

Naked Came the Librarian

Chapter 5

By Carla Tracy, Library Director

I say yes to dinner, of course. Why wouldn't I? It isn't really a date. Andy is an old friend—well, an acquaintance—and he isn't likely to flick anything into my hair or bean me with geometry paraphernalia anymore. And I want to learn more about his handmade furniture. We agree to meet at The Blue Fish, a nearby microbrew and restaurant. We'll meet early so that I can ride my bike home before it gets dark.

Andy orders the standard burger and fries while I opt for a somewhat more artery-friendly salad with broiled chicken. We both add a mug of The Fish's excellent wheat beer. Then we catch up by exchanging the usual personal data: Where did you go to college? Why did you decide to become a librarian? Furniture maker? How are your parents doing?

Andy twirls his last French fry in the little pool of ketchup on his plate, then abandons it. Taking a deep breath, he looks straight into my eyes. "Lia, did you know that I had a crush on you all through middle school and even high school?"

"What?!" I squeak. The diner next to us glances over. "You've got to be kidding, Andy. All you ever did was shoot paper wads into my hair or poke at me and tease me! Not that you hurt me or anything, butAnd you hardly said 'hi' to me in high school...." I trail off, surprised and more than a little self-conscious.

"That's because I was tongue-tied when you really looked at me," he says, now staring into his plate. "And didn't you ever learn that when a young boy keeps on picking on a girl, it usually means that he really likes her?" He glances up at me again and a grin spreads over his face.

"Well, I ... I don't know ... I guess I know that now, but I didn't back then. It's not like I had lots of boys interested in me. I mean, the geeky girl who liked Erector sets and going to the library for old *National Geographics*? Please!" I chuckle. "And this wild curly hair as well?"

"I thought you were smart and beautiful—I mean, you *are* smart and beaut-..."

Andy breaks off in confusion and I'm afraid that my mouth is stuck open. This kind of thing does not happen to Aurelia Wintergarden.

Andy tries to get the conversation back to a somewhat less intense level. "That is, you look great, Lia. And you seem to love your job—but is it a kind of draining—tons of questions and students wanting help with papers in all different subjects? You look a little tired...."

“Oh, I do love my job,” I reply with some relief. “And I don’t usually find it draining. It’s fun to help students track down information—sort of like being a detective without carrying a gun—and to teach them that there’s so much more to research than Google searches. But at the moment, there’s a bit of a flap going on, and I’m right in the middle of it.”

“A flap?” Andy asks. “About what?”

I fill him in on the plagiarism case, my reference work with the John Anderson imposter and my interview with *Riverbend in Review*. “Then on top of all that, I received a strange e-mail over the weekend that said 'I’m very sorry' and something about 'involvement.' I thought it was spam, so I deleted it, but now I wonder if it had anything to do with this John Anderson thing. The *Review* reporter suggested that maybe a company could create a case, then pressure college administration to buy the *When in doubt, check it out*TM software.” I feel the tension build in my neck and my voice. “And then I get that drawing on my desk and you start lurking around the reference stacks and bringing up the distant past and—“

“I’m sorry, Lia,” Andy blurts, “I really am. I shouldn’t have been so stupid about the way I approached you, leaving a dumb drawing and sneaking through your library—“

I shake my head, as much to clear it as to indicate my negative response. “Andy—no *I’m* sorry. This isn’t about you at all. I know what it really is: It’s the thought that I could be tricked, that someone pretended to be something he was not—and a college student, no less. I work with dozens of college students every week. Why didn’t I even suspect that there was something off about the way he looked or talked? It’s shaken my confidence in my ability to read people. I’ve always been pretty good at that—I thought.”

“Well, I don’t know—people can be deceptive, Lia. But think about it: it’s not exactly like it was some ordinary young guy pretending to be a rocket scientist or a college president or something. He just pretended to be someone he probably really *was* just a few years ago—a student who procrastinated on writing a paper. Not a big stretch—just fall back into the role.”

I haven’t thought about it that way and I feel a bit of relief flow through my brain. I haven’t been quite as gullible as I’ve blamed myself for being. But I’m still in the midst of an uncomfortable situation. If I could retrieve that e-mail...if I knew more about that company....

“What is the matter with me?!” I remark sharply.

“Nothing, Lia! I told you, it would be an easy part to play, anyone would fall for it—“

“No—no—Andy, that’s not—you’re right about playing the role, and I’m grateful you pointed it out to me. Now I feel better about that. But then I suddenly thought: Why am I

just sitting back, wishing I had more information on this person and on the company? After all,” I smile, “I’m a reference librarian—a detective sans firearm. I can find out anything!”

Andy looks relieved to see me laughing and ready for action. He even seems to catch the excitement himself. “What are you going to do?”

“Well, Watson,” I tease, “it’s elementary. I’m going to use all of the massive information resources at my fingertips to find out everything there is to know about *When in doubt, check it out*TM and the company that owns it. I’m also going to check my deleted items bin in my e-mail. I don’t remember emptying it, so the strange e-mail might still be there. If not, I’ll check with my friends in the IT department to see if there’s any way to recover it. When digitized text is deleted, it’s often not really gone. Let’s get moving!”

“Maybe we don’t have to go anywhere—that is, if this place has wireless,” he says. A bit sheepishly, he pulls his iPhone from his pocket.

“You build furniture, but you have the latest—expensive—gadget?” I exclaim.

“Yeah, well—I love gadgets...and we really do need it for our business, since we travel a lot and....”

“Okay, okay—I’m jealous, but I’m glad you have it,” I admit. “Our off-campus access has improved greatly, so I think I can access everything I need just by logging into my college account.”

“Good,” Andy responds. He hands me the gleaming technology that I’ve coveted during every one of those catchy ads on television and picks up our mugs. “I’ll order us another beer and you get started.”

I open my e-mail account and check the deleted items bin. There are a few items there, but nothing from “dannyboy.” I sigh in frustration. I must have emptied it too recently. I’ll have to call Ted in IT services. I’m not sure he’ll be able to do anything, but there’s always a chance.

I do a Google search for *When in doubt, check it out*TM. There’s no harm in starting with a web search. It can provide valuable facts before one digs in more deeply. I discover that this plagiarism software is sold by EduTech Solutions. Their website proclaims that while students often purchase whole papers from term paper mills, “cut and paste” plagiarism is absolutely rampant on college campuses. “One in four students will intentionally take phrases or whole paragraphs of someone else’s writing without giving credit to the source,” they say. Hmmm— there’s no footnote to be found and I wonder how they could document a statistic like that anyway. Plagiarism cases are confidential, and what college would reveal even the mere number of cases they had dealt with in a given year?

Andy brings the beer, and I move on to the licensed databases that require my college login. The proxy server is working fine, and I search EBSCO’s Business Source Elite first.

By skimming a number of abstracts and a few full text journal articles, I learn that EduTech Solutions is a subsidiary of a larger company, which in turn is a subsidiary of yet another company. I'll need LexisNexis to untangle this snarl. But from the articles, I can already pick up from some of the articles a hint of suspicious business practices.

"Listen to this," I say to Andy, and begin to read from one of the articles. "An anonymous source stated that EduTech plants student imposters who manage to attend classes under an assumed name, hand in papers containing fairly obscure plagiarism, then start rumors by boasting to classmates. Word spreads on the campus, and that's EduTech's cue to send in sales people who put the pressure on dismayed academic deans and others."

"Sounds pretty familiar, right?" says Andy.

I don't find anything new in the major newspaper archives on LexisNexis, so I move on to the southeast regional papers. This part of the vast full-text newspaper archives allows me to search smaller publications from papers around the southeastern United States, including those of several Atlanta suburbs.

My eyes skim down the results list until I spot this headline and nearly shout it out to Andy: "EduTech's Link to Term Paper Mill?" It's a short article that would have been buried inside the original publication, and it takes me only moments to read it to Andy. "A former employee of EduTech, who asked not to be named, has stated that EduTech's *When in doubt, check it out*TM retains student papers not just to create a database for investigating plagiarism but to sell the well-written papers on a web-based 'mill.' Unlike ethical businesses such as *Turnitin*, which carefully protects its database from misuse, EduTech actively exploits the colleges and students who use it. Reporters have begun an investigation into this claim."

Andy whistles in astonishment, but I do another search. The article was published six months ago, but I can't find any follow-up. "It all started and stopped with that," I say. "Whatever happened with the investigation?" I pause and look at Andy. "I think I'm going to talk this over with Chris Miller first thing in the morning. He's our library director. I think he'll want to take this to the Dean."

We do a bit of tap dancing about the bill—he *asked* me to dinner, Andy argues—so I finally relent and let him pay. "Can you come to the library around lunchtime tomorrow?" I ask. "That is, if you want to hear what happens—you certainly deserve to know, since it's monopolized the end of our dinner together. Do you have time?"

"Yes, I have time—and of course I want to hear all about it! Who knew that being a librarian could be so exciting?" he laughs.

"It usually isn't," I respond. "And this may turn out to be pretty mild in the end. But regardless, I'll meet you back at the library, at my office, around noon tomorrow."

As I begin to unlock my bike, Andy heads for his car. "Thanks for dinner," I call out.

“See you tomorrow, Lia,” he answers cheerfully. I hear his car door slam shut, then another one closer by. The guy sitting at the next table—who had been treated to my various exclamations and reading aloud to Andy—had left The Fish right after we did. Maybe it was his car door I just heard.

It’s darker than I would have wished, so I turn on as much speed as I can. The time had gone so fast. It was great talking with Andy. I like him. He certainly is not the loud, awkward boy I remembered. My head is swimming with thoughts of EduTech, “John Anderson” and Andy’s long-ago crush. Long ago...?

I begin the first leg of the journey over the Arsenal Bridge. In the winter, this is where I could see as many as 30 bald eagles roosting in the trees on any cold day. Occasionally, one or two of them perched in a dead tree that was so close to the bridge that I could distinguish their sharp eyes in their striking white heads. But tonight is warm, and I hear the water lapping beneath me....

Those headlights. Why have they been behind me for so long? There's no oncoming traffic, so why doesn't that car simply pass me?