

Adult suspense series about human resilience and hope for survivors of a dying world. During a deadly pandemic, survivors journey by foot from Vermont to Kentucky in search of safe, virus free lands and are met with life changing challenges.

better lands: The Discoveries

By Susan Clawson

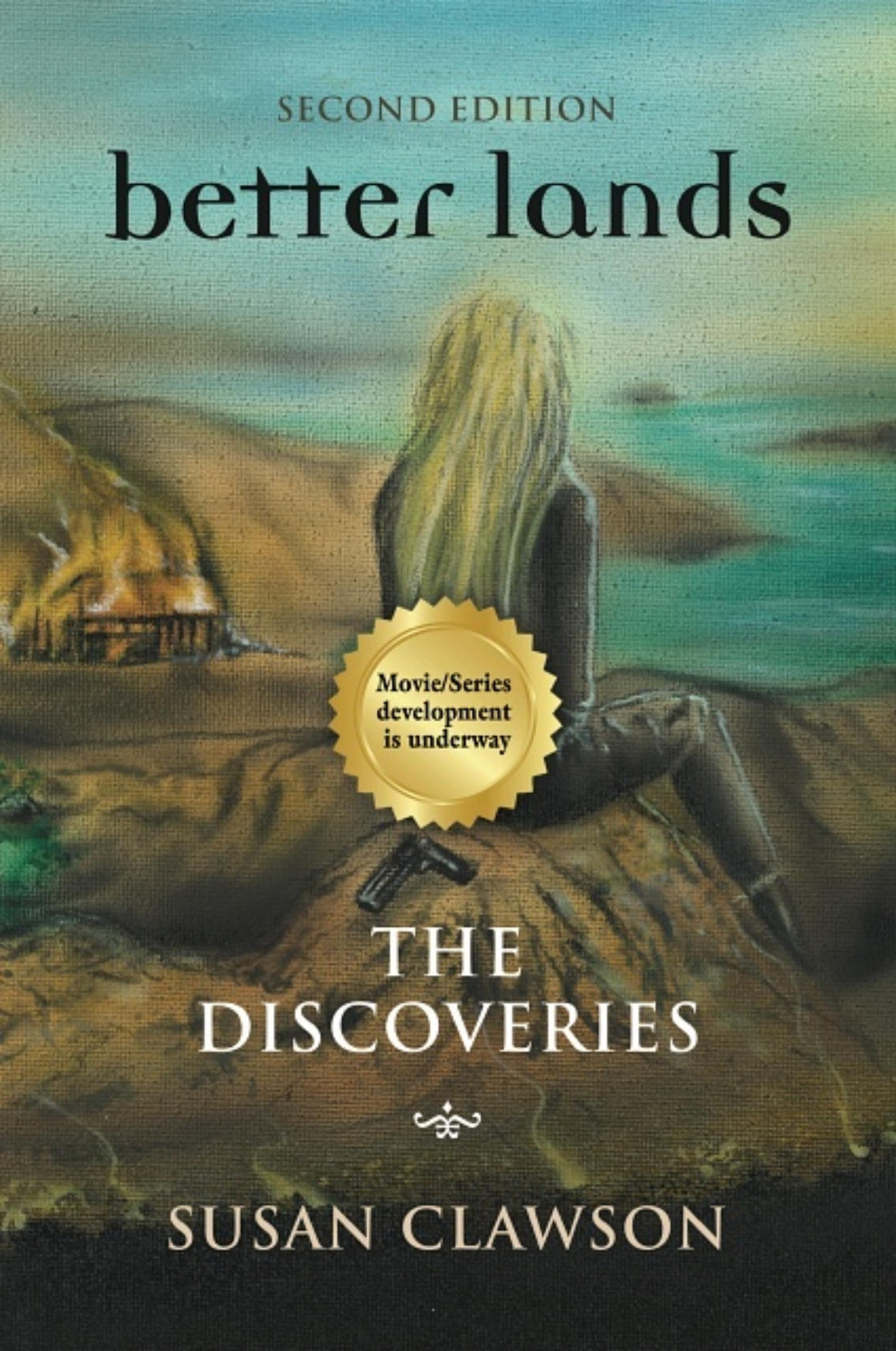
Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11874.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

SECOND EDITION

better lands



Movie/Series
development
is underway

THE DISCOVERIES



SUSAN CLAWSON

Copyright © 2021-2023 Susan Clawson

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-64719-645-5

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-646-2

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by Abuzz Press, Trenton, Georgia, U.S.A.

Artwork by RJ Heredia.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Clawson, Susan

better lands – The Discoveries by Susan Clawson

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021939844

Printed on acid-free paper.

Abuzz press

2023

Second Edition

Meet the Author



Susan Clawson grew up in the Burlington, Vermont area and, for the past 16 years, has resided in a rural town in northern Massachusetts with her husband. They plan to move to the Kentucky area when they retire. Their children are all grown, and living throughout the U.S. Susan has worked in sales, marketing and training for most of her career. She is excited to present book 1 of a 5-book drama dystopian series to her readers.

Continue the journey with:

Book 2 – ‘better lands – THE SOUTHBOUND JOURNEY

Book 3 – ‘better lands – THE ARRIVAL

Books 4 & 5 are in the works!

Spring 2020

With sirens loudly blaring, the ambulance whipped down a long, paved driveway that led to a large residential home just yards from Lake Champlain on Shelburne Bay. The late spring sun shone brightly over the polished landscape, slightly reflecting off the clear, calm body of water that signaled afternoon was approaching. The emergency vehicle came to rest under a beautifully sculptured gazebo-type carport just near the front door. The flower gardens that surrounded the entranceway were filled with hundreds of tulips of all colors. Potted plants displaying daffodils and daisies lined the outskirts of the porch.

The red lights were left flashing, but the siren silenced as two men, suited up like astronauts, jumped out from the front of it. The back doors swung open and two more EMTs hopped out with a gurney full of medical equipment. They raced toward the wide-open double doors that were anticipating their arrival.

Once inside the large glass entranceway, the men stopped to gauge their surroundings. The humidity level was high from all the tropical plants that greeted them. A thin layer of moisture quickly covered the outside of their plastic face shields, slightly fogging them. To the right of the foyer, they saw a huge, Victorian-style living room displaying several oversized paintings by John Michael Wright, a British baroque-style artist from the 1600s. Straight ahead of them loomed a beautiful white marble staircase. Its golden brass railing sparkled as the sun's rays beamed in through the floor-length windows lining the stairwell. As their eyes continued to look about, pleas for help came from the upper level.

"Up here! We're up here!" shouted a trembling, high-pitched voice, "Please, hurry! Up here!"

Without hesitation, the four men immediately raced up the stairs with the gurney. Upon arriving on the second-floor landing, they

spotted a young girl, clearly terrified as she stood in the hallway with her back braced against the wall. She looked to be about 11 or 12. Her long, blonde hair was pulled back in a ponytail and a pink headband had slightly slipped down onto her forehead. Her teary blue eyes blinked profusely, as she watched the paramedics approach.

Before they had a chance to ask her where to go, the familiar pleading voice shouted from down the hallway, "Hurry, please!"

At that point, they rushed past the girl and followed the voice down the hall to the last bedroom at the end of it. The pleas subsided as two of the EMTs grabbed the medical bags off the gurney and rushed into the room to assess the situation.

The bedroom chamber was almost as large as a dance studio, with high ceilings and detailed molding that elegantly framed it. The French décor mimicked times from the Victorian era, with more Wright paintings hung about. The thick, gold velvet curtains were drawn open to let light in from the floor-length windows. On the far side of the room, situated between two sets of stained-glass French doors, was a king-sized Victorian canopy bed, sporting matching gold velvet attire. The bedspread was falling off its side.

One of the French doors was open, filling the room with a scent of fresh air. Just outside of it was a large balcony overlooking Lake Champlain and, just across the water in New York, a picturesque view of the Adirondack Mountains. The area was a prime and prominent place to live, and those with means inhabited it. The medium-sized mansion-type homes were spread far enough apart so that neighbors didn't see or hear each other when they were outside.

The bay, located in the town of Shelburne, offered a variety of outdoor recreation in the warmer months, such as swimming, fishing, and boating, and some places to cross-country ski in the winter months. A private yacht club perched at the end of the cul-de-sac road with

nearby walking paths that took hikers through the woods to the tip of Shelburne point, opening up to panoramic views of the lake.

The 120-mile, eighth largest freshwater lake in the United States, had played an important role in the Revolutionary War. It allowed movement from colonies to its nearby neighbor, Canada. Also, the oldest known fossil reef in the world was found housed in Lake Champlain, dating back 450-480 million years.

The town itself, established in 1763, was named after a member of the British Parliament, Earl of Shelburne, and in the 20th century became home to two big tourist attractions, the Vermont Teddy Bear Factory and the Shelburne Museum.

In the middle of the bed, lying on his back, was a middle-aged frail-looking man gasping for air. Both of his arms rested tightly across his chest. The sheet and blankets were off to his side; his t-shirt and boxer shorts appeared to be dripping in sweat. Standing next to his bedside was a distraught, well-dressed lady in her mid-40s, gently rubbing his upper arm and forehead. Noticeable red blotches covered her face, most likely from crying, and her body trembled as she looked over at the EMTs approaching the bedside. She became more hysterical as they got closer.

"Please, please, over here! Please help him! Please, hurry!" Her voice was anxious yet a bit weaker than when they first arrived.

"Ma'am, we really need you to step away from the side of the bed so that we can get closer to him," one of the paramedics loudly stated, stopping for a moment, waiting for her to move.

It had become apparent that she wasn't going to give them the immediate access to him that they needed, as she stood firmly by the bedside, clinging even tighter to the man's arm.

"Ma'am, we really need you to let us over there," the EMT said again.

Meanwhile, one of the other paramedics, who was standing at the foot of the bed, asked, “Ma’am, would you mind coming over here so I can get some more information? I at least need you to confirm his name. Can you do that for me?”

She looked over at the man then attempted to catch her breath, still not moving and finally answered, “Bill ... Bill Wells. Please, please, help him. He’s my husband. He’s so sick; you have to help him ... please.”

One of the paramedics got close enough to lightly rest his hand on her shoulder then softly said, “We’re going to do the best we can, but you have to let us do our job, and you’ll have to move away from him,” he paused for a moment, watching her teary eyes staying focused on her husband, then continued, “I’m Mike, and I assume you’re Rochelle, the one that made the call to us?”

Rochelle Wells was a petite, slender woman dressed in black yoga pants and a red cashmere sweater with a silky pink scarf tied loosely around her neck. Her blonde ponytail bounced about as she hesitantly acknowledged Mike and eventually let him guide her to the other side of the room. It was easier than he had anticipated.

Her once bright blue eyes, now swollen and red, despairingly looked at him as she softly asked, “Yes, I’m Rochelle Wells. You can help him, right?”

Rochelle’s eyes fixated back on her husband as she slowly tried to nudge her way back to the bed, but Mike blocked her attempt. He told her she needed to stay out of the paramedics’ way, but knew she wasn’t in a state of mind to listen, so knew he’d have to stay close by while his counterparts worked on Bill.

There was nobody around to comfort Rochelle as she watched the EMT jam the big blue breathing tube down her husband’s throat while the other man punched needles into his arms. It was too much. She grabbed her stomach and keeled over, gagging as if she were about to

vomit and worked herself into enough of a frenzy that it took Mike a few minutes to calm her back down. Shortly after the tube settled and the surrounding machines turned on, Bill let out a few hoarse gasps. His face, which had previously reflected dire pain and stress, seemed to relax as his darkened eyes closed and his breathing calmed.

It all was so surreal to Rochelle. Just a month earlier, the three of them were vacationing at their second home in Barbados during their daughter's spring break. It was a short but welcomed getaway at the small yet cozy beach house located on prime, oceanfront property.

Just 15 years earlier, Bill's parents gave them the family beach house as a wedding gift. As a kid, he spent many summers there and was excited to carry on the tradition. His parents continued to spend some summers there with them until they passed away, just a few years before the pandemic hit.

Rochelle felt a momentary calmness surround her as she recalled the mesmerizing sounds of the waves and smells of the ocean. It was one of her favorite places to be. She slightly smiled thinking about the local culture and welcoming residents it always offered. Then there were the tropical drinks she and Bill always had on their private balcony as the island's sun set for the night. Rochelle felt a pit form in her stomach remembering how she dreaded their most recent departure, feeling uncertain and fearful it was the last time they'd all be there together. They saw news clips that a virus had hit parts of North America, as well as some other countries, and was resulting in extreme devastation. Bill tried to assure her that they'd be okay and had many more years ahead to enjoy their getaway and all its creature comforts. Even though he told her not to worry, she did, and upon arriving home, her worst fear was confirmed. It was complete chaos.

The pandemic had arrived and spread quicker than anticipated. Suddenly businesses were closing, transportation slowed down, some essentials quickly became scarce, and thousands of people were already

dying. Medical facilities were overwhelmed as there weren't enough healthcare providers or supplies to keep up with the increased sick and dying population. Everyone was ordered to wear gloves and face masks in public to avoid the airborne virus as much as possible. Vermont, along with many other states and countries, eventually shut down. From that point, it never got better.

Rochelle wasn't an income contributor for her family and didn't need to be. However, she devoted a lot of her spare time to working with the church and also volunteered at a local women's shelter. Rosa was their only child who excelled in her studies at a local private day school. At just 12 years old, she was captain of the school's soccer team and had lead roles in a couple of the school and church plays. Rochelle was involved with helping out at all of them and in return, Rosa helped her mother with a lot of the church activities and sometimes at the women's shelter.

At a very early age, Rosa had a keen business and leadership sense. On her own, she had started a fund-raising campaign that brought much-needed programs to local nursing homes, then helped solicit some community members to run them. Rochelle and Bill supported Rosa's future aspirations of wanting to continue to help make a difference in others' lives. They joked that their daughter's compassion came from Rochelle and her ambition came from Bill, who had a long line of leaders in his family.

Bill had been the CEO of a local family-owned, deluxe soap manufacturer for the past 20 years. His grandfather had originally started it in the early 1940s, only to hand it over to Bill's dad, who eventually handed it over to him.

Over the course of his ownership, Bill earned the reputation around town of being a good employer, providing his employees with sound medical benefits, lots of PTO, and the ability to work flex schedules as needed. During the initial pandemic outbreak, because his business was

classified as non-essential, it was required to temporarily close its physical doors. At that point, 23 of his 350 employees had already contracted the virus. Bill furloughed most of them with continual benefits while the management team worked from their homes, as he did. Just three weeks later Rochelle dialed 911.

As the paramedics lifted Bill onto the gurney for transport, the room filled with Rochelle's relentless pleas that drowned out the monitor beeps, "No, oh God no... please, can't you just take care of him here? I can't be with him at the hospital... please," she begged, pausing as she tried to catch her breath. "He can't be alone! Please... I need to be with him."

Rochelle hastily moved toward Mike who was standing near the foot of the gurney, then grabbed one of his arms, hoping her pleas would stop them from leaving the room. From the moment Bill became bedridden and she dialed for help, her biggest fear was once he left their doorstep, she'd never see him again. It was all over the news that visitors were no longer allowed in patients' rooms who were diagnosed with the virus. There were no exceptions and because of that, many victims were left on their own to fight for survival, many dying without loved ones by their sides.

Simultaneously, Mike gently grabbed both her arms and replied, "Rochelle, it'll be okay. Please, let us get him out of here now so we can give him the best chance to fight this. I promise, it'll be okay and someone will contact you once he gets settled in."

Then, after he sternly gazed into her swollen, tear-filled eyes, she slowly backed off, and he softly said, "It'll be okay, I promise."

Then Mike grabbed one of the monitors and walked beside the gurney as they began to wheel Bill out of the room. Rosa had been standing in the doorway, watching everything that was happening to her dad. She felt like she was caught in a dream, one she couldn't wake up from. With eyes wide open, she tried the best she could to decipher

what was going on and what it all meant for him. She watched her mother falling apart, crying and begging the strangers not to take him away.

“Please, sweetie, you need to move aside. We have to get your daddy to the hospital as soon as possible,” one of the paramedics softly said as she unintentionally blocked the doorway.

Rosa momentarily froze, not knowing which direction to move in or if she even could move. She heard her mother’s frantic voice ringing in her ears, and panic set in. She mustered up the strength to move aside and caught a close-up glimpse of her dad surrounded by all the tubes and needles stuck in his frail body. Her heart sank as he lay there, so still, with his eyes closed and pale face completely dominated by the breathing tube. The monitors continually sang, keeping the paramedics informed of his stats.

Rosa always thought of her dad as a strong man. She recalled how every time he came home from work, she’d run to greet him. He’d immediately put down his briefcase, pick her up, swing her around, then hold her tight in his arms. After he softly kissed her cheek, he’d ask how her day was. Then there were all the times she’d watch him chop and pile up firewood with little to no effort. She’d catch glimpses of him working out in their gym, lifting heavy weights, sweating profusely, and seemingly never out of breath. The father she knew was far from the meek, vulnerable man who was hustled past her, lying so flat and motionless on the gurney. She had never seen him that way and it scared her.

Through it all, deep down Rosa knew what was happening and it made her feel even more alone and frightened. When her family got home from that spring break vacation and were surrounded by the ‘new normal’, her parents made sure she understood what was going on. There were so many changes they had to quickly adjust to. Rosa had to attend school online. They no longer went to church or participated in

outside activities. She couldn't play even with her two best friends that lived down the street. Then her dad started working from home, and her mother stopped volunteering. Rosa was confused with all the changes. They frightened her, but she tried to be brave up until she overheard her parents talking about how things were getting worse. The news placed hard emphasis on the daily death tolls. She was frightened because she really didn't know what it all meant.

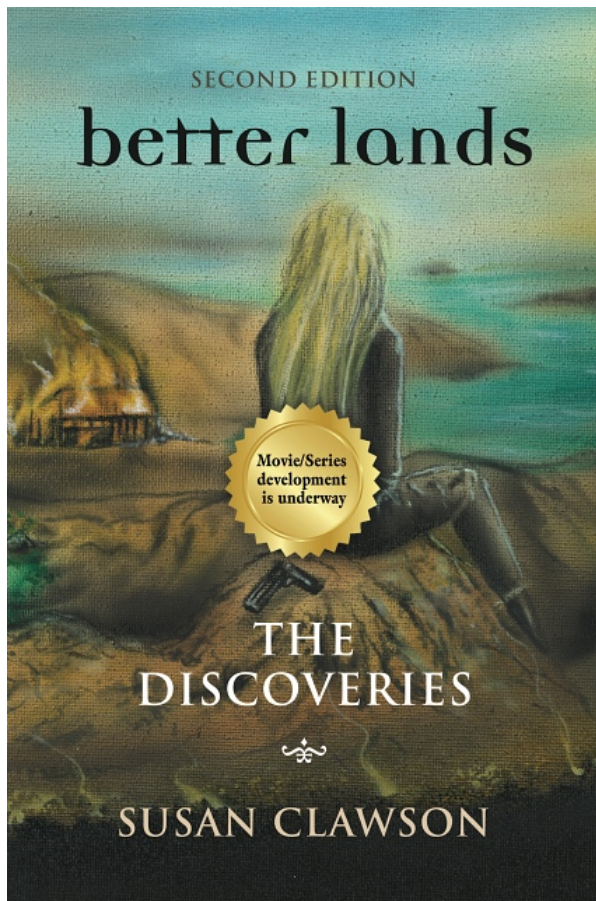
Her parents knew it was affecting her, so they continually promised her that in the end, everything would be okay. Then her father started coughing. He couldn't stop. It looked like it hurt him. But he told them it didn't. And then it got worse. His body ached. And then he got a fever. But he said it would go away. Her mother wanted him to get some help. But he refused. He feared the moment he left the house, not only would he be alone, but it would be a burden on his family. Then he became insufferably worse, to the point he couldn't breathe well, so her mother dialed 911.

As Rosa stood in the hallway Rochelle rushed by her as if she didn't exist, following the paramedics as they scurried toward the stairs. All Rosa heard were the sounds of shoe soles clicking against the marble as they swiftly went down them. Her mother's faint voice echoed in the stairwell, constantly telling Bill how much she loved him and that everything was going to be okay. Rosa stood at the top of the stairs unable to move again, unable to run to her dad's side to tell him that she loved him too, and didn't want him to go. She tried hard not to cry and told herself he'd be back soon. After all, he had promised her everything would be okay no matter what.

She never did see him again. Three days later, he died.

As she continued to gaze upon the church, Rosa finally felt a sense of peace flood through her after all the turmoil and loss that the last few

years had burdened her with. With both her parents gone, she was left to fend for herself. But she had a new family and it was time to take some of them to a safer place where the rumored third wave of the virus couldn't touch them. She hoped that the better lands held up to their myth that she read about it and were virus-free. She and Jean-Pierre had already prepared the others for the next morning's departure. Rosa was so thankful he and Darcy came into her life, just months earlier.



Adult suspense series about human resilience and hope for survivors of a dying world. During a deadly pandemic, survivors journey by foot from Vermont to Kentucky in search of safe, virus free lands and are met with life changing challenges.

better lands: The Discoveries

By Susan Clawson

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/11874.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**