

A scenic photograph of a lake house with a white boat in the foreground. The house is a two-story structure with a prominent porch and large windows, situated on a rocky shore surrounded by dense trees. The water is calm, reflecting the warm, golden light of the scene. A small white boat with a black interior is moored in the foreground, with a yellow buoy attached to its stern. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and idyllic.

A Tracey Marks Mystery

*Looking for
Laura*

ELLEN SHAPIRO

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*Ellen, a real-life PI, kept me Looking for Laura deep into the night. -
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*Looking
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Laura*

Ellen Shapiro



Table of Contents

Dedications

CHAPTER 1
CHAPTER 2
CHAPTER 3
CHAPTER 4
CHAPTER 5
CHAPTER 6
CHAPTER 7
CHAPTER 8
CHAPTER 9
CHAPTER 10
CHAPTER 11
CHAPTER 12
CHAPTER 13
CHAPTER 14
CHAPTER 15
CHAPTER 16
CHAPTER 17
CHAPTER 18
CHAPTER 19
CHAPTER 20
CHAPTER 21
CHAPTER 22
CHAPTER 23
CHAPTER 24
CHAPTER 25
CHAPTER 26
CHAPTER 27
CHAPTER 28
CHAPTER 29
CHAPTER 30
CHAPTER 31
CHAPTER 32
CHAPTER 33
CHAPTER 34
CHAPTER 35

CHAPTER 36
CHAPTER 37
CHAPTER 38
CHAPTER 39
CHAPTER 40
CHAPTER 41
CHAPTER 42
CHAPTER 43
CHAPTER 44
CHAPTER 45
CHAPTER 46

Acknowledgments

About the Author

To my daughter Carrie, who I love dearly and brings joy into my life
every day

To my dear friend Susan, who has always been there for me

CHAPTER 1

The morning skies were bright but by 3:00 dark clouds rolled in. My mood was as dark as the clouds. Business was really slow, and with all my bills to pay I didn't know if I could get through the next month. My office rent was due in two weeks, and unless I could come up with the money, my landlord might not be inclined to renew my lease. I contacted a client that owed me five hundred dollars and tried to keep desperation out of my voice.

I started my PI business ten years ago and it's been a struggle building a clientele. Most of my cases are fairly routine, background checks, locating witnesses to testify at a trial, deadbeat dads, or people being sued. Every once in a while someone will hire me to conduct surveillance on their spouse to see if they're cheating, but those I farm out to investigators who do it all the time. Unfortunately TV makes it look easy, but it's tedious and there are many ways you can lose the subject.

I was shutting down my computer when I heard the doorknob turn. In walked a man trying to look as dignified as he could with water dripping down his face, and his umbrella forming puddles on my carpet. He was about 6'2", dark hair that curled up in the back of his neck, fair complexion with a body that was most likely sculpted at the gym. He appeared to be around my age, in his mid-thirties. He must have thought I was an idiot since I was just staring at him without saying a word.

I shoved my bills under my computer, stood up and stuck out my hand, "Tracey Marks."

"Sam Matthews. I'm sorry to barge in on you. You look like you're ready to leave."

"No, no, I was just finishing up some paperwork. Sorry I don't have a towel to offer you." I grabbed a roll of paper towels from the cabinet and handed it to him.

We both sat down and Mr. Matthews blurted out, "my wife never came home Friday night and I'm really worried. I know she would have called unless something happened to her. Can you please help me?"

"Have you reported her missing?"

"Yes, Saturday morning, but from the questions I was asked by a Detective Harris I got the impression he didn't believe me and probably thought I was being paranoid."

I couldn't believe my luck. Finally a case I could sink my teeth in. My first missing person case, but I had no intention of letting the cat out of the bag.

"Can I get you coffee or tea?" I said, trying to keep my enthusiasm to a minimum.

"No, thank you."

"Before I decide to take your case, I need to ask you some questions," knowing that unless this guy was a psycho, I couldn't afford to turn him away.

"First, what's your wife's name?"

"Laura."

"When was the last time you saw Laura?"

"Friday morning. She had the day off from work. She mentioned she was meeting a friend and said she might be home a little late. We made plans to have dinner out when she got back. I waited till 8:00 and then called her cell phone but it went straight to voice mail. By 9:00 I was getting pretty worried and called her friend Melanie. She had no idea where Laura was but said she would call me if she hears from her."

"Do you know who she was meeting?"

"No, I didn't think to ask," looking annoyed at himself.

"Were there any problems in your marriage?"

"Not that I'm aware of. We were happy. Laura and I have only been married a year, and we're making plans for our first vacation.

"Was she acting different lately, or do you think she may have been depressed?"

Mr. Matthews told me that he hadn't noticed any changes in his wife's behavior. He was adamant that she was not having an affair and that he would never cheat on her.

"Mr. Matthews, do you have any enemies that might want to take out their anger on you or your wife?"

"I don't know anyone who'd want to hurt Laura or me," shaking his head.

"Is there any place you can think of that your wife might have gone?"

"No. I'm sorry I'm not being more helpful."

"One last question, is this the first time Laura hasn't come home?"

"Yes, that's why I am so concerned."

I didn't know if I believed him. It could be as simple as she left him, but it's also possible something did happen to her. I know he might not be telling me everything. People seldom do.

"Mr. Matthews I'll take your case, but I can't promise you anything except that I'll do my best to find out what happened to your wife."

Though the words came out of my mouth, my doubts of whether I could handle the case were weighing on me.

“My hourly rate is \$100. I’ll e-mail you my one page retainer agreement for your signature, and in the meantime I want you to make a list of her friends, habits and anything else you can think of that might be important.”

“Thank you very much,” he said, sounding relieved.

When Sam Matthews left I just stared at the check he gave me for \$5,000. I was so relieved I could pay my rent on time I gave out a shout of joy.

I thought about my interaction with Mr. Matthews. Something was off. It seemed a little strange that he would hire me without asking about my experience.

After he left, I took out my PI manual and went to the chapter on missing persons. I wanted to read as much as I could to get some pointers so as not to make a complete fool of myself.

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About the Author



Ellen Shapiro is a private investigator and the author of *Looking for Laura*, a Tracey Marks Mystery. Acting on her passion for writing, she enrolled in the Sarah Lawrence Writing Institute where she took courses in creative writing. Her professional expertise in locating people led her to create the storyline and develop the characters for her novel. She has written articles related to her field for both local and nationwide newspapers. She is a member of Mystery Writers of America. When she is not writing or working, you can find her on the golf course yelling at her golf ball. Ellen resides in Scarsdale, New York.