

Naked Came the Librarian

Chapter 7

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It was the end of a long, stressful day, and Ethan Frost felt like someone had dragged him through the mud. The computer clock switched to 10 pm, so he scanned the library's main floor and reference collection from his seat at the reference desk. Everyone seemed well occupied, and no one was approaching the desk, so he decided he could safely call it a night.

Carefully stacking the collection of books he'd pulled for his instruction session the following morning, Ethan took a few deep breaths and tried to calm himself. The reference librarians had held a meeting mid-afternoon, talking about their official response to the ongoing plagiarism case. By the end of the meeting, he was worn out with all of the political aspects of academia. While his colleagues could go home and rest, he had only had a short break before he started his reference shift at 5:30 that evening. The administration was definitely touchy about the case, particularly after the introduction of the new Academic Integrity Standard this year. Obviously, having a plagiarism case come up this early in the process was causing them to feel pressure from board members and parents alike - and they had decided to share their stress with the faculty.

"Poor Lia," Ethan thought, taking his work materials to his office desk. "She only did what any of us would have done, talking the student through the use of several databases, including *CQ Researcher*. I hope that her date tonight was able to take her mind off of the problems at work."

Noticing that one of the students was staring at him oddly, Ethan realized that his internal musings had suddenly been broadcast out loud. He needed to get out of the building fast, before his disgruntled attitude really took shape. The thing was, no one else had fully realized his involvement in this whole fiasco. Although he was a librarian by training, Ethan had taken a career detour while living in Georgia. After spending several years working at public libraries, he'd found himself reporting on the city council meetings being held in the library conference rooms for the local paper. He'd been burned out from dealing with patron log-ins and crank questions at the reference desk, and so he'd jumped at the opportunity to put his research skills to new use. But what seemed exciting initially turned into two years of petty local politics and stories about a new city council member's conspiracy theories. But during a party for New Year's 2007, Ethan had

reconnected with a library school friend who was concerned about a new plagiarism software being introduced in Georgia. Publishing the article on EduTech's actions throughout the Southeast could have been a start to a thrilling journalistic career, but the truth was, even though his research had been solid, even then he'd known his heart was back in the library.

Honestly, Ethan hadn't thought the company would take any action against him. He'd heard rumors of threats to college administrators, but since no one was willing or able to provide proof, he hadn't touched on it in his article. Most of the issues he'd reported on were ethically gray, rather than a clearly illegal action. Sure, there was always the possibility of a lawsuit, but Ethan had thought that would only draw more unwanted attention to the company.

And then the first death threat had arrived. Clearly, he'd touched on a nerve or hint of a bigger issue somewhere, but with a young family to take care of, he really didn't want to pursue it further or wait things out. One threat was enough motivation to encourage him to get back into librarianship. When the position at Riverbend had opened up, he'd thought it was the perfect opportunity. And since he'd always published his articles under a pen name, all he'd had to do was convince the Human Resources Director at the Snellville Times to verify that he'd been a staff member on the paper. It was, after all, the truth. It just didn't fully cover all that he'd done while affiliated with the paper.

Riverbend had been fine with his references, and they were even willing to accept that his journalistic efforts had informed his career as a librarian. Certainly they'd been impressed by his knowledge of copyright law - an essential understanding that any academic institution had to pay attention to these days.

Ethan knew that he was going to have to come clean about his full knowledge of EduTech and their actions, but something had held him back from speaking up at the meeting. Before he e-mailed Chris, the library director, to set up a private appointment, he needed to get home, hug his kids, and talk to his wife. He and Sue had been so sure they'd escaped the death threats. Why would EduTech be so stupid as to send someone to plagiarize at the school he now worked at, if they knew he was there?

Climbing the stairs, Ethan started to calm down. Physical exertion always cleared his head, and he knew that a run on the treadmill at home would be a good idea before he tumbled into bed. Sue wouldn't be happy about the sound of the exercise equipment going at 11 p.m., but the boys would sleep through it. And then, halfway up the flight of stairs, Ethan realized the crucial element he'd missed. Lia had subbed for him the night she'd dealt with the phony "John Anderson." With the twins down with a treacherous combination of the flu and poison ivy, Sue had begged him for help. Kindhearted Lia, a

frequent babysitter, had volunteered to take his shift so that he could relieve his frazzled wife.

Had the EduTech masterminds planned for him to get blamed for the plagiarism and thus get fired? That kind of sneaky, behind-the-scenes maneuvering wouldn't add jail time if they ever got caught, but it certainly would mess up his life.

Exiting the building, Ethan realized that his car had been blocked in. The school had been security-conscious enough to designate 2 parking spots on the loading ramp for evening library workers. However, with the approach of midterms, students frustrated by the chronic parking shortage had decided to park on the other side of the ramp. Now, he was blocked in and couldn't leave!

Making a quick call to Security, Ethan entered the building from the nearest public entrance. Just inside the door, he stopped to check in with the student worker at the circulation desk.

"Have any students told you they had parked in the ramp for emergency purposes?" he asked, trying desperately to hold his temper in check. At her quick shake of the head, Ethan felt his control snap. Walking throughout the floor, he began to shout: "Who has a 2006 RAV4 parked in the library loading ramp? Does anyone here have a RAV4 parked in the loading ramp?"

"Over here!" called a voice from a table of female students. "We're working on a big project for our biochemistry class, but we should be gone before midnight. Why, did somebody hit my car?"

"I'm about to hit your car!" Ethan shouted, stomping over to the student rummaging through her designer bag. "Those spots aren't for general parking, those are for library employees. Besides which, you didn't park in an official parking space. You're in the emergency vehicle lane! I've already called Security, so you can expect that at a minimum you will have a ticket, and at the maximum, your car will have been towed."

"Whatever, dude. You are totally overreacting. Nobody needs to have that area clear at night. I've parked there tons of times, and never gotten a ticket."

Leaning down, Ethan put his hands on the table and started to speak, his voice growing from a whisper to a roar. "I've been at work for an extended shift, I have to get home to sick children, and so help me, if you don't start walking this second, I will pry your lazy derriere out of that chair myself. MOVE IT!"

Tammy stretched and yawned, trying to get into the swing of the workday. Her date with Clarence the night before had taken a severe turn when the hospice nurse called to alert them that he was rushing Clarence's father to the hospital. Plans for a romantic dinner at the Velie were quickly abandoned, and the couple had settled for a vending machine dinner of crackers and coffee while waiting for the doctors to come out of the ER. Sadly, it looked like Edward wouldn't be around to witness the wedding in June. As a result of the night spent dozing on the waiting room chairs, and despite catching a quick catnap before the start of her afternoon/evening shift, Tammy was exhausted.

Thinking of the stink that Ethan had caused last night, she giggled. The students were having a heyday with the story of the librarian who went beserk, and though both Michelle and Tammy were doing their best to quiet the gossip, it was really hard not to laugh privately between themselves. A former student worker had even told her that it was like watching a mild-mannered geek walk into a cubicle and walk out a Supervillain. Ethan Frost, evil librarian? It was too much!

Still, Tammy reined in the laughter and put on her best professional voice when the phone rang. Hearing Lia's voice on the other end, her adrenaline started thumping.

"Tammy?" she heard, hushed but urgent. "Could you help me with a special project?"

"Special project" was the library's code for a serious crisis. "Do you need me to come upstairs?"

"No, just listen for a minute. I need to rely on your friendship, as well as your professionalism."

Quickly, Lia outlined a plan to keep her office under covert surveillance. Tammy agreed to have Laurel and Joe, two of the library's most trusted student workers, begin updating the shelving signs near Lia's office. We had received numerous comments in the last two weeks that people were having problems finding books in that area, thanks to a massive shifting project we had undertaken. By starting to document what signs needed changing, the student workers also would be close enough to Lia to offer help if needed.

After learning that Lia was going to meet with someone involved in the plagiarism case, and seeing that she was headed into Chris Miller's office, Tammy decided to take a pass by Lia's office. True to her trusting nature, Lia had left the door open. Calling upon her teenage experiences in a rough high school, Tammy quickly took the wall clip she'd grabbed from the supply closet and created a wedge that tightened one of the pins in the

door and made it impossible to close it completely. This way, complete privacy would be nearly impossible, and Lia would have another layer of protection, even if she didn't know it!

Pacing in the library lobby was definitely not a good way to stay low-profile, but he couldn't seem to help himself. Noting the looks he was getting from the Amazon supervising the students behind the counter, he checked his watch for the umpteenth time, then walked outside and down the stairs to pace on the quad. Dan still didn't know how much he was going to tell Lia, but he knew that in doing so, he was risking his job. He'd seen enough of what the librarians did to realize that it was a lot like private investigation, but with a better working environment and more social interaction. Still, would anyone hire him once his culpability in the EduTech case came out? And just how much school did it take to become a librarian anyway? Surely it couldn't be much ... it was just glorified Google searching, wasn't it?

The bells in the campus carillon began to sound, and he realized that Lia would be in her office waiting for the meeting. Hopefully, she'd understand his desire for privacy.