

# Naked Came the Librarian

## Chapter 3

*By Jamie Nelson,  
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The clock radio reads 6:47 when static and voices burst forth. I can hear Renee Montagne talking and I'm quite happy to listen to the news for a few minutes. My alarm is always set for prime numbers. There's something adventurous about avoiding the conventional 6:45 or 6:50 wake up call.

After a quick shower, I pour coffee into my travel mug and pop an English muffin in the toaster. Soon I'm on my bike and heading over the river to campus. Riding my bike lets me blur the transition from home to work, and take a moment to think about my surroundings. All too soon I'm on campus. I tell myself I should really take a long ride along the river this coming weekend since the commute is starting to feel shorter each time.

Michelle, the head of circulation, pulls her minivan in next to the bike rack.

"Lia! How's your Monday?"

I nod in acknowledgement and mumble a reply. I don't mean to be unfriendly, but I'm bent over my bike, locking it up. Michelle understands, and chats as we walk to the library.

"I don't mean to tell tales out of school, but did you hear about the plagiarism case?"

I nod again. Such cases are meant to be confidential, between the student, faculty member and the Dean. Somehow word had leaked out on this one. John had seemed like the typical student. He was rushed that night at the reference desk, but no more so than any other 19 year old with an eleventh hour assignment. If anything, he was refreshingly interested in the topic once we dug in. I thought he would be able to pull it off. He had left a message for me through the circulation desk last week, but there was no answer when I called him back. I had assumed that he had already turned his paper in and didn't need me anymore. Hmm.

Michelle and I part ways to get our days started. I'm on the reference desk this morning, so I try to work my smile muscles a few times to get prepped. As the first person students see when they walk into the library, the reference librarians strive to present a unified front of approachability and interest. Sometimes my cheeks are more heavily taxed than my grey matter after a reference shift. Library lore has it that a previous

director once spied on a newbie librarian to make sure he had the smile down. While both the director and that librarian are now gone, the smile remains.

I stop at my own desk before heading out to reference. There's a note folded there, with handwriting I don't recognize. "Aurora B," it reads, with a little pen sketch of the night sky. I open the paper, but there's no message inside. *Strange.*

I log into the reference desk computer and check the email account for any unfinished business. All clear. Same for the voicemail. The morning shift can be a bit slower than the rest of the day. All the students lucky enough to get later classes are still in bed, and those early risers are tucked away in the classroom buildings right now. I open up our virtual reference chat program on the computer and start leafing through my new issue of *College & Research Libraries* for must-read articles.

I have to admit, I wasn't the strongest supporter for the chat program. I'm all for technology, as long as it brings people together. The welcoming reference smile seems to be more important than on-demand reference. Our work with students has only increased as technology has seeped its way into every nook and cranny in our lives.

The *ding!* from the reference computer jostles me out of my musings. The virtual reference program wants me to play.

Patron: Good evening from Karmanikstan!

Librarian: Will! So good to hear from you! I knew you were in the 'stans, but I wasn't sure where.

Patron: Ah, it's my good luck that it's you at the desk, Lia! I have some quick questions.

Librarian: Sure.

Every so often when Will needed information in the field, he called up his personal reference librarian, so he liked to think. While the internet has made its way to the far corners of the world, reliable electricity and bandwidth have not. Will liked to firm up details for his Lonely Planet guides while in-country, so that he could move on unencumbered to the next country. Lately he'd taken to writing political essays and news stories on the side. It made sense, since the news bureaus didn't really want to pay to send correspondents to the ends of the earth, and Will was already there, eking out a living on the Siberian steppe or in the Amazon river basin. Roaming made him happy.

Patron: What can you find out about the KLG?

Sometimes I rounded up print resources and maps to provide context for Will's writing, and other times I just used Google. With limited internet time in remote villages, it was faster for me to Google and round up resources to summarize than for Will to sort through it all on his own. If he'd been a student, I'd never have done the work for him. But I did still have a soft spot for Will.

I group the sites that seemed to be legitimate and push the pages to Will. From my quick reading, the KLG looked like a pretty rough gang. They were said to be responsible for kidnappings and car bombings in southern Karmanikstan. They disputed the boundaries of their newly-formed republic and resorted to guerilla warfare to make their point. I answered a few more questions for Will about recent border skirmishes in the region, and Western oil investments in Karmanikstan. It sounded like a 21<sup>st</sup> century Wild West show.

Librarian: So, you're writing a story on the KLG?

Patron: Lia, I'm listening to their side for a few days. I've been asked to live with a group of KLG fighters and to represent their side to the world. Some of the villagers here trust me and apparently have family ties to the group. Hopefully Newsweek or Time will pick up my story. Thanks again—have to run!

And just like that, Will is gone again. A couple of years ago Will asked me to sign up for the “Amazing Race” with him. He thought we'd be an unbeatable team; him with dozens of countries under his belt, and me with my thinking cap. I reminded him that the National Geographics were still good enough for me. Besides, what do librarians do on vacation? Visit museums. That wasn't Will's travel style so I hadn't taken him up on any offers to accompany him. Yet.

Before I can think more about Will, the phone at the reference desk rings. *Maybe this will be a busy morning after all*, I think.

“Riverbend College Library, this is Aurelia,” I answer, speaking cheerfully, trying to shake off my concern for Will's latest undertaking.

“Hi, this is Elise from the *Riverbend in Review*. We want to do a story on the plagiarism case. I'd like to find the librarian who worked with John Anderson on a poli sci paper.”

“We're always happy to work with the *Review*, but aren't plagiarism cases confidential?”

Elise laughs. “Oh, so then you haven't heard! Turns out John Anderson wasn't registered for Poli Sci 301. Well, he *was*, I mean, his name was on the class list, but he didn't know he was registered for that class and didn't go to that class this term. He says he didn't write that paper and he's as confused as the rest of us. We think that's worth a story!”

“Whew. That's..uh...well, huh. I worked with John, but I'm not sure I understand why you would need to speak with me.”

“The John who turned in the paper hasn't been back to class and the school doesn't know how to contact him. All they have on file are the addresses for the other, the *real*, John Anderson. And he claims he doesn't know anything about this mess. We want to interview the professor and some students, and you, hopefully, to see if we can figure anything out.”

After making arrangements to meet with Elise at the library coffee shop after my reference shift, I turn my attention back to the reference desk. I field a myriad of questions about scholarly journals and the online catalog, as well as how to find resources on TV's effects on children's IQ and the divorce rate of couples who live together before marriage. Keeping Mrs. Willow's example in mind, I try to be patient with each of the researchers, though my mind is churning.

After my reference shift, I stop in at the college archives. My colleague Richard hasn't yet heard the story of the student who is not really a student, and I tell him the basics quickly. He brings me the past year's *Riverbend Ripple* yearbook and we look for John Anderson. Actually, we look the at head shots of four John Andersons, and none of them is the student with whom I worked.

Richard chuckles. "Pretty clever, actually. There's a John Anderson every year. The other students probably didn't think much of it. They probably wouldn't have really wondered why he didn't look like the John Anderson in their dorm or other class because it's such a common name. In the archives, it's already a joke. If we get a genealogy reference request for a John Anderson from the early days of the college, we don't even start researching it unless we're also given the place of birth, father's profession, and decade he attended. You can't turn a page of the catalog in the early years without running into a John Andersen or Johan Anderson or some mix of the two. Good choice, your mystery student."

Soon enough it's time to meet with the *Review* Reporter. I answer her questions about his appearance and demeanor and anything else I can remember. Elise nods, and takes some notes, but she seems to be in a hurry.

Tapping her pencil on her pad, she leans toward me and says, "I have a hunch I'd like to run by you." I nod. She continues, "What do you know about the *When in doubt, check it out*<sup>TM</sup> software?"

Plagiarism detecting software. Librarians are often pulled into the fray when it comes to plagiarism since we connect the students with their resources. I reply, "I know that it was heavily marketed here, but that we chose not to pursue it. Why?"

Elise shrugs. "I don't know what I really think about this, but what if the company had some way to prove to colleges that it was a good purchase? What if they had some data for an administrator, some embarrassing data?"