

**A sample of  
SILENT GRAVES  
by Carolyn Arnold**

**CAROLYN  
ARNOLD**

**SILENT  
GRAVES**

**HIBBERT & STILES**  
PUBLISHING INC.

Sample of *Silent Graves* 2020 Revised Edition

Copyright © 2014 by Carolyn Arnold

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, contact the publisher.

Hibbert & Stiles Publishing Inc.  
hspubinc.com

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Names: Arnold, Carolyn, 1976

Title: *Silent Graves* / Carolyn Arnold.

Description: 2020 Hibbert & Stiles Publishing Inc. edition. | Series: Brandon Fisher FBI series ; book 2

Identifiers: ISBN: 978-1-4977982-5-0 (e-book) | ISBN: 978-1-988353-72-2 (4.25 x 7 paperback) | ISBN: 978-1-988064-07-9 (5 x 8 paperback) | ISBN: 978-1-988064-75-8 (6 x 9 hardcover)

Additional format

ISBN 978-1-989706-16-9 (6 x 9 paperback large print edition)

## Prologue

One Week Ago  
Prince William County, Virginia  
A Friday in September

**H**e had promised her a time she'd never forget. It was why she sacrificed comfort and drove in her stuffy BMW into the countryside. The weather had such nerve to reach record heat waves in September. It scorched as if it were the middle of summer.

She glimpsed in the rearview mirror, angling it to better see her reflection.

*"A woman has been reported missing..."*

Those few words from the radio made it through to her ears. That was top news? Surely, there was a murder or a stock-market drop to report.

*"...it's suspected that she may be the victim of foul play. Police are urging women of the Washington, DC, area to be careful."*

She laughed. *Be careful.*

A song came on, one she didn't care for, and she commanded the radio off.

She had never been where he had directed her to go, but she was excited to see this Wooded Retreat. Usually, they'd meet up at her house or the Marriott, but he wanted today to be special and personal.

She had long given up on feeling guilty about her infidelity. Her husband was too busy with his prestigious law firm in central

Washington. Really, it was his work that killed their marriage—his love for revenue his priority.

Her focus returned to the road and where she was headed. She wasn't used to the country with all its color. She was accustomed to the shades of gray that were intrinsic to life in the city. Maybe there was something to be said for the simple things. She lowered the window and inhaled deeply, ready to give the rustic experience a chance.

The air was fresh, despite the humidity, carrying with it the smell of greenery and—she gagged and raised the window again—damn blasted cows.

*Why does he think I'll be in the mood once I get there?*

The thought barely formed, and she had the answer. He was a fabulous lover. Thinking of his hands caressing her skin sent shivers through her and made her lower abdomen quiver.

She turned left when she noticed the rundown diner that he had mentioned to her.

Gravel crunched beneath her tires as she went from the highway's asphalt to an unpaved surface. The strip was narrow, barely wide enough to accommodate two cars if one came in the opposite direction. She studied the edge, anticipating the need to do just that. The soft shoulder appeared unforgiving as if it would suck in her car given a chance.

*Fifteen miles.*

She found it hard to believe this stretch would continue that long. Her eyes went to the woods, being cautious, watching for any deer or other animal that may decide to tempt fate. She checked her side mirror. Dust clouds being kicked up in her wake would be wreaking havoc on the wax job.

*So much for showing up looking pristine.*

She glanced in the mirror again and touched her fingertips to her forehead. She couldn't let him see her like this either.

Driving with one hand, she reached into her designer handbag on the passenger seat and pulled out her compact. She lifted the loaded brush, and the air conditioning vent cascaded powder through the air. She blew to keep it from landing on her cream-

colored pantsuit and began application. The scent of the powder tickled her nose and made her sneeze. She jerked the wheel just slightly, and the case toppled from her hands, hit the seat between her legs, barely missing her pants, and settled on the floor.

She slammed on the brakes. The mailbox he had told her to watch for, once a bright red, had worn from time. She had almost missed the turn.

She couldn't see the house from the road, but her heart beat rapidly now, anticipating what awaited her.

She fished into her bag again, this time for her gloss. She smeared some on with a finger, smacked her lips, looked in the mirror, and declared herself perfect. She was ready to go to bed with her lover.

# One

Present Day

Woodbridge, Virginia

Tuesday Morning

**A** couple months had passed since Deb and I separated, and I was still getting used to sleeping alone. Most mornings I would roll on my left side, open my eyes, and expect Deb to be lying there. Every time I did this, it met with the same result. I was alone.

The mornings were hard to take. At night, my mind was usually preoccupied with the day's events, a current case, or the complicated relationship that existed between me and a coworker.

I rolled over and faced the clock. 4:59 A.M.

I returned to my back and stared at the ceiling. It was hard adapting to the early mornings, but these days I usually beat the alarm. Even on days off, my body would wake me.

The alarm clicked on, and AC/DC's "Thunderstruck" came through the tiny speakers and, at the same time, my cell phone vibrated on the nightstand. I rolled over again and sat up. It wasn't like I would be getting more sleep anyhow.

"Rise and shine, Kid."

I rubbed a hand across my brow. My boss, FBI Supervisory Special Agent Jack Harper, only called people he respected by their names. I'd earned that privilege, but periodically he'd pull out the nickname anyway. "What's up?"

"What's up? Am I some friend now? I'm your boss."

“I’ll save professional for office hours,” I said sardonically with a grin that I was sure traveled through the line. In my career with the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit, there was no such thing as “office hours.”

“Come straight to the meeting room today. We’ve got a new case.”

“Sure.”

“What’s that noise in the background? Have you been partying all night?”

I turned my alarm off. “It’s AC/DC, classic rock.”

“Well, it’s not music. Music is—”

“I know...the Rat Pack, Natalie Cole, Michael Bublé.”

“Don’t knock it, Kid, and there’s nothing wrong with Michael.”

*Yeah, I suppose if you’re good with crooner music in the first place.*

“See you soon,” I said.

“Don’t be late.”

I rolled my eyes, wishing the expression wasn’t lost on the walls of my bedroom, yet thankful he couldn’t witness it, or I might be searching for a new job.

I rose from bed and flicked on the stereo, turning up Nickelback’s “Burn It to the Ground” until the glass in the old house rattled. I loved this song, and the louder the better.

I had an hour to make it to the office. I wrapped my hands and wrists with tape, and then started beating on the heavy bag I had installed in the bedroom. Deb never would have let it happen, but I didn’t have her to worry about anymore.

With each strike, I felt my stress, anger, and frustration melt away. I embraced the resulting euphoria and roundhouse-kicked the bag until I was sweating and breathing hard.

The song changed to the next on the playlist—Poison’s “Nothin’ but a Good Time.”

*Damn. Now this is music!*

I switched to uppercuts and jabbed at the bag mercilessly, hitting it as if I planned to kill it.

A half hour later, soaking wet, I headed for the shower. There was no better way to start the day. In a matter of minutes, I’d be facing the next monster to cross paths with the FBI.



\*\*\*

**I smiled as I entered the meeting room just on time. How could one get any more punctual than that?**

“You’re late, Fisher.” Jack was sitting at the table with the rest of the team, which consisted of Zachery Miles and Paige Dawson. She was the coworker with whom I had a complicated relationship. We’d had a brief affair and she fell in love with me; I loved her, but not to the extent she required. She acted as if everything was fine, but I knew—*sensed*—it wasn’t.

“It’s Pending, boss. He probably forgot to set the alarm.” Zachery lifted a steaming take-out cup to his mouth, cutting his smirk short. He’d nicknamed me “Pending” to poke at my probationary period.

“He even got a wake-up call,” Jack mumbled.

“Brandon,” Paige said. Her red hair hung in loose curls, serving as a soft frame for her face, but her eyes were cool.

I took in my team, not sure how they did it. They were there, not just on time, but early. They were all alert, despite the caffeine they clung to as if their lives depended on it.

“Sit. We don’t have all day.” Jack patted his shirt pocket where he kept his cigarettes. He had probably already smoked a few since waking up. He was definitely a chain-smoker.

“Hey.” Nadia came up behind me and tapped me on the back as she walked by.

Nadia Webber was our analyst.

“Hey.” I took a seat.

Nadia clicked a button on a remote she held, and a wall-mounted screen filled with the picture of a woman. Thirties, beautiful, long dark hair, and brown eyes.

“This is Amy Rogers,” Nadia said. “Her husband is Kirk Rogers.”

“Kirk Rogers. Doesn’t he own the communications company Trinity?” I asked.

“He does,” Nadia said. “His wife went missing last week.”

“I’m not sure why we’d be tasked with her disappearance.” I might have been a little fast to react, given Jack’s glare, but our team focused mostly on serial crime. At this point, we didn’t even know if Amy Rogers had been abducted.

“That’s correct,” Nadia confirmed. “Rogers has money, and he’s used some of it to pay investigators to do some snooping around. They found out that thirty women, thirty-one including his wife, have been reported missing from Prince William County in the last six years. Rogers has a tight friendship with the police chief from the Metropolitan Police Department of the District of Columbia. He’s the one who asked us to help out.”

“So because some rich guy has connections—” I snapped my jaw shut at the sight of Jack’s scowl.

“We’re investigating this case because this is the one we’ve been assigned.” Jack’s mouth fell into a thin line.

Nadia continued. “Rogers’s investigation turned up something else that’s interesting. There were three women found ditched along I-95 between Lorton and a little west of Dumfries.” Nadia pushed a button on the remote again. The screen split into three columns and showed three women’s faces, above photos of what I assumed were their remains. All of them were naked and of different skin color.

I sat up straighter because now I saw evidence of serial homicide. “It doesn’t seem the killer selected his victims based on race,” I said. There was a blend of Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic.

“I wouldn’t say it’s a factor,” Nadia agreed.

“I-95 is a major highway, but the stretch you mentioned is—what?—twenty minutes at the speed limit?” Paige said. “It’s likely someone from the area.”

“When were they found?” Zachery asked Nadia.

“Between eleven and forty-one years ago. The oldest case was Melanie Chase. She was discovered along I-95 near Woodbridge by the Levine family, who was on a road trip. The youngest, age three, had to pee. There were no rest stops for a distance, so the father pulled over for the kid to go, and they got more than a number one.”

Woodbridge was where I lived. “How was she killed?”

“The ME ruled the cause of death as pulmonary edema.”

“Fluid in the lungs.” Everyone gave me the once-over as if to say, *yes, that would be pulmonary edema*. “What about the other victims?”

“Another died of a severe stroke while yet another of a brain hemorrhage. The other victims found were Lena Swanson, thirty-eight years ago, and Jane Warner, eleven years ago.”

“Whoa,” I said. “That’s quite the span between the two. Either there’s a long cooling-off period in there or there are victims we don’t know about.”

“Whatever the case, it seems someone new is carrying on with abducting women in Prince William County or the original has resumed his work.”

It was unsettling to think of abduction as being someone’s *work*. “Were these women raped?”

“There’s only evidence that Jane Warner was, but these three women were all married without children.” Nadia turned to the screen, zooming in on their wrists and ankles. “Chase, Swanson, and Warner all have these same markings. It appears the killer bound them with linked chain.”

“And you said there’s been thirty women reported missing in the last six years?” Paige asked.

“Yep.”

“On average, that’s one woman every two months,” Zachery calculated. “Assuming all the reported missing cases were taken by one unsub.”

Unsub meaning unidentified subject, a gender-neutral label for suspects.

“Holy crap.” The words left my lips without thought, and everyone’s attention was on me again. “What more do we know?”

“Not much, but given no evidence of defensive wounds, it would suggest they were drugged.”

“Could be with ketamine. Although that would show in their systems,” I said.

Nadia shook her head. “Yeah, and there wasn’t any trace of that.”

“Then maybe something herbal that would inhibit their ability to move but would leave their system quickly,” Zachery tossed back.

“If the cops figured one person was responsible for the death of these three women, why not call in the FBI even eleven years ago when Warner was found?” I asked.

“They did, but the case was never taken on. The killer went silent, and there didn’t seem to be any future threat, so the FBI bowed out.”

I leaned forward on the table. “But we’re thinking this guy’s back and could have Amy Rogers?”

“That’s exactly what we’re thinking.”

## Two

The Night Before

Dumfries Police Station, Dumfries, Virginia

Monday Evening, 7:30 PM

**A**nother woman's life had been summed up in the media as missing, but Officer Trent Stenson was pretty sure she was only a piece of a much larger picture. The good that came from her disappearance was that her husband was some powerful, rich businessman. Now people would be paying attention.

Trent was only a *lowly* officer, if he listened to his superiors at the Dumfries Police Department. But he'd been on the job for three years and was capable of a lot more than they seemed to think. It wasn't like there was any room for advancement within his department, though. That's why he had his sights on moving over to Prince William County PD where they had hundreds of officers to Dumfries PD's dozen. He saw himself in their Homicide Unit under the Violent Crimes Bureau that worked out of the Central District station in Woodbridge. It might have to do with having a friend there. He'd have beers with Detective Lenny Hanes from time to time, and Trent hoped that Hanes would put in a good word and help him transfer and advance, but things hadn't worked out that way yet. For the most part, shit floats to the top. At least, that's how some disgruntled cops saw things.

Trent wasn't going to let the actions of others sway him from doing his job with dedication. He subscribed to the adage "anything worth doing is worth doing well."

He looked beyond the front desk and out the glass doors to the parking lot. It was a quiet night. Officer Becky Tulson had been dispatched to a drunk-and-disorderly at a local bar, but that was about all the excitement going on right now. Even management had begged off, so he had the office to himself, making it the perfect time to look into his “pet” project, as it were.

Amy Rogers wasn't the only missing wife who graced the missing persons database from the area. There had been many others before her. He suspected more would follow.

He logged onto the database and searched the area for women ages twenty-two to thirty-five. It didn't seem race mattered, so he let that parameter go. He searched Prince William County and surrounding areas as far as Washington on the south side.

Thirty faces from the last six years came on screen. He searched for new ones. He had the others memorized and catalogued in his mind—and in his filing cabinet at home. If his sarge found out about the latter, he could lose his badge, but it was worth the risk if it meant bringing even one woman home.

Most of their faces were familiar to him because he scoured this information every day, sometimes more than once day. It had become not a fascination, but an obsession.

*Who is taking these women? How are the husbands losing track of their wives?*

Not that Trent had any experience being married. He was only twenty-four and preferred to hold on to his single lifestyle as long as he could. He didn't need a woman telling him how to live his life.

He dropped forward and cupped his forehead in the palm of a hand for a few seconds. His bangs brushed the back of his hand. Silly how, at a time like this, he thought of his mother and how she preferred his hair cut above his collar. He let it grow out, only trimming its length periodically. The women he took to bed liked to run their fingers through his hair.

The door opened, and a woman in her late sixties walked in. Her blue eyes stood out in stark contrast to her pale face and gray hair. Tears dampened her cheeks.

"I should have called it in. I shouldn't have driven all the way here." She shook her head, and tremors ran through her body as if she were fighting off a chill. Maybe she was.

"Ma'am. It's okay. You're safe now."

The radio crackled to life, and Officer Tulson confirmed she was returning to the station.

"Sorry about the interruption." He looked up at the woman, but she was—gone? *Where did she*— He stood and found her on the floor with her knees tucked into her chest.

"Ma'am." He rushed to help her to her feet.

She slapped him away, and her eyes seeped with fresh tears. "It's there... I found it. I should have called."

Trent agreed with her assessment that she should have stayed put, wherever that was, given that she was in no condition to drive. "You said, 'It's there,' ma'am? *It what?*"

She met Trent's gaze, and her body heaved with another bout of crying. She covered her mouth, pinched her eyes shut, and rocked.

*Great, she's off her meds!*

"Ma'am, I can help you, but only if you talk to me. Let's get you off the floor." He held out a hand to her again, and this time she took hold. He helped lift her, but when she reached about halfway up, her legs faltered.

"You have a face like my grandson," she said.

He continued to help her to her feet, with him assuming most of the responsibility against gravity. He feared if he let go, she'd crumple back to the floor.

"I could go home and pretend I never saw a thing," she said. "Yep, I'll shut my eyes, and the body will be gone."

*The body?* Morbid excitement pulsed in his veins. *Could this be a homicide case dropped in my lap? Maybe this is the break I've been waiting for.*

He reined in his emotions, which were balanced quickly by the realization that this *body* was once a human being, or at least he hoped so, although *hoping* for such a thing sounded wrong to him. He didn't need a crazy making a fool of him. If he took her seriously and an investigation revealed nothing more than

a decomposing cow on a riverbank, or even worse, thin air, he'd never make detective.

He considered the empty station. If anyone came in, no one would be at the front desk. "Excuse me. One minute." He spoke into his radio. "Officer Tulson, what is your ETA?"

"Tulson here. About to pull in now."

"Roger that." He turned back to the woman. "We'll just wait for Officer Tulson, and we'll make out a report."

The woman nodded. She understood. Good. She had some wits about her.

He studied her in those few seconds. Her eyes, although moist, were cognitive. There was awareness behind them. Her pupils followed his as he took in her face. They were not dilated or pinpricks. She wasn't on drugs.

"Honey, I'm home." Becky walked in the front door. Her mouth clamped shut and she came to a standstill when she saw the woman.

He went over to Becky.

In the limited space of the station, her sexual pheromones sparked, making it impossible for any man in her vicinity to ignore them. She had a uniquely shaped face, and when paired with her confidence, it made her beautiful.

"I need you to watch the front for a bit."

"Sure."

Trent led the older woman to a conference room, thankful his sergeant wasn't there to take over. If he got in over his head, though, he had someone he could call—Hanes—but he'd reserve that as a final option. Technically, he should have driven her to PWCPD, but why squander this opportunity? And it was best he confirmed exactly what he was dealing with first.

"Would you like some water?" he asked.

She was already seated at the table. "Yes, please."

He poured her a glass and sat beside her. "My name is Trent Stenson." He dropped the officer part, not because he lacked pride in his position, but what did it matter in here? If he wanted her to relax and feel like an equal, he needed to level the playing field. "And you are?"



“Audrey Phillips.”

Holding a pen in his hand, he fidgeted with the pad in front of him. He would rather listen to her recollection of the situation and then make notes, but he had to follow things by the book if he would ever rank. He wrote her name on the form.

“Now, you said you found a body?”

Her face paled further, eyes blank and distant. She nodded.

“This was a human body, I assume.”

Seconds had passed before she answered. “Yes.”

This would take a long time if all he received were simple answers, direct, concise, and to the point. His pen was poised, eager to spread some ink on the page. “It’s okay. Go ahead and tell me more.”

“Most of her...” Shivers jerked her shoulders upward, and her head twitched. “*Most of her* was a skeleton, but her face, her hair... was there. And she was...gray. Is that normal?”

*Her. Could this be one of the missing women?*

“Where did you find her?” he asked.

“Out back. On my property.” She gave him the full address and waited while he took down the details. “She was in the field. Just... just lying there.” She covered her mouth with a hand, lowering it a second later. “We had flooding, but it’s receded now. Do you think she came up with the river?”

It was too early to offer an opinion, and they needed men out on the scene. The longer the body remained exposed to the elements, the more contaminated it would become.

“How old do you think she was?”

She lifted her shoulder and nudged it against an ear. “Thirties. I took this.” She pulled out a plastic sandwich bag and extended it to him. Inside was a gold band.

He wanted to scream, *you touched the body*, but instead said, “She was a married woman?”

Audrey nodded.

He took the bag and pinched the ring between his fingers. The tactile experience, even through the plastic, caused images from the missing persons database to parade through his mind.

He studied the ring and got the burning sensation in his gut, the one that contracted it into an acidic raisin. "Can you excuse me for a minute?"

"Yes, of course." Her brows sagged, and the corner of her mouth twitched as if she was confused by his rush to leave the room.

"I will be back. We need to get some officers over to your place." His heart beat fast, the pressure in his gut not easing up, but intensifying. He pulled out his cell phone and dialed Hanes. After a brief greeting, Trent got right down to it. "You know all those cases we've been talking about? How I think they're all connected somehow? Well, now we have a body."

**Detective Lenny Hanes stood in the doorway of his kitchen. He** watched his wife cleaning up the dinner dishes and loading what would fit into the dishwasher. Nicole and Brett, both under eight years of age, had been put to bed not long before. Lenny hoped the ringing phone hadn't wakened them.

"You're sure this is her?" he asked into the receiver.

His wife looked at him, and he mouthed the words, *it's a case*.

"When isn't it?" She closed the dishwasher door and started the cycle, leaving him in the kitchen but kissing his cheek as she passed him. "See you in the morning?"

Lenny made a sad face. He held her hand until it filtered out of his, keeping his eye on her until she disappeared up the staircase.

"The ring. It matches, I swear to you." Trent sounded out of breath.

"And she took the ring off the woman's finger?"

"Off Nina's finger? Yes."

"Before you get all caught up on—"

"I swear to you, it is. The engraving on the band matches the one noted in the missing persons database, and there's—"

"There's what?"

"Audrey Phillips, who found the body and took the ring...well, she took some of the flesh with it."

Lenny's dinner threatened a reappearance. "What is wrong with some people?"

“Don’t know. She seems like a sweet woman, but I don’t get it.”

“Well, we know people do strange things when faced with extreme circumstances.”

Lenny remembered one case where a woman leaned over her husband’s dead body and open-mouth kissed him. She only admitted that he was dead when he didn’t reciprocate. The hole in his head and the blood pool around him wasn’t enough. He shook the memory from his mind.

“And you haven’t told anyone else about this yet?” A couple of seconds passed. “Trent? You hear me?”

“Sorry, I was shaking my head.” He let out a small laugh. “Guess you couldn’t see that.”

“No.” Lenny sensed a mixture of emotion coming through the line from Trent—excitement his hunch was paying off but also regret that it was.

“We’re dealing with a serial killer, Len. It’s obvious. Amy Rogers went missing just last week. They called in the FBI for her. They need to know about this.”

“We can’t rush to conclusions. I’m going to call my sergeant to let him know about the find and contact Crime Scene and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. I’m heading out to Audrey Phillips’s place now. Keep her there, keep her calm, and let her know we’ll take care of it.”

“It?”

“The DB, Trent. Dead body, the victim. You have to learn to think of them that way. Otherwise, the job will eat you up.”

“I’m not babysitting this woman. I’m going to the crime scene.”

“Oh, no, you’re not.”

“Len—”

“There isn’t room for debate. You have to stay there. That’s your job. This is mine.”

“So you keep reminding me. Just remember, I connected everything before the detectives of PWCPD even had a clue.”

“Now you’re resorting to digs? Come on, Trent, you know I’ve got your back. I always have.”

“I still don’t see ‘Detective’ on my badge, and yep, I’m definitely in uniform.”

Lenny laughed. “Stop sulking. I’ll keep you posted.” He hung up the phone, went upstairs, and told his wife there was another case. His hours around home would be hit—and more likely miss—for the next while.

“Just take care of you.” She brushed a hand on the side of his face, and he kissed her forehead.

“That’s why I love you.”

“Love you.” Her nose went back into her paperback. She would be carried off into a fictional world before he hit the front door.

**You have reached the end of the sample. For purchase options, visit:**

[CarolynArnold.net/Silent-Graves](http://CarolynArnold.net/Silent-Graves)