the students made jokes a few times and I asked them to respect Tammy's privacy. But I know that if students know then it must be pretty common knowledge.

"Enough daydreaming and on with these reports," I told myself. And the rest of the day passed quickly in a blur of Access tables.

The rest of the week seemed to go by quickly and uneventfully, as well. No problems with patrons or with employees, it seemed. I dreaded dealing with either one--students who owe fines, faculty members who don't believe in returning books, staff members who need coaching. A little experience was helping to make these situations a little less painful, but for me they would never be easy. I just wasn't good at being the "bad guy."

I was grateful for the low stress level. I was planning my son Liam's 5th birthday party and I wanted to be able to focus on house cleaning, party favors, and what color the cake frosting should be.

On Friday, though, at about 3 p.m., I heard about a new drama brewing on campus. I was about to head out for the weekend and the delicious prospect of Liam's

party when I overheard students whispering about plagiarism linked to a name that was ringing a bell with me, a male student. As I locked my office door, I remembered who this student was: the young man who had called for Lia on Monday.