

## **Prologue—To Have or Not To Have?**

**by Marla Madison**

*She's Not There*, a novel of suspense and my first novel, has a 4.2 Star rating on Amazon.com after more than 600 reviews, and is the first novel in the successful TJ Peacock & Lisa Rayburn suspense series.

The story begins when psychologist Lisa Rayburn discovers abused women are disappearing at a rate too high to be a coincidence. I felt that this discovery by my main character through a group of statistics would not be an engaging enough start for a suspense story, so I decided to do a prologue that introduced the killer.

Prologues are most common in the mystery/suspense/thriller genres, and they give the author the ability to begin his story twice, at two different points in time. As a reader I do enjoy prologues, although I don't like the ones that make it difficult to tell how far back in time they're going—if at all—or describe a dream sequence. My personal taste aside, however, the general consensus among experts advises against the use of a prologue when drafting a novel. And if I had to use one, they recommended I ask myself two questions:

- Do I really need a prologue?
- What will the prologue do for the story?

I believed the story needed a compelling hook that would propel the reader into the first chapter and also introduce the antagonist. The book has intermittent chapters from the POV of the antagonist so the prologue also sets up an introduction to his early development. After the one-page

prologue, the following page starts Chapter One, when Lisa Rayburn makes her alarming discovery about abused women going missing.

## **Prologue**

### **Eight years earlier**

A black pickup raced along a narrow road that twisted sharply left, crossing a bridge over a deep ravine. The river below marked the division between adjoining counties. Lit by the oncoming headlights, four pine crosses stood out in the ground fog shrouding the opposite riverbank. Faded to weather-beaten gray, they served as a reminder of young lives foolishly lost.

Years back, four varsity football players from a nearby high school were killed when the car they rode in left the road at an impossibly high speed in a mad attempt to cross the narrow river without traveling the bridge. The vehicle didn't make it over the river. Airborne, the car wedged into the opposite bank, leaving no survivors. It was rumored that the same car successfully completed the daredevil crossing many times before the deadly impact.

Imagining the impact of his vehicle against the riverbank, the driver of the pickup pressed hard on the accelerator as the truck approached the bridge. After tonight there would be five crosses on the riverbank. It was unlikely anyone would cover the fifth with sentimental memorabilia.

The driver's last thoughts—and he was certain in the split second before the truck sailed over the river they would be his last—were not of his life flashing before him. Instead, gratitude for a life ended.

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### **Autumn Leaves, Women's Getaway Weekend**

#### **UWM Campus, Milwaukee**

#### **Friday 7 p.m.**

Lisa Rayburn had hardly been able to focus on her class. She and Tyler didn't get together often, but when they did, the magic she found in his arms kept her smiling for days. Knowing she'd be with him soon, her senses tingled as she stuffed the leftover handouts into her briefcase. She'd had one eye on the clock since she'd walked into the room.

The annual Autumn Leaves event for women offered classes on everything from money management to how to handle a divorce. For the third year running, Lisa Rayburn's class on How To Prevent Domestic Abuse was well received by her audience. The class, one of many things Lisa did in an effort to get her message out to women, warned women not to stay in an abusive relationship. Better yet, avoid beginning one. The early signs weren't difficult to spot. The hard part came in walking away.

Lisa looked up to see a young woman standing in front of her. A brown dress covered her thin body to the ankles. She held a manila file-folder against her chest as if afraid someone would snatch it from her.

In a voice barely above a whisper, she said, "My name is Jennifer Hansen. I'm gathering statistics for my thesis on abused women. I need to talk to you."

Lisa motioned her to the student desks. The girl appeared upset, frightened even, her pale hands tightly clenching the folder. Once seated, Jennifer handed Lisa a sheet of paper. "I wanted you to see this."

Lisa scanned the page, her gaze stopping on a line highlighted in fluorescent yellow. It revealed a dramatic rise in the percentage of abused women who'd gone missing in Milwaukee and its neighboring counties.



Marla Madison is the author of the popular TJ Peacock and Lisa Rayburn suspense series that includes, *She's Not There, Trespass*, and *Girl Undone*. Her other series stars Detective Kendall Halsrud in *Relative Malice*, *Iced Malice*, and the soon to be published, *Promise of Malice*.

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