



# Montana

*Gwen Florio*

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## **Montana** Gwen Florio

Foreign correspondent Lola Wicks is pissed. Downsized from her Kabul posting, her editor reassigns her to a stateside suburban beat formerly the province of interns. Arriving in Montana for some R&R at a friend's cabin, her friend is nowhere in sight.

Anger turns to terror when Lola discovers her friend shot dead. She can't get out of Montana fast enough, but finds that she can't as she's held as a potential witness, thwarting her plan to return to Afghanistan on her own and have her editors change their minds. Her best hope lies in solving the case herself. But this surefooted journalist who deftly negotiated Afghanistan's deadly terrain finds herself frighteningly off-balance in this forgotten corner of her own country, plagued by tensions between the locals and citizens of the nearby Blackfeet Nation.

Lola's lone-wolf style doesn't work in a place where the harsh landscape and extreme isolation compel people to rely upon each other in ways she finds unsettling. In her awkward attempts at connection, she forms a reluctant alliance with a local reporter, succumbs to the romantic attentions of a wealthy rancher, and fences warily with the state's first Indian candidate for governor, the subject of her friend's final stories.

Ultimately she comes to truly care about the people she meets in Montana, only to miss the warning signals that her own life is in danger.

While unraveling her friend's terrible fate, Lola joins many Americans in learning the hard lessons of a fraught economy - that circumstances change in a flash, that formerly overlooked places and people can hold deep value, and that human bonds matter more than fleeting career success.

## **Montana Details**

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Author : Gwen Florio

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## **From Reader Review Montana for online ebook**

### **Samantha Hines says**

I get too picky about books set where I live. Felt inauthentic at times, which is odd since Gwen lives just down the road from me in Missoula, but I think some of the 'Montananness' was played up to make it more appealing/interesting. Maybe if I was reading as opposed to listening to this on the worlds longest car ride I'd like it better...

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### **Kate Moretti says**

Great mystery and interesting characters! The writing was fantastic, which is always a plus for me. Florio is a master at using language in new and interesting ways. I learned a bit about Native American culture and life in Montana, vastly different than my life in Eastern Pennsylvania and I love any book I can close and think 'I learned something new today'.

Highly recommend!

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### **Joyce Adams says**

The first in the Lola Wicks series by Gwen Florio really gave me a sense of what it feels like to return from a third world country and try to integrate into First World culture again. Ms. Florio's prose provided me with a sense of small town life in Magpie, Montana. Searching for the clues and the reason that her friend Mary Alice was murdered, Lola gets involved in the community and the murder investigation. The story was fast paced, a little predictable regarding the murderer, but did have some interesting twists. I would definitely read another book in this series.

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### **Nikki says**

Lola Hicks is a tough-as-nails reporter who gets yanked out of Afghanistan when her newspaper closes down her division. Furious and forced to take a vacation, Lola heads to small-town Montana to see best friend and fellow reporter, Mary Alice. Lola's crusty exterior starts to crack when she finds her friend dead from a shot to the head. Lola quickly comes to realize that Magpie, Montana, located on the edge of a Blackfeet reservation, is a town divided. Lola blasts back at both the local big-shot rancher, Verle, who urges her to go home, and the inexperienced sheriff, Charlie, who labels her a person of interest and tells her she must stay in town.

Horried by Mary Alice's death, angry at the world and resentful of being told what to do, Lola decides to find out why Mary Alice died. After reading her friend's recent stories, Lola zeroes in Johnny Running Wolf, a local Blackfeet politician running for governor. After a confrontation at Mary Alice's funeral, Lola is determined to find out the truth behind Johnny's cocky self-assurance and endless supply of money.

The descriptions of Montana and the Blackfeet reservation are evocative and echo the tone of a lonely death on a hillside in a place with wide open spaces and vast skies. She also paints a clear picture of the uneasy and uneven existence between whites and native Americans. Wisely, she does not offer any quick fixes for the hardships of life on either side of the fence.

in the first half of the book, the character of Lola is so rude and irritating that it is hard to care what happens to her, but her dogged devotion to Mary Alice and her gradual softening eventually make her a palatable character. Florio takes the reader on a trail of twists and turns, casting suspicion on pretty much every male character in the book. She winds up keeping her options open a little too long, with the reveal coming up suddenly and without enough build-up. We go from knowing everything going on in Lola's head to knowing little when she finally figures out whodunit, and that's annoying.

There are other little things that irritate; the disbelief of a town that small having a daily newspaper, much less one that makes a morning headline out of a 2 AM death report. A woman driven to find a killer who takes a whole day to clean a house and another day to learn to ride a horse doesn't make a lot of sense. The scenes give time for Lola to reflect and for her character to grow, but they do so awkwardly and in an unbelievable way.

Overall, this is a good first novel and I expect Florio's next one, already titled *Dakota*, will be better. I intend to read it.

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## Amy says

Foreign correspondent Lola Wicks gets called back to Baltimore for a local reassignment and she's furious. Her editor insists she take a vacation. When she arrives in Magpie, Montana at her friend's cabin, she finds her friend, a local reporter, shot dead. Lola stays to discover why someone killed her even when she finds herself in danger.

Dauntless, free-spirited and a truly independent woman, Lola knows what she wants to do professionally and what makes her happy. At this time, that's being in a war zone covering international conflicts. Author Gwen Florio writes: "She heard her editor yet again, essentially suggesting that it was time for her to be more like other people. Ignoring the fact that the thing that made her different was the reason she'd presumably been hired in the first place."

Coming back from Afghanistan, Lola Wicks finds herself a bit paranoid— "She cast sidelong glances at her fellow passengers, retrieving an array of towering backpacks and cylindrical cases that looked as though they could contain grenade launchers." Into this small, seemingly idyllic town in the midst of America, Lola brings her wary foreign correspondent mindset. But does that become a hindrance or help in determining what happened to her friend?

**MONTANA** drew me in immediately with its stellar page-turning plot, terrific characters and stunning descriptions of Montana scenery: "*ahead, bare foothills bunched like fists, knuckled ridges pressing back against the weight of sky. The road arced around the hills in lazy swooping curves, then without warning hair-pinned through cliffs that leaned in above her, slicing the sky in manageable size.*"

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## **Jim Crocker says**

When I first picked up this book I wondered why Gwen Florio titled it Montana. By the time I finished, I found out. I can't imagine a better title. In so many ways the people, the land, the weather and the animals of Montana are major characters in this fascinating mystery.

Since Montana has been my home the past eleven years, I could hardly pass up this title without giving it a shot. Lola, Florio's main character—a battle-hardened foreign correspondent fresh from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—travels light and moves fast. She's developed that special sense of awareness that comes from weeks in the line of fire. For Lola, it's all about the juice and meeting her next deadline. Then out of the blue, she finds herself stateside, sidelined and out of the game. What better to do than visit an old friend in the wilds of Montana?

When she finds her old friend murdered on her own doorstep, Lola goes back in action on the trail of the killer. This is a journey of discovery, where Lola encounters the real Montana and a whole lot more. Don't hesitate. Pick up this exciting mystery, and along the way meet some of the horses, dogs, mountains, weather and terrific people that make Montana the special place it is—the jewel in the crown of the continent.

Jim in MT

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## **Skip says**

Foreign correspondent Lola Wicks is called home, victim to cost savings cuts at her newspaper. While determined to return to the war zone by any means necessary, she decides to first visit her only friend, Mary Alice, who she hasn't seen in five years when their career paths diverged. Lola arrives at her cabin in Montana to find her best friend shot to death, and vows to find the killer, because the apparently incompetent sheriff seems clueless. Her intrepid skills lead her quickly into politics, crime, and relations with the local Native Americans. 3.5 stars.

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## **\*Avonna says**

I did a Feature Blog review of Books #1 - #3 on my website <http://www.avonnalovesgenres.com>.

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## **Annie says**

a most excellent 5 star read... review to come!

Hello new favorite wild and feisty crime fighting broad!

I loved the book and very much enjoyed "out of her element" Lola.

This woman is tough as nails, rude, brusque, unsentimental (a little too unsentimental at first glance) she knows what, when and who she wants and when she wants it with no apologies.

Her name is Lola which makes me chuckle as you would think her name would be a tough girl name...anything but Lola!

Lola Wicks is part of a dying breed seeking out the real horror stories as a tough war correspondent in Afghanistan.

For most of her career she has been covering wars all over the globe in strange and faraway lands with people to match but, unfortunately people are just not interested in hard news anymore, they want light and fluffy so, much to her dismay Lola gets pulled off assignment and told to go take a much needed vacation. Totally pissed off and with plans to head right back to the war zone as soon as she can she decides to take that vacation in the Montana home of her good friend, Mary Alice.

Things go downhill as soon as she gets to the Montana cabin her friend owns when she finds Mary Alice murdered, shot in the face outside on her own property, dressed oddly with her dog whimpering over the body.

First thing Lola wants is to get the hell out of this town and head back home but, considering she is a witness and a suspect the local police insist she stick around for awhile.

Lola gets a room in town and starts to dig around wondering what the heck her friend had gotten herself into and how she could possibly end up dead, she soon realizes Mary Alice was onto some important and deadly information.

Lola starts nosing around town and questioning some of Mary Alice's friends and townspeople and soon finds herself in the same kind of trouble as Mary Alice was.

This story has local politics, fun, quirky small town characters, a huge Meth problem, animals, sexy cowboys, proud Indians and gorgeous scenery. ...

Oh, and Lola? what's with the heavy glass paperweight, carved cribbage peg, souvenir sugar spoon and Zuni fetish... did you do that covering news in the war zones too? (hahaha)

At first I thought Lola was just a nasty broad and I might not care enough to keep on reading but, as I kept reading and by the time I finished the book I realized that I loved this big hearted bad girl and wanted to see her again and again!

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## **Mark Stevens says**

Lola Wicks is tough. She's been a foreign reporter in Afghanistan and she has grown used to working in a strange country "among the casually over-armed."

Suddenly the newspaper closes down its foreign bureaus and Wicks is on an airplane headed home. The return to her Baltimore newsroom doesn't go too well. She doesn't want to cover zoning hearings and school board meetings. That work is for interns, she asserts. She wants to return to Afghanistan but the newspaper needs to cut costs. There are no more interns, the editor tells her, and she better learn to incorporate social media into her work.

Lola Wicks agrees to a break. A little R & R. She'll go visit a reporter friend, Mary Alice Carr, in Montana. She's so angry about the turn of events that she has a vivid daydream fantasy of blowing up the newspaper offices and she demonstrates a penchant for swiping small objects, which will come in handy. She heads off, goes west.

But there's one problem. Lola Wicks doesn't fish, doesn't like horses, and doesn't, in fact, do a lot of normal things like eat breakfast or carry a purse. In more ways than one, she's a stranger in a strange land.

And one more problem. She doesn't have a friend in Montana. Mary Alice Carr is dead. Lola is the one to find body, half-way up the hill behind her remote cabin. There's a bullet hole in her cheek.

And, from there, "Montana" is off. And running. Soon, Lola Wicks is following Mary Alice's trail, trying to figure what chains Mary Alice was yanking. Lola doesn't speak the local tongue. She has to learn the lay of the land. She has to ingratiate herself with the locals—but making nice is not exactly in her nature and the negotiated self-exile from the newspaper hasn't put her in the cheeriest frame of mind.

But Lola Wicks is sharp-eyed and, once convinced that she's onto something, sinks her teeth in harder. And deeper. The trail runs through issues with drug trafficking and politics and finds her wary of the state's first Indian candidate for governor.

"Montana" is beautifully written. Florio milks the Montana scenery for every ounce of atmosphere—the wide skies, the wind, the trees. And the wind. Did I mention the wind? And Florio is equally adept at zooming in on fine details. Florio writes with the eye of a keen reporter and the heart of a poet.

Lola Wicks knows at some point that the best way to tell the big story is to find the revealing details, the fine points. When all else fails, follow the money. Or whatever the money is buying. Montana is built around the themes of guises, masks, poses and borders. But it's also a story of finding a new place to call home and a new character within.

Lola Wicks uses all her skills—dogged research, intuition and observation. She learns some new tricks and skills as she adapts to her new surroundings. Out in Montana, as she finds out, weapons come in all shapes and sizes. Everyone out west is over-armed (casually or not) and when push comes to shove every option is fair game.

NOTE: Full disclosure that Gwen Florio was a colleague of mine but our friendship in journalism and fiction in no way impacts my thoughts about Montana. Catch Gwen at The Tattered Cover in Denver on Friday, Nov. 16.

Interview with Gwen on my blog: <http://wp.me/plqD1-ut>

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## Sheila says

Montana's surely as far as you can get from the killing hills of Afghanistan. No interpreters needed for an American reporter here. No threats around every corner. No sudden death.

That's what war correspondent Lola Wicks thinks anyway as she returns from Kabul and plans a brief, rebellious visit with her less enterprising colleague and friend. But Lola's friend is dead, and the streets of a small Montana town might be as alien as the language of Facebook and Twitter or as dangerous as the alleyways of Kabul.

Lola loses her assignment as Gwen Florio's Montana begins. But soon she's lost her friend, her grounding, and her plans for the future. An enjoyable, cynical, independent protagonist, she's portrayed in this novel with a gritty, honest voice and firm determination. Expert at connecting with strangers in a foreign land, she struggles to read the people of her own. Expert at getting her own way, she's quickly trapped in someone

else's. Expert at leaving, she struggles to find herself and come home.

The Montana landscape, its people, its animals and its traditions all play a vital part in this tale. First People live in the borderlands of two countries, while Lola inhabits a bubble between two worlds. Death and life live side by side, fire and water, and future and past. The dialog is convincing, reflecting different relationships and different people. And the clues to the mystery gradually turn into truth at just the right speed.

As Lola solves her friend's death, she slowly resolves her own life. New relationships build themselves around her and, reluctantly, she learns to rely on others. But she's been betrayed before. Will she manage to trust the people she's met long enough to open her heart, or will she run away again? Not just a mystery, this is a novel of people, place, relationships and hope, and it's highly recommended.

Disclosure: I was given a free preview edition by the publisher with a request for my honest review.

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### **Julie says**

I didn't love this book. It left me kind of cold. Perhaps there is promise there, but I found the writing unmoving so the twisty plot didn't quite draw me in. I understand it is the first of a planned series (quelle surprise)and perhaps I'd try another. The author is certainly competent. But I think the main problem is that I found the lead character sort of uninteresting (which is saying something about the writing, given that her backstory is that she's a war correspondent.)

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### **David Marshall says**

This is a very impressive first novel, nicely balancing an innovative plot against the stress-related problems experienced by the hero.

<http://opionator.wordpress.com/2013/0...>

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### **Janet says**

This was a well-written suspense filled read. Gwen Florio's background has helped her make her characters multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Though flawed, they are all human and their actions, while not predictable are at least understandable. This was well-plotted with twists and turns galore, and the pacing was fast. The conclusion made sense. I think this might be an introduction to a series, and I liked the heroine enough to look for more....

\*I received my copy from NetGalley.com in exchange for an honest review.



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## **Sarah Flood says**

Lola Wicks is a driven, focused reporter stationed in Afghanistan. She's just now gotten herself entwined enough with the inner circles of people she wants to write about and her editors pull her out. She's pissed.

After being convinced by her editor to take a few days vacation, which really means finding a way back to Afghanistan, she decides to visit her old reporter pal in Montana. When she arrives to find her murdered, the reporter in Lola comes out and she's got to figure it out. The sheriff seems inexperienced and the neighboring Blackfeet reservation proves to be a community not welcoming to questioning outsiders. Lola quickly learns that nobody wants her asking questions but she's not going to stop until her friend is avenged.

The writing is fast paced and kept the plot moving without feeling rushed. The authors experience as a reporter shows through and lends an authentic voice to Lola. Everything she does seems believable and somehow she manages to stay one step ahead of law enforcement. The story comes to a satisfying end and you close the book and let out a huge breath you didn't realize you were holding in. I would love to read more of Lola Wicks and her adventures.

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