

# Naked Came the Librarian

## Chapter 4

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In reality, John Anderson was Daniel Crofton, a 27-year-old working for EduTech Solutions, an Atlanta-based company specializing in the development of technological devices for the "unique needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century academia." Dan had always wanted to be a private investigator, until he realized that his conception of the job was based solely on the romantic portrayals of detectives in crime shows. His college roommate had laughed when he first mentioned his dream job.

"Are you serious?" Nate grunted. "Dude, do you realize that ninety percent of that job is sitting in a car with binoculars, watching some banker cheat on his wife? Kind of a hassle anytime you want to take a piss."

Dan prided himself on being world-wise, but in this case, it did seem as though he had been naive. Besides, he had never been sure how to get started as a P.I. It wasn't really a job you could sign up for on Career Day, seeing as how the whole point was to be inconspicuous. He doubted any good investigator would want an awkward teenager following him around, blowing his cover.

He finished college with a major in psychology and no idea what to do next. Discouraged but still curious, Dan turned to the Yellow Pages. He tried "Investigators" but no such heading existed, so he moved to "Detectives." There was one entry, but the line had been disconnected. He finally came upon "Information Services," and dialed the number for "GoldStar Information Services."

"George Messer," a rough voice barked into the phone.

"Yeah, hi, this is Daniel Crofton." Dan began.

"Who?" the voice barked back.

"Daniel. Daniel Crofton." Dan said with more force. "Sir."

"I don't know you," came the reply.

Dan laughed nervously. "No, you don't. I'm, uh, hoping to learn about work as a private detective, and I found your number in the phonebook. I thought maybe --"

"Tell you what. Come on down to my office and I'll show you around."

And so, Dan went. A brief tour of the office -- which strangely, unaccountably, was also home to several large birds, some caged, some not -- turned into a driving tour of past clients' residences and offices, where George had spent hundreds of hours on stake-outs. Dan thought of the time his mother went to Hollywood and paid \$45 for a drive-by tour of celebrities' homes.

At the end of the tour, George Messer offered him a job.

"I've never kept records and the place is a dump," he said wearily. "Think you could do some filing for me? You can handle the little jobs, too. Not too exciting, but you'll get your feet wet."

Having nothing else to do, Dan agreed readily. "Should I call you George?" he asked.

The man strained to open a jar of Cheez Whiz. "Call me Messer," he said as the lid clicked open.

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Unfortunately, Nate had been right about the downside of the job. On his first field assignment, Dan said to Messer, "Um. Well. What happens when I need to pee?" His boss shoved a jar into his hand and waved him off.

It was a steady paycheck, and easy, uncomplicated work. Despite the unfavorable bathroom situation, Dan's favorite part of the job was when Messer handed him a field assignment: follow this guy, take pictures of this meeting, dig up dirt on this business. It was a thrill when, after waiting in the car for hours, a suspect person appeared and did exactly what it was you suspected him of doing.

But the field assignments were rare, and after three years of filing, answering the phone, and cleaning up after the birds, Dan began to look for a new job. The last of his college friends were trickling out of town, the brief interlude between college and the real world finally drawing to a close.

One day at work, while flipping through the latest issue of *Inspector*, the profession's quarterly trade publication, Dan noticed an ad in the Classifieds for a "Student Impersonator." The ad looked suspiciously like one of those too-good-to-be-true "WORK AT HOME!" blurbs. It read:

<p>WANTED: STUDENT IMPERSONATOR. Educational technology company seeks young person to investigate academic integrity practices in higher ed institutions. Work where you live! Must look younger than 25 and have own transportation. Excellent opportunity for mature self-starter. CALL TODAY 1-800-823-6577.</p>
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"What do you know about this?" Dan tossed the paper on his boss's desk and pointed to the ad. Messer studied it while taking a bite of his sandwich. A gob of mayo plopped onto the paper and he swiped at it with a fat finger.

"Yeah, I've heard of those things," he said, his mouth full. "Easy enough, as long as you can act." He gave Dan a long, appraising look. "You'd probably be perfect. You look like you're about 19." He threw his head back in a guffaw, and for a minute, Dan was afraid he'd choke on his lunch.

Dan returned to his desk and resumed his book-keeping. He remembered how, only a month ago, he had gone to see an R-rated movie with a friend. The attendant had asked to see his I.D. It was embarrassing, but it wasn't the first time he had been mistaken for a teenager.

Dan decided to call.

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He really could have written the paper without going to the Reference Desk. He had been to college, after all, and knew the basics of how to find sources. He just had to look up a few books in the library catalog, pull a few articles from the online databases -- and then misuse them shamelessly. But to present a challenge to this mission, Dan decided to actually play the part of John Anderson. Frankly, he was bored with the job. Like his work for Messer, the initial hire had sounded more glamorous than the daily reality. Dan had managed to move freely about the campus without so much as one person taking interest in him. He sat in the back of a class, conducting his reconnaissance and drawing cartoons. All he really had to understand were the basics of the paper he was supposed to write: the topic, the length, the number of required sources. His supervisor had stressed the importance of his paper blending in with the real papers of his peers.

Besides this desire to play the part, Dan had other reasons to visit the Reference Desk that night. He was lazy, for one. Having a librarian direct him straight to the sources he needed was alluring at 10:00 that night. But even more motivating was the lovely woman sitting behind the computer at the Reference Desk.

He had noticed her immediately upon entering the library. It was impossible *not* to notice her. She looked to be about his age, perhaps a few years older. She wore her long auburn hair atop her head in a loose bun. A few curls cascaded down her neck, framing her slender face, her eyebrows furrowed in an endearing expression of concentration.

Dan sat at a computer and pretended to search for books while he watched her. She appeared to be entranced by the work in front of her, relishing the intellectual rigor of the task at hand. She was cute, Dan thought, but more than that, she was *smart*. She looked as though she knew all kinds of things, asked all kinds of questions of the world and pursued the answers with

a fierceness bordering on obsession. She was quite possibly the sexiest woman that Dan had ever seen.

As he emerged from his seat and headed in her direction, he stole a furtive glance at the ring finger of her left hand: it was bare. For a moment, he was giddy. Just a moment. Then he felt utterly ridiculous for even entertaining the thought. To her, he was just another student, and an irresponsible one at that, waiting until the night before a paper was due to commence his research.

She looked up just as he stopped short of the desk. It suddenly occurred to him that he should not involve her in this assignment. If his plagiarism managed to go undetected -- and worse yet, if the press picked up the story -- surely everyone involved would be implicated. EduTech would prepare a damning report and intimidate the college's administration, bullying them into hastily purchasing the mediocre *When in doubt, check it out*<sup>TM</sup> software. The college, embarrassed and mobilized by the debacle, would eagerly scold the parties it believed were responsible for the disgrace: Dan's professor, inevitably, and anyone else he had talked to about his paper. Like a librarian.

He should turn around and walk away this very instant and forget all about her. But then she smiled and raised her eyebrows as if to say, "Yes?" and his resolve melted. Enraptured by her presence, he mumbled a meek greeting and became exactly what he had been pretending to be since he set foot on campus: an inarticulate college boy not yet accustomed to the culture of academia. His words came out in a rush.

"So, I have this paper I have to do about the effects of campaign financing in the last election, and it's due tomorrow. I have to use six reliable sources. I've been busy with other things and haven't been able to get to this until tonight. If you can just help me get started, I'll be okay."

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Aurelia could feel him watching her. She shifted uncomfortably in her seat, and angled her computer monitor in order to create a barrier between them. She had tried to make eye contact -- it was her job to make every patron feel welcome, after all -- but each time she looked up, he looked away and darted between the tall shelves of the Reference section, only to emerge again and gape at her when she returned to her work.

She was already having trouble concentrating; this game of cat-and-mouse only made it more difficult. The plagiarism scandal that had erupted on campus yesterday consumed her thoughts. She thought back to the night "John Anderson" came in, asking for help with a paper on campaign financing. In jeans and a vintage T-shirt, he *looked* like a student. Peppering his speech with "like" and "um," he *sounded* like a student. And yet, clearly, he was not a student -- or at least not a student at Riverbend. So who, exactly, was he? And why had he blatantly plagiarized his sources? Aurelia had received an e-mail from *dannyboy80@netmaster.com* over

the weekend, but she hadn't bothered to read it closely, assuming it was spam. Now she struggled to recall its message, thinking that perhaps it was connected to the mysterious young man. She remembered the words "very sorry" and "unfortunate involvement" and the request, "Can I meet you for coffee to offer an explanation in person?"

The phone interrupted her thoughts.

"Looks like someone's here to check out more than books!" Before she could even say hello, Michelle's mischeivious giggle rang in her ear.

"Very funny." So Michelle had noticed the stranger, too. "It is odd. I think I'll go over and introduce myself. Find out what brought him in."

"Besides you, you mean?" Michelle laughed again. "Let me know how it turns out."

Aurelia rose and walked slowly in the direction of the stranger. She assumed he was a public patron, someone from outside the college. It was likely that he was conducting personal research, perhaps genealogical, or that he wanted to use one of the computers, all of which required a college ID to log in. But his strange behavior baffled her.

Her muscles tightened as she turned into the BS section. He stood only a few feet away, staring intently at a row of Biblical commentaries. He ignored her, though his face reddened noticeably as she approached.

The mystery man had thick curly hair that obstructed a clear view of his face. He was tall and thin, and wore jeans and a heavy gray jacket over a plaid shirt. He looked like a farmer, Aurelia thought.

"Hello," she said quietly. "May I please help you locate something?"

He turned to her and smiled slightly. "Hi," was all he said.

Aurelia tried again. "Do you need assistance, sir?"

The man broke into a wide grin and bit his lip. He reached up and ran a hand through his hair and chuckled.

"Aurelia, it's Andy. Andy Shalla. We went to school together." He paused and raised his eyebrows as though pleading with her to remember him.

Aurelia studied him. She flashed back to geometry class with Mr. Tate, her desk directly in front Andy's, a loud, skinny boy with red hair and freckles. He was constantly flicking things into her hair and poking her on the shoulder with his protractor.

"Andy! Really? Yes, of course. What brings you here?" Aurelia relaxed into a smile.

“Just passing through. I make furniture – rocking chairs, tables, dressers, desks – and we’re one of the few places that deliver it ourselves. We go cross-country, believe it or not. I saw in our Nathan Hale High School magazine that you worked here, so I figured I should look you up next time I was in the Midwest. So, here I am.” He paused. “I was actually here yesterday, too, but I didn’t see you.”

Aurelia remembered the note perched on her desk. *Aurora B*. Of course. Only someone from her middle-school years would know that name.

“Anyway, I just wanted to say hi. You look really great.” He blushed. “I’ll be in town again in about a week. I’d love to catch up. Hear about all your college and library adventures.” He gestured at the books around him. “I’d like to . . .” His eyes drifted toward the ceiling and he exhaled deeply. “Aurelia, would you have dinner with me?”