

# You *Do* Want to Know

LISA JACKSON TAKES READERS ON A TOUR  
OF HER NEW BOOK — AND HER BRAIN!

By Lisa Jackson

**T**HIS FALL I GOT LUCKY. I was finally able to write the book that's been rattling around in my head for years. The book has literally haunted me.

OK, maybe I should backtrack about 10 years. The truth is that *You Don't Want to Know* started out as three paragraphs that I was forced to write at a workshop led by Heather Graham. We were at some writers' conference in Virginia. She asked everyone in the room to write the first scene of a story. Right there on the spot. Oh, God! I hate those kinds of things. You know what I'm talking about: the exercise where you write something on the spur of the moment under intense lights, with the clock ticking and the woman next to you scribbling away as if she is inspired enough to write *War and Peace*. Worse yet, after you scratch out your idea, you're supposed to read your work *aloud*. I wanted to bolt out of the room, claim an attack of appendicitis or an emergency at home, or anything. I'm just no good under pressure. However, I couldn't *not* do it; Heather's a friend. So, sweating bullets, I dug in.

This was a romance conference, but nothing romantic came to mind. I went blank. For *four* minutes. I watched the hand of the clock tick away, and we only had 20 to finish the scene. I did everything I knew to relax, cleared my brain and, suddenly, a scene came to mind. Since I had nothing else, I grabbed hold of it and started writing so fast that the woman working on the opus would have been proud. In my mind's eye, I was staring out a rain-washed window, looking through a curtain of fog, to the dock where my son was standing, my 2-year-old son in his red and gray sweatshirt, teetering on the edge of the pier.

I tried to get to him, to run, but I couldn't make it to the door and...you get the idea. I was really writing fast now, the words pouring out. When Heather said the time was up, and I was pulled back to the present, I was surprised by how deeply I got into the story. My paranoia of reading aloud took hold, but, when my turn came, I actually was able to read the piece. I remember that no one knew what to say, but it didn't matter. I think Heather made the comment that I was "seriously twisted," or something.

However, that scene, born of fear, was forever lodged in my mind. I saw the heroine, Ava Church, in a panic to save her son. Was he real? A ghost? A figment of her tortured imagination? As desperate as she was to reach him, she was unable. Her panic was palpable; she was reliving her worst nightmare over and over again. I knew that I would write this book someday. I just didn't know when.

The years — and lots of other books that had to be written first



Victorian manses and the foggy Pacific Northwest coastline inspired the setting for Jackson's latest suspense.



— rolled by. Finally, the day came where I sat down and really concentrated on putting the novel together. After all, a creepy first scene does not a book make. The pivotal characters had already formed in my mind. I already knew Ava Church, a once strong woman who's now frantic. She can't accept that her son is dead and fears she's losing her mind. Her husband, Wyatt, had come to me as well: a concerned man who is unable to cope with the changes in Ava. Her best friend, Tanya, as well as a new hire on the estate, a man with a shady past, were also present. Some of the characters were cunning, others had a secret agenda. There were still others whose motives weren't clear to me yet, but I knew who they were. With the pivotal players already formed and coming to life, I had to decide where to set the book. The mood had to be dark, with a lingering sense of evil. I wanted my heroine isolated, trapped in a gilded cage, a mansion that was as haunting as it was beautiful.

The Pacific Northwest in winter — its coastline often shrouded in fog, the wind fierce, the sea raw — created just the mood I was going for!

Since I wanted the heroine to be trapped on her island, the San Juans, a unique chain of islands in the waters separating Washington state from Canada, seemed like a perfect setting. I've been there a few times and always loved them. The islands are cov-



ered with old forests on steep hillsides and peppered by quaint towns connected by a ferry system. They seemed perfect for what I had in mind!

Of course, the actual setting of *You Don't Want to Know*, Church Island, is fictitious. I envisioned an isolated spot, surrounded by water, with rolling fog and a cold so deep that it settled into my heroine's bones. I felt her loneliness and despair and hoped to create a home where she didn't feel safe and couldn't trust anyone; in essence, an elaborate jail cell. The house itself is a three-story Victorian manor, complete with tended grounds, widow's walk and turret. I used some of the houses I'd visited in Astoria, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash., as inspiration. I hoped to create an elegant old house with locked doors and deep secrets.

Along with the house, the island needed its own unsettling history. I felt that if it housed an abandoned asylum upon its shores, all the better. This hospital would have housed the most deranged of the criminally insane. To tell you the truth, Sea Cliff, the vacant hospital in *You Don't Want to Know*, is kind of a cross between Alcatraz and a state asylum — a community unto itself. Because even though Alcatraz was a prison, it had the right "feel" to it, with inmates, guards and the families of the staff living in close proximity — away from the mainland. And, really, what good is a mental hospital without an escaped patient or two? Wait! Make that a

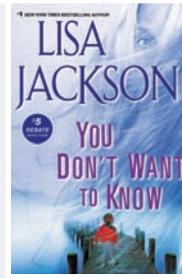
*violent* escaped patient!

OK, so the island was coming together. I was starting to feel it. But what of the town across the bay? Located on the mainland, Anchorville is really a mixture of all the beach towns I visited as a child. Complete with a marina filled with fishing and sailing vessels, the town is set on a steep hillside across the bay from Church Island. The fish market in *You Don't Want to Know* is like so many I've frequented since I was a kid: the kind with live crab and oysters, fresh fish and glass cases packed in ice. Outside there was always huge crab pot boiling, steam rising into the already foggy skies. Seagulls screamed, and sea lions swam in the estuary, while cats slunk through the dark alleys.

After coming up with ideas for places within the book, I sat down to write it. Some books are easier than others. I've written books where the plot made me want to tear out my hair and others that came together as easily as a well-oiled machine. Thankfully *You Don't Want to Know* wasn't difficult. Maybe it was because the characters were so real to me, or the setting almost in my backyard, but I think it's because I could connect to Ava on a very personal level. Unfortunately, all families experience tragedy, and the loss of a small child is every mother's nightmare. Our family experienced something very similar and, thankfully, there were organizations like Molly Bears and the M.I.S.S. Foundation to console us through our grief. In *You Don't Want to Know*, Ava is very much on her own. She's frantic as she fears she's not only lost her son, but her sanity, as well. She's a woman on the edge, a woman with a past and a woman who's scared to death of her future. I really can't say that I blame her!

This book was certainly a long time in the making, but I can safely say it's my favorite. Writing about Ava Church was like writing about an old friend. She's been with me for so many years that it was a pleasure to finally tell her tale. ♡

Visit the author at [LisaJackson.com](http://LisaJackson.com).



## EXCERPT FROM *You Don't Want to Know*

The path wound ever upward where the trees gave way to a headland with a breathtaking view of the strait. From this point other islands could be seen, dark peaks jutting out of the ever-shifting waters of this arm of the Pacific.

The last time she'd been here had been the morning after Noah had gone missing. She'd searched every building, every niche in the

house and finally, she'd ridden through the woods to this very spot and had looked out to the sea, afraid she'd see his small body in the restless waters. She'd even attempted to climb down the dilapidated stairs that, from this point, switched back and forth sharply to a bit of beach and dock that hadn't been used in decades. Her jaw clenched. She'd been so frightened the night Noah had disappeared, so spurred by her need to find him, that she'd attempted to climb down the stairs that night.

The wind had buffeted her, the sea crashing below. She'd held her flashlight tightly in one hand, her other fingers steadying herself on the rickety, wobbling banister.

Slowly, carefully, she'd descended, a litany of prayers tumbling through her mind.

*Oh, God, please let me find him.  
Please let him be okay . . . please,  
please, please . . .*

"Noah!" she'd yelled, her voice ripped from her throat, the roar of the sea deafening. "Noah!" Then, more quietly, "Oh, baby, please . . . come to Mama . . . please."

Her hood had flown off, her hair flying in front of her face.

Step by step, she descended the unsteady stairs. One step. Two . . .

At the landing, she'd taken a deep breath, turned, then inched her way down the second short flight. All the while, the old staircase had groaned against her weight.

But she had to go down.  
Had to find him.

Where was her baby? *Where?*

