

# WOLF BOG by Leslie Wheeler

## EXCERPT

Charlotte's brow furrowed as she stared at the bog. "There's something down there. A dead animal or...?" She raised her binoculars to get a better look.

"Where?" Wally asked. She pointed to a spot on the peat at the edge of the water. Wally had barely lifted his binoculars when Charlotte cried, "Oh, my God, it's a body!" And took off toward it.

"No, don't go there!" Wally grabbed at her, but she eluded him. When Charlotte was almost to the body--if that's what it was--she began to sink into the bog. She waved her arms and twisted her legs, trying desperately to get out, but her struggles only made her sink deeper.

Kathryn's heart seized. They had to rescue Charlotte, but how without getting stuck themselves? Brushing past Wally, Steve started down the slope. Wally caught him, pulled him back, and handed him over to Hal Phelps. "You stay put. Everyone else, too. I've had experience hiking around this bog, and I think I can get her out. Stop struggling and try to keep calm," he called down to Charlotte. "Help is on the way."

Wally made his way carefully to where Charlotte stood, caught in the mire. He tested each step before putting his full weight on it, backtracking when he deemed the ground too soft. When he was a few yards away, he stopped.

"This is as far as I can safely come," he told Charlotte. He extended his hiking pole and she grabbed it. Then, on his instructions, she slowly and with great effort lifted first one leg, then the other out of the muck and onto the ground behind her. Wally guided her back to the others, following the same zigzag pattern he'd made when descending. Charlotte went with him reluctantly. She kept glancing back over her shoulder at what she'd seen at the water's edge.

Kathryn trained her binoculars on that spot. Gradually an image came into focus. A body was embedded in the peat. The skin was a dark, reddish brown, but otherwise, it was perfectly preserved. Bile rose in her throat.

Charlotte moved close to Kathryn. "You see him, don't you?" Her face was white, her eyes wide and staring.

"See who?" Wally demanded.

"Denny," Charlotte said. "You must've seen him, too."

"I saw something that appears to be a body, but--" Wally said.

"So there really is a dead person down there?" Betty asked.

"It looks that way," Wally said grimly. "But let's not panic. I'm going to try to reach Chief Lapsley, though I doubt I'll get reception here. We'll probably have to leave the area before I can."

"We can't just leave Denny here to die," Charlotte wailed.

"Charlotte," Wally said with a pained expression, "whoever is down there is already dead."

She flinched, as if he'd slapped her across the face. "No! I'm telling you Denny's alive." She glared at him, then her defiant expression changed to one of uncertainty. "Dead or alive, I'm to blame. I'm staying here with him."