



## Midwest Crime Writer

Marguerite Ashton

*Crime Fiction With Color*

Lily leaned on the steering wheel and squinted at the tall figure in her headlights. She eased her foot off the gas pedal and watched as the figure dragged something off the road. “Did you see that?”

“It could’ve been road kill,” Morgan said.

Lily slowed down. She pulled the truck off to the side where she peered at an object lying on the pavement. “It’s a cellphone.” Throwing the gear into park, she hopped out.

“Wait a second. Let me call it in.”

Lily squatted down next to the cellphone.

Morgan came up next to her. “They’re sending out a car.”

Lily put her hand up. “Backlight’s going out. Phone was just used.” She stood and scanned the cornfield. “Someone’s out there and most likely in trouble.”

Lily’s heart raced as she ran back to her truck, collecting her gun and badge from underneath the seat. She placed her gun in her hip holster and clipped her badge on the opposite side onto her belt. “That wasn’t an animal.”

“You’re not going out there,” Morgan said.

Lily grabbed the flashlight from the side pocket on the door and sprinted over to spot where the figure had disappeared.

She turned on the flashlight and drew a circle using the light rays near her feet. “It looks like drag marks.”

“Back-up is coming. It’s dark. No way we’re going hunting in some damn cornfield.”

Lily sighed. Morgan was right, but whoever had been hauled off was in trouble and running out of time.

A piercing scream erupted in the distance. Lily took off toward the sound, using her flashlight and the dull glow from the city lights to guide her.

In a matter of seconds, her feet pounded the soft soil leading away from the safety of her truck. She glanced over her shoulder and saw her partner running parallel with her, but staying closer to the road.

On the other side of the fence row, footsteps matched hers in beat as they trampled the pile of fallen leaves scattered among the field. Lily picked up her pace, running hard and fast, tussling with buck thorn branches as they swatted her face and throat.

Strings of hanging barb wire nipped at her clothes as she dodged several leaning fence posts. The chilling wind penetrated her torn clothing and lapped at the slits in the fabric on her thigh and calf.

A few seconds later, a prickly burn in her leg forced Lily to stop. It felt like thin shards of glass sliced into her raw flesh, imbedding themselves into the jagged gashes. She hiked up her pants leg and shined the light on the wounds. *Those damn branches.*

Lily's chest heaved with exertion as disappointment overwhelmed her. The footsteps tapered off into the darkness. *He was getting away.* She fell to her knees and clutched her injured leg in agony.

Lily glanced over at the road. It was silent. And she was alone. Where did Morgan go? The terror that lay beneath her bold judgment to rescue someone had surfaced.

Then, several yards away, Lily saw an outline walking towards her. Instinctively, she reached back, gripping her nine millimeter, giving her the reassurance she still had control. "Stop! Police!"

The outline continued toward her.

Lily unfastened the holster and the person stopped, sheltered by the trees. She could tell by the masculine build it wasn't Morgan.

"Get down on the ground and put your hands behind your head," Lily demanded.

"Lily?" Morgan shouted, coming up from the rear.

Relieved to hear the voice of her best friend, Lily exhaled, but kept her eyes front, ready to pull her firearm and shoot if he dared to make one move in her direction.

As Morgan approached, the unidentified man turned and fled in the other direction.

"Are you all right?" Morgan offered her hand.

"Terrified."

As Lily and Morgan made their way out to the road, they heard movement near the fence. Lily stopped, aimed her light and followed the beams over a pile of clothing, then upon a woman's face.

The victim moaned and threw up her arm to shield her eyes from the light.

Morgan jogged over to the young lady and stooped next to her to ask a few questions.

Exhausted, Lily limped to a grassy patch and sat down. She could still see Morgan. For the moment, that was all that mattered.

Lily looked at the stretch of road she'd traveled on several occasions; one of those occasions jabbed at her memory like nails being pounded into hard recycled wood.

Celine's funeral.

A snapping sound brought Lily out of her thoughts. She looked toward the hazard lights flashing on her truck and saw a yellow strip flapping in the wind a few feet away from her.

She rose, took a couple more steps, and squinted at the bold black lettering printed on the tape, which kickstarted her heart.

County Road K.

She was near the crime scene.