

**The First Two Pages: *The Ransom***  
**by Nancy Boyarsky (Light Messages Publishing)**

*The Ransom*, the fourth of the Nicole Graves Mysteries, is about a series of kidnappings for ransom that turn into murder cases. The reader knows from the cover blurb that Nicole Graves is a newly licensed private investigator. She works for a private investigation agency that never gets involved in police investigations. So when her boss leaves information on her desk involving recent kidnappings that involve a death and two disappearances, she is puzzled. What possible role is she expected to play in this case?

In the opening two pages, I lay out the book's setup by describing the nature of the crimes and how very strange they are. My goal is to pique the reader's interest.

Nicole Graves arrived at work to find a manila envelope on her desk. It bore a yellow sticky note from her boss:

Take a look at this. Then come  
to my office and I'll explain.

—Jerry

We know from the cover blurb that Nicole Graves is a private investigator. If her boss left her an envelope, it must have something to do with her next assignment.

She pulled out the contents of the envelope. First was a news article she'd seen in the paper several days ago. It described the home invasion of a wealthy couple in which the wife was kidnapped. This was the third such incident in as many months. Nicole had read about the crimes and found them intriguing, especially since kidnapping of adults for ransom was rare in Los Angeles and other American cities.

We learn that this case is extremely unusual because the crime wave involves the kidnapping of adults, which is rare in the U.S. today. Odder still is what Nicole's role in this case might be. Her firm—a modern-day, corporate investigation agency—never gets involved in criminal matters, which are the purview of the police.

In the first case, the husband, whose name was never disclosed in the news, followed the abductors' instructions to the letter. They'd warned him not to call the police, and he didn't. He delivered \$50,000 ransom in cash—unmarked bills of assorted denominations—as demanded. The drop point was L.A.'s downtown central library, behind the books on a shelf holding copies of Shakespeare's "All's Well That Ends Well." Only after his wife was released did the husband report the crime to the police. The tabloids had a field day with the story, referring to the perpetrators as the "All's-Well Kidnappers." It did have a certain ring to it.

The reader learns here that the case is likely to attract attention from the media, as did several cases Nicole handled in earlier books in the series. The media was so relentless in her past adventures that it became a leading character, shaping events and providing a threat to Nicole since part of her job is to keep her work confidential.

In the second case a month later, Craig Reina also followed instructions not to involve the police when his wife, Victoria, was kidnapped. He delivered the ransom to a public park, where he'd been instructed to leave it under a slide set. After twenty-four hours passed with no sign of his wife, Reina finally called the police. Now, six weeks later, Victoria Reina was still missing, and the police didn't seem to have a clue to her whereabouts.

Here the case takes on an even more malevolent tone. Since the perpetrators have not released the kidnapped woman, this suggests she may be dead.

The third case, described in the article Jerry had left, took place five days ago. In this instance, the kidnap victim's husband had been killed, and his wife was still missing. In the previous kidnappings, the wife had been taken while the husband was left drugged, tied up, but otherwise unharmed. The intruders had disguised themselves so well that no one could give a physical description, except that the kidnapers were three in number and probably male. Not only had they covered their faces and worn gloves, none of them had spoken during commission of the crimes.

Now we know for sure that the kidnapers are murderers. Since the husband was killed in commission of the home invasion/kidnapping, and the wife is still missing, the kidnapers may be responsible for three deaths.

Nicole was insatiably curious when it came to crimes serious or bizarre enough to make the news. She found two aspects of these incidents intriguing. One was the way most crimes and attempted cover-ups were so badly bungled that the perpetrators had to be stupid, crazy, or both to imagine they'd get away with it.

This gives a look at an aspect of the heroine's personality—her insatiable curiosity—a trait that makes her such a good P.I.

When Nicole had read about the first two home invasion-kidnapping cases, she'd been puzzled by the relatively modest amount of ransom when the victims were extremely wealthy and probably would have paid a great deal more. Were the guilty parties kids, unaware of how much money to demand? Or was this rash of kidnappings something else altogether, like a sophisticated insurance scam or a weird, twisted prank that was the product of a sick mind?

Nicole recognizes how odd these cases are, with low ransoms demanded from people who'd pay a lot more to get their loved ones back. She sees that these incidents are something other than straight-forward kidnappings for ransom (unusual enough themselves), although she doesn't yet know how unique they are.

#

Nancy Boyarsky is the author of the Nicole Graves mystery series. She coauthored *Backroom Politics*, a *New York Times* notable book, with her husband. She has written several textbooks on the justice system and contributed to political anthologies, including *In the Running*, about women's political campaigns and *The Challenge of California* by the late Eugene Lee. She has also written articles on a variety of subjects for the *Los Angeles Times*, *West* magazine, *Forbes*, *McCalls*, *Playgirl*, *Westways* and other publications. She lives in L.A. with her husband, the journalist Bill Boyarsky.