

Kris Bock

What We Found

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One

I shouldn't be doing this. I don't do things like this.

And yet I kept walking, following Jay through the woods. I stepped carefully along the narrow path, but my good shoes would be dusty by the time we were done. My gaze flicked up to Jay's long legs in faded jeans. His butt had been voted the best in our high school. It wasn't the only reason I'd had a crush on him as a sophomore, but it definitely played a part.

Six years later, it was hard to believe I was really walking through the woods with him. Though we'd grown up together in a town of only 8,000 people, we'd rarely spoken. He was two grades ahead of me, but even if we'd been in the same year, I wouldn't have traveled in his circles. I'd seen him around school or at the pizza parlor, I'd watched his basketball games, I'd felt sorry for him when I heard his dreams of playing college ball fell through.

Since I'd graduated, I'd only seen him around town when I came back to visit. We might smile and say "Hey" as we passed, the way acquaintances did. Yet a week after I'd moved back home, I was taking a long lunch to follow Jay into the woods. I felt like a giddy high school girl again.

I had to remind myself that I was twenty-two, an adult, with a brand-new college degree – with honors. I'd worked hard to get the Hospitality Degree that had landed me one of the few good jobs in the only place in town worth working. I'd come back to my hometown for my new job at the Mountain Inn and Resort and for my brother, not for Jay. And I was old enough to realize that we probably didn't have much in common.

But when my high school crush noticed me for the first time and offered to show me the view from the plateau, how could I resist? I didn't expect to start a beautiful relationship, but it was nice to imagine I'd turned into the type of woman who could attract a cool guy's attention.

My heart was beating a little too quickly and I had to wipe my palms on my slacks. Despite the leafy shade, the air hung heavy and hot, the first really warm day of the year. It had hit 87 down in Albuquerque the day I moved, but summer came later in the central New Mexico mountains, at an elevation of almost 7,000 feet.

We entered a small clearing. Sunlight broke through the trees, dappling the long yellow grass. It was nice to be back in the mountains, back in these woods where I'd walked so often, after four years in a big city. I'd missed the green.

A bird rustled nearby. Jay turned and smiled at me. I smiled back, but my face felt stiff as I remembered his reputation with girls. At the time I'd envied those girls, with all the naïveté of a shy teenager who never got asked to go for walks in the woods with boys. Now I wasn't sure what to do with myself. He'd said he wanted to show me the view and point out the changes since I'd been gone. But in high school, a "walk in the woods" wasn't about the scenery.

I was being silly. We'd grown up since then. And we hardly had time to get into trouble. He couldn't possibly assume we were sneaking out for a quickie after chatting for half an hour in the employee lunchroom. I'd told him I only had a few minutes.

"Come on, let's go through here." He pushed into the trees to the side of the clearing, rather than going forward on the established path that looped around the plateau and eventually back toward the resort. The view should be straight ahead.

I glanced back down the path, but the bright green of the golf course had disappeared around a bend. Still, we were just a few minutes from work. Maybe he knew another path, a smaller game trail.

It was easier to go along than to ask questions. If he had something more in mind than admiring the view, I could stop him later. But no need to cause a fuss yet.

A minute later he stopped in a smaller clearing, where a fallen log had cleared a space among the other trees. A nearby bank sloped down to a ditch that might carry a trickle of water later in the season, after the rains. I kept my smile in place and waited to see what he would do.

He swung toward me and reached out with one hand. I jerked back. My arm bumped against a tree and I felt the bark catch my sleeve. I looked down to free it, my face hot.

"Nervous?" Jay asked with a smile in his voice.

I shrugged and avoided his gaze. "You startled me."

"Ah, sweet little Audra. Not so little anymore, and surely not so innocent?" He brushed his fingers over my hair where it draped over my shoulder just above my breast. I tensed but couldn't move back without hitting trees.

He reached in his pocket and pulled out a small plastic baggie. He unrolled it and pulled out a handmade cigarette – probably a joint. Some of the other rumors about him came back, rumors I'd forgotten. He grinned the cocky basketball-star smile that had melted so many hearts, but it didn't look quite the same now. For the first time I noticed the hollows under his eyes and the faint lines on his weathered skin. Could he really be just twenty-five? Had we all aged so much? Or had the years been harder on him?

He did work outside, which could account for some of the weathering. I was glad I always used moisturizer with sunscreen.

He lit up, took a puff, and held out the joint. I shook my head and struggled to keep a polite half-smile in place. He frowned and kept his arm extended. "Come on, you need to loosen up."

My hand twitched, as if it wanted to follow his command of its own accord. I hated conflict. But I didn't do drugs, and I wasn't about to start. If I got fired from my job in the first week, I'd have a hard time finding anything else in town. I'd been away for four years, only visiting once a month, and I wasn't about to make Ricky deal with Mom on his own any longer.

"Thanks, but no. I, uh, have some mild asthma and smoke makes me cough." I'd found excuses like that more effective than a simple no thanks, which could lead to derision and pressure.

He shrugged and turned away, taking another puff. The smoke drifted toward me, confirming that this was no ordinary cigarette. I edged toward the ditch bank to get away from the smell. As an excuse for backing away, I leaned over to sniff the clusters of yellow blossoms on a gangly wildflower.

I almost gagged.

Could that stench really be coming from those pretty little flowers? I straightened, trying to breathe shallowly through my mouth and hide my disgust so Jay wouldn't think I was disapproving of him.

Once I'd noticed it, the smell seemed strong all around me. Jay sat on the log and smoked. I paced the small open space, trying not to gag. It smelled of garbage, something rotten, decaying, dead. I wanted to get out of there. I wanted to turn back and run through the woods, back to my small office where I could focus on my work. This was a mistake. I'd never belonged with Jay and never would.

My friend Katie's voice sounded in my head. *Stop it! You're channeling your mother again. Not all men are monsters.*

He grinned up at me. "Come on, have a seat."

I stared into his face as my stomach churned. How could he stand being in this place? Couldn't he smell it? Or did his little cloud of pot block out everything else?

I managed a smile. "Can we go now? I don't want to get in trouble my first week."

He made a sound that might have been a short laugh or might've been a grunt of annoyance. "What's the big deal? My dad's the manager. I'll put in a good word for you."

But his dad wasn't my direct boss, and having Jay ask his dad to tell my boss to go easy on me wouldn't build the reputation I wanted.

He gave a smile that I would have found charming when I was fifteen. "Come on, sit down next to me."

I hesitated. I should tell him I was leaving. Just walk away. But I couldn't make the words come out. He might get angry, and as he'd said, his father was the manager.

I didn't want to go back to the office smelling of marijuana. He had the joint in his right hand, so I finally sat on his left a couple of feet away. Once he finished his joint, I'd insist we leave.

He edged closer and put his arm around me. His right hand – fortunately empty – came up to my face. I hoped he hadn't dropped the joint into the dry grass. Fire danger was at its usual early-summer high.

He leaned in and his lips touched mine. I flinched.

Jay leaned back. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

My face heated. "I'm sorry. It's just...." I searched for an excuse that wouldn't insult him. I glanced toward the ditch. "Something stinks here. It's making me sick."

He sniffed the air. "You're right. Smells like something died."

When he stood, I jumped up too. But instead of heading back for the main path, he walked closer to the ditch. It figured, a man notices something dead and instead of getting away from it he wants to poke around closer. I sighed.

Jay sniffed and then made a face. He pushed past a low-hanging branch and took a couple of steps down the ditch bank. I guess I have my share of morbid curiosity, because I edged closer.

Jay made a choking sound. He stumbled backward, turned, and bumped me hard as he pushed past.

“What is it?” I demanded

He leaned over the log, hands on his thighs, taking deep breaths. I looked toward the ditch, then back at Jay. What could have caused this reaction? Something dead, but larger and grosser than he’d imagined? I pictured a deer with maggots crawling all over it.

I shuddered. Whatever it was, I didn’t want to see it.

“Jay? Are you all right?”

He straightened, still breathing heavily. “We have to get out of here. It’s a body. I think – I think it’s a body.”

I stared at him, the words slowly sinking in. “You mean ... a *human* body?”

He didn’t answer. I glanced toward the ditch and whatever it hid. “Are you sure?”

He shook his head. His skin looked gray, and his eyes seemed to stare at something no longer there. He lifted a hand and curled it into a fist over his chest. “There was ... a hand.”

I swallowed hard and pressed my arm over my stomach. “We need to call someone.” But if we reported a body and it turned out to be an animal, we’d look like fools. “We have to know for sure.”

Jay made no move. I said again, “We have to know.”

I walked slowly toward the ditch. I ducked under the branch. The smell rose up to gag me and I put a hand over my nose and mouth. My face turned away, refusing to see. I had to force myself to turn my head, to keep my eyes squinted open.

Oh God. It was a body. A woman’s body.

The smell choked me and my vision blurred. Behind me, I heard Jay’s harsh breathing. I should have listened to my instincts.

I shouldn’t be here.

About the Author

Ordinary Women, Extraordinary Adventures

Kris Bock writes novels of suspense and romance with outdoor adventures and Southwestern landscapes. *The Mad Monk's Treasure* follows the hunt for a long-lost treasure in the New Mexico desert. In *The Dead Man's Treasure*, estranged relatives compete to reach a buried treasure by following a series of complex clues. In *The Skeleton Canyon Treasure*, sparks fly when reader favorites Camie and Tiger help a mysterious man track down his missing uncle. *Whispers in the Dark* features archaeology and intrigue among ancient Southwest ruins. *What We Found* is a mystery with strong romantic elements about a young woman who finds a murder victim in the woods. In *Counterfeits*, stolen Rembrandt paintings bring danger to a small New Mexico town.

Read excerpts at www.krisbock.com or visit her [Amazon page](#). [Sign up for Kris Bock newsletter](#) for announcements of new books, sales, and more.

The Mad Monk's Treasure is the first of the Southwest Treasure Hunters novels. *The Dead Man's Treasure* is book 2 and *The Skeleton Canyon Treasure* is book 3. Each novel stands alone and is complete, with no cliffhangers. This series mixes action and adventure with sweet romance. The stories explore the Southwest, especially New Mexico.



The Mad Monk's Treasure

The lost Victorio Peak treasure is the stuff of legends—a heretic Spanish priest's gold mine, made richer by the spoils of bandits and an Apache raider. When Erin, a quiet history professor, uncovers a clue that may pinpoint the lost treasure cave, she prepares for adventure. But when a hit and run driver nearly kills her, she realizes she's not the only one after the treasure. And is Drew, the handsome helicopter pilot who found her bleeding in a ditch, really a hero, or one of the enemy?

Erin isn't sure she can trust Drew with her heart, but she'll need his help to track down the treasure. She heads into the New Mexico wilderness with her brainy best friend Camie and a feisty orange cat. The wilderness holds its own dangers, from wild animals to sudden storms. Plus, the sinister men hunting Erin are determined to follow her all the way to the treasure, no matter where the twisted trail leads. Erin won't give up an important historical find without a fight, but is she ready to risk her life—and her heart?

"The story has it all - action, romance, danger, intrigue, lost treasure, not to mention a sizzling relationship...."

"Great balance of history, romance, and adventure. Smart romance with an "Indiana Jones" feel."

“Well-written with an attention to detail that allowed me to picture exactly in my head how a scene looked and played out.” - Jules R.



The Dead Man's Treasure

Rebecca Westin is shocked to learn the grandfather she never knew has left her a bona fide buried treasure – but only if she can decipher a complex series of clues leading to it. The hunt would be challenging enough without interference from her half-siblings, who are determined to find the treasure first and keep it for themselves. Good thing Rebecca has recruited some help.

Sam is determined to show Rebecca that a desert adventure can be sexy and fun. But there's a treacherous wildcard in the mix, a man willing to do anything to get that treasure – and revenge.

Action and romance combine in this lively Southwestern adventure, complete with riddles the reader is invited to solve to identify historical and cultural sites around New Mexico.



Counterfeits

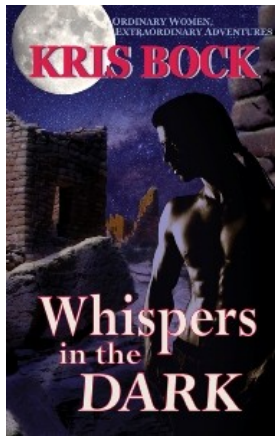
Painter Jenny Kinley has spent the last decade struggling in the New York art world. Her grandmother's sudden death brings her home to New Mexico, but inheriting the children's art camp her grandmother ran is more of a burden than a gift. How can she give up her lifelong dreams of showing her work in galleries and museums?

Rob Caruso, the camp cook and all-around handyman, would be happy to run the camp with Jenny. Dare he even dream of that, when his past holds dark secrets that he can never share? When Jenny's father reappears after a decade-long absence, only Rob knows where he's been and what danger he's brought with him.

Jenny and Rob face midnight break-ins and make desperate escapes, but the biggest danger may come from the secrets that don't want to stay buried. In the end, they must decide whether their dreams will bring them together or force them apart.

Praise for *Counterfeits*:

“‘Counterfeits’ is the kind of romantic suspense novel I have enjoyed since I first read Mary Stewart’s ‘Moonspinners’, and Kris Bock used all the things I love about this genre. Appealing lead characters, careful development of the mysterious danger facing one or both of those characters, a great location that is virtually a character on its own, interesting secondary characters who might or might not be involved or threatened, and many surprises building up to the climax.” 5 Stars – Roberta at Sensuous Reviews blog



Whispers in the Dark

Young archeologist Kylie Hafford heads to the remote Puebloan ruins of Lost Valley, Colorado, to excavate. Her first exploration of the crumbling ruins ends in a confrontation with a gorgeous, angry man who looks like a warrior from the Pueblo's ancient past. If only Danesh weren't so aggravating... and fascinating. Then she literally stumbles across Sean, a charming, playful tourist. His attentions feel safer, until she glimpses secrets he'd rather keep hidden.

The summer heats up as two sexy men pursue her. She finds mysteries – and surprising friendships – among the other campground residents.

Could the wide-eyed woman and her silent children be in the kind of

danger all too familiar to Kylie?

Mysterious lights, murmuring voices, and equipment gone missing plague her dig. A midnight encounter sends Kylie plummeting into a deep canyon. She'll need all her strength and wits to survive. Everything becomes clear – if she wants to save the man she's come to love and see the villains brought to justice, she must face her demons and fight.

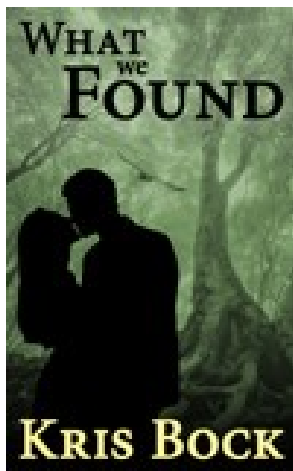
Whispers in the Dark is action-packed romantic suspense set in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

Praise for *Whispers in the Dark*:

“This book was a delight from start to finish!”

“Whispers in the Dark has a hefty dose of adventure and mystery, as well as a strong main character.”

“This book kept me turning pages until the end. The plot was full of twists and turns, always keeping the reader rooting for the heroine. Excellent read!”



What We Found

22-year-old Audra Needham is back in her small New Mexico hometown. She just wants to fit in, work hard, and help her younger brother. Going for a walk in the woods with her former crush, Jay, is a harmless distraction.

Until they stumble on a body.

Jay, who has secrets of his own to protect, insists they walk away and keep quiet. But Audra can't forget what she's seen. The woman deserves to be found, and her story deserves to be told.

More than one person isn't happy about Audra bringing a crime to life.

The dead woman was murdered, and Audra could be next on the vengeful killer's list. She'll have to stand up for herself in order to stand

up for the murder victim. It's a risk, and so is reaching out to the mysterious young man who works with deadly birds of prey. With her 12-year-old brother determined to play detective, and

romance budding in the last place she expected, Audra learns that some risks are worth taking – no matter the danger, to her body or her heart.

Praise for *What We Found*:

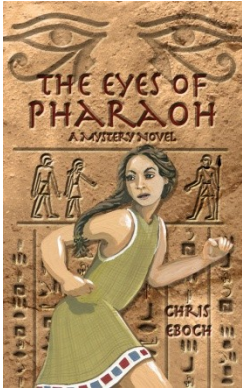
“Another action-packed suspense novel by Kris Bock, perhaps her best to date. The author weaves an intriguing tale with appealing characters. Watching Audra, the main character, evolve into an emotionally-mature and independent young woman is gratifying.”

“This book had me guessing to the end who was the murderer. Well written characters drive the story. Good romance. Exceptional and believable plot twists and turns. I loved it!”

“This is a nonstop suspense. Love the characters and how real they seem with every episode played out. This is a love story and suspense all in one.”

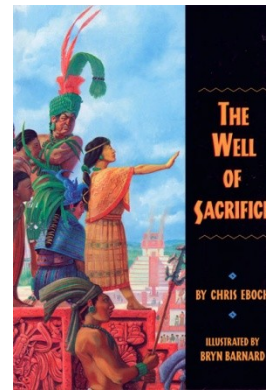
Children's books by Chris Eboch

Ms. Bock also writes for young people as Chris Eboch. Her novels are appropriate for ages nine and up. Learn more or read excerpts at www.chriseboch.com or Chris's [Amazon page](#). Sign up for the [Chris Eboch children's books](#) mailing list for special offers and new releases.



The Eyes of Pharaoh, a mystery set in Egypt in 1177 BC, brings an ancient world to life. When Reya hints that Egypt is in danger from foreign nomads, Seshta and Horus don't take him seriously. How could anyone challenge Egypt? Then Reya disappears. To save their friend, Seshta and Horus spy on merchants, soldiers, and royalty, and start to suspect even The Eyes of Pharaoh, the powerful head of the secret police. Will Seshta and Horus escape the traps set for them, rescue Reya, and stop the plot against Egypt in time?

In *The Well of Sacrifice*, a Mayan girl in ninth-century Guatemala rebels against the High Priest who anyone challenging his power. Kirkus Reviews engrossing first novel.... Eboch crafts an exciting narrative with a richly depiction of ancient Mayan society.... The novel shines not only for a recreation of an unfamiliar, ancient world, but also for the introduction likable and determined heroine."



century sacrifices said, "[An] textured faithful of a brave,



The Genie's Gift is a lighthearted action novel the mythology of The Arabian Nights. Shy and determines to find the Genie Shakayak and claim the Gift of Sweet Speech. But the way is barred by a series of challenges, both ordinary and magical. How will Anise get past a vicious she-ghoul, a sorceress who turns people to stone, and mysterious sea monsters, when she can't even speak in front of strangers?

Bandits Peak: While hiking in the mountains, strange trio. He befriends Maria, but he's the men with her. Still, charmed by Maria, Jesse to tell anyone that he met them. But his new deadly secrets, and Jesse uncovers them. It will take all his wilderness his courage, to survive.



Jesse meets a suspicious of promises not friends have skills, and all

Readers who enjoyed Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet* will love *Bandits Peak*. Pounding adventure tale is full of danger and excitement.

This heart-



The *Haunted* series follows a brother and sister who travel with their parents' ghost hunter TV show and try to help the ghosts. In *The Ghost on the Stairs*, an 1880s ghost bride haunts a Colorado hotel, waiting for her missing husband to return. *The Riverboat Phantom* features a steamboat pilot still trying to prevent a long-ago disaster. In *The Knight in the Shadows*, a Renaissance French squire protects a sword on display at a New York City museum. During *The Ghost Miner's Treasure*, Jon and Tania help a dead man find his lost gold mine—but they're not the only ones looking for it.

Learn more or read excerpts at www.chriseboch.com or Chris's [Amazon page](#). Sign up for the [Chris Eboch children's books](#) mailing list for special offers and new releases.

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