

## *Interview with Morgan Hunt, author of “Fool on the Hill”*

### **Fool on the Hill: A Tess Camillo Mystery**

*Morgan Hunt*

Alyson Books (2008)

ISBN 9781593500276

Reviewed by *Cherie Fisher* for Reader Views (3/08)

Today, Tyler R. Tichelaar of Reader Views is happy to welcome back Morgan Hunt to talk about her new Tess Camillo Mystery entitled “Fool on the Hill.”

*Morgan Hunt was raised on the Jersey shore in Brigantine where she was fascinated with things like conch eggs and learning the Hebrew alphabet. She played at college, then enlisted in the Navy and served at Brunswick, Maine and San Diego, where she stayed for over twenty-five years. She now hides out in the Pacific Northwest, twenty miles from the actual location of Einstein's brain (so she says). In 2001, she was diagnosed with advanced lobular invasive carcinoma, a particularly dangerous form of breast cancer. She hopes her mysteries will provide both entertainment and hope to other cancer survivors.*

**Tyler:** Welcome back, Morgan. I’m glad to have you come and fill us in on what has been happening in the lives of your characters, Tess and Lana, since “Sticky Fingers.” To start out, since this is the second mystery in your Tess Camillo series, do you advise readers to read the first book before they read “Fool on the Hill” or can this book stand by itself?

**Morgan:** Hey, Tyler; you’ve grown since last time we talked. Or is that just your font? :) While my books are all part of a series, I provide enough background information in each so readers can enjoy them independently and out of sequence.

**Tyler:** In “Sticky Fingers,” Tess had breast cancer. Will you update us on her condition and how it has changed her, as well as the other events that have happened in the time between the two books?

**Morgan:** “Fool on the Hill” takes place more than a year after “Sticky Fingers.” Tess is healed from her mastectomy and breast reconstruction surgery. She’s back to work, snooping into a murder, and interested in romance. Like most cancer survivors, she still has moments of doubt about whether the cancer will return, but all in all, she’s ready to kick butt.

**Tyler:** I notice your book titles relate to songs or albums from the 60’s and 70’s. The victim in this story is a folk-rock musician, and the love interest is a music producer. Were you in the music field yourself?

**Morgan:** I’m sorry; what was that? I couldn’t hear you over the stereo. :) Seriously, no; I’m not a musician myself. But music is one of my greatest joys and one of humanity’s universal bonds. My books are targeted primarily to educated baby boomer women, and I think many of us boomers feel music has been intertwined with all the important times of our lives. “Fool on the Hill” reflects that.

**Tyler:** I’ve heard that other baby boomers think that way about music, as well as other authors, and the soundtrack to “Forrest Gump” comes to mind. Do you have any idea why baby boomers are so attached to the music of their era?

**Morgan:** I'm no sociologist, but my guess would be two-fold. First, most folks enjoy their youth; it's a time when we're strong, healthy, attractive, and feel like we can take on the world. So we're favorably disposed toward those things associated with our youth. Secondly, as young people, boomers were confronted with serious issues—the Vietnam War, civil rights, the deterioration of trust in government embodied in Watergate. We were not mature enough to hold positions of political impact at the time, yet we very much wanted to change what was happening in the world. We see a similar phenomenon on today's college campuses. The one arena in which young boomers did exert influence was the music industry. We *were* the music! So I think not only is music enjoyable in the obvious and universal ways, but for boomers, it gave us a sense of control, a sense that we could make some kind of difference in our world.

**Tyler:** The way Cody is killed is unusual, to say the least—he's crucified. Why did you choose that type of murder?

**Morgan:** When I proposed this series to my publisher, one of the precepts I laid out was that no one would be murdered by a simple slug in the chest. As a society, we're almost immune to the tragedy and emotion inherent in a gunshot murder. In video games, many characters can be shot to death with little or no feeling. So I've tried to come up with methods of murder that are unusual enough to take readers out of that numbness and make them feel the drama of death. In "Sticky Fingers" that attempt was manifest in murder by venomous snake; in "Fool on the Hill," it's crucifixion.

**Tyler:** But why crucifixion over some other bizarre form of death? Is there some religious significance, since Jesus died by crucifixion, to this form of death that ties into the mystery?

**Morgan:** Like my lead character, I attended a Bible college for several years. So perhaps from the outset as an author I had more familiarity with crucifixion than most people do. Also, whether one regards Jesus as deity, prophet, messiah, or simply a kind man, almost no one believes he deserved the cruelty of that form of death. I intentionally created the victim in "Fool on the Hill" to be a very caring, compassionate figure. When he is killed in the same manner as Jesus, there's a cultural subtext of poignancy; a sense of "Damn, he sure didn't deserve that."

**Tyler:** Will you tell us about some of the interesting places that Tess has to visit during the course of the mystery?

**Morgan:** Tess questions suspects at the private party of an L.A. music producer, at a fundamentalist church, at Legoland, in a 7-11, and on the carousel in Balboa Park. That girl gets around—and has fun doing it!

**Tyler:** Morgan, did you find it difficult or therapeutic to have Tess deal with breast cancer since you underwent it yourself? What made you decide to have a main character who deals with breast cancer?

**Morgan:** It's both difficult and therapeutic, so let's say I find it worthwhile. I hope any readers who have dealt with the same fate will find it so, too. I wanted my main character to be diagnosed with breast cancer and face treatment decisions, surgery, etc., because I wanted to show readers that there's life after cancer—even serious, advanced tumors. Not everyone is as fortunate as I have been with my health, but for however long we are given, life is to be lived. I give Tess a great deal of élan, so she can re-enter life with energy, charm and reasonable optimism, even after her ordeal.

**Tyler:** Morgan, do you feel "Fool on the Hill" is a better book than your first?

**Morgan:** The books have different strengths and weaknesses. "Sticky Fingers" possibly had more emotional poignancy, because I took my protagonist through the cancer diagnosis and treatment in that story. "Fool on the Hill" has a very unusual murder method—a crucifixion—and readers have commented on how smoothly it flows.

**Tyler:** Last time you were here, you mentioned you already had ideas for a third book. Will you give us a hint of what you plan for that novel?

**Morgan:** Certainly! In "Blinded by the Light," Tess takes a temp job in Albuquerque at a company where her pregnant friend Beth works. She and Beth visit the Lightning Field, an earthworks art piece in the New Mexico desert. A murder takes place while they're there—Tess is almost as jinxed as Jessica Fletcher in that department! Tess' pregnant friend is accused of the murder, so she tries to solve it to get her friend off the hook.

**Tyler:** How many books do you think the Tess Camillo series will include?

**Morgan:** That depends on whether the series catches on. I enjoy writing these books, so I hope there'll be many of them. However, I also have a political satire and a mainstream thriller in the back-40 of my brain.

**Tyler:** Morgan, you made a reference to Jessica Fletcher from the TV Show "Murder, She Wrote." Would you say that show or any other mystery novels or films and TV shows have been a major influence on your writing?

**Morgan:** I'd say Agatha Christie, the writers of "Murder, She Wrote," and Sue Grafton have had a major deal of influence on the mystery aspects of my books. The voice of my books is a different matter. The voice is more akin to Kinky Friedman, Christopher Moore, or Whoopi Goldberg.

**Tyler:** Thank you for joining me today, Morgan. Before we go, will you tell us about your website and what additional information can be found there about your novels?

**Morgan:** My website, which won a Writer's Digest Best Writer's Website Award, can be found at [www.morganhuntbooks.com](http://www.morganhuntbooks.com). The site offers a "Fool on the Hill" crossword puzzle, a survey where you can vote for favorite suspects, chapters, etc., a radio interview pod cast, the 10 Best Reasons to Read a Mystery, and other condiments.

**Tyler:** Thank you, Morgan. Keep writing those mysteries!

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