

A MADDIE LANDON MYSTERY

THE KINLEY SCHOOL

A  
Dangerous  
Lie

ELLEN SHAPIRO

# A Dangerous Lie

by

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## CHAPTER 1

The sign on my office door read *Maddie Landon, Private Investigator*. I was just shutting down my computer, getting ready to leave for the day, when I heard the door open and a voice shouting, “Maddie, are you here?” And then footsteps moving quickly toward me.

I would have known that voice anywhere, but I was totally surprised to see her standing in my office. Samantha looked exactly the same, except her wavy shoulder-length brown hair now had streaks of green instead of purple. Her seventeen-year-old face was sprinkled with freckles around her small nose.

“Maddie, you have to help him. He didn’t rape her. I know he didn’t.”

“*Whoa*, slow down.” I hadn’t seen Samantha since I found her biological parents more than a year ago. It was complicated to say the least. The last time I saw Sam, the family was in therapy trying to get their lives back together.

“Sit and start from the beginning.”

“You remember I go to the Kinley Private school here in Manhattan. Well, Jason also goes to Kinley except he’s there on a scholarship. I know he would never rape anyone.”

“Sam, you have to calm down and tell me what happened slowly.”

“This girl in my school, Mia Franklin was raped, and she accused Jason. I don’t know why she would say

that but she's lying. I know she's lying. Jason is my best friend and he would never hurt anyone."

"Where is Jason now?"

"He's home. His mother borrowed money to pay his bail."

"Does he have a lawyer?"

"Yes, but he's a lawyer you don't have to pay."

"You mean a public defender. How old is Jason?"

"Seventeen."

"And how old is the girl he allegedly raped?"

"I'm not sure. None of this matters since he didn't do it."

"Sam, it's not that simple. I wish it were. First, even if I wanted to take the case, I can't do it without his parents' consent."

"It's only his mother and she doesn't have any money. I could pay you. I could help you with the investigation and whatever money I earn you can keep."

"That would be nice, but unfortunately you can't be involved. You might compromise the case and it could be dangerous."

"I don't care."

"You may not, but I do, and your parents might have something to say about it. How are things at home?"

"Okay."

"How are you getting along with your father?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," she said, but I could tell by her clenched jaw she wasn't telling me the truth. When Sam found out what her father had done, she was so angry she didn't want to live in the same house with him. Who could blame her. When Sam's birth mother



decided to give Sam up for adoption, Sam's father deceptively adopted Sam without her birth mother's knowledge. It all came out eventually, the father's affair with Sam's birth mother and Sam learning that all these years later she was living with her natural father. Unfortunately for Sam, I also learned that her birth mother was murdered a few months after Sam was born.

"Listen, Sam. Everything is going to be fine. Have Jason's mother call me. Will you do that?"

"I gotta go."

Typical Sam. When Sam first came to me to search for her biological parents, I wasn't prepared to deal with a teenager as a client. I had no experience with teenagers and Sam was like a bull in a china shop. She never said hello or goodbye, whether on the phone or in person. But over time she grew on me. Maybe I just got used to her abruptness or perhaps it was because we were both adopted. In spite of the fact that Sam could be a pain in the neck, there was something very endearing about her that I couldn't ignore.

When she left my office, I was curious about this boy Jason and why the police arrested him. What evidence did the police have? Right now there wasn't anything I could do until I heard from Jason's mother.

I quickly locked up my office since I was running late for my therapy session with Dr. Goldberg.

## CHAPTER 2

Sitting in my therapist's waiting room, the walls felt as if they were closing in on me. I recently met my biological father and I would be lying if I said it was a tearful reunion. I never had any intentions of looking for my birth parents. Why would I? For thirty-seven years I was sure they never wanted me.

"Maddie, come in."

Dr. Goldberg reminds me of someone's grandmother. She is short with gray hair and her clothes are matronly looking. Her calming voice puts me at ease and the office always smells of lilacs. I wonder if she sprays it with air freshener.

I sat down in my usual spot, a gray couch opposite Dr. Goldberg who sits in a low back beige upholstered chair. Between us is a small coffee table with a box of tissues on it. Looking at the box I wonder how many patients have cried while spilling out their life story.

"It's been a while since we last met," Dr. Goldberg said. "What's going on?"

"Now that I finally met my birth father, I don't know how I feel," I said, my leg shaking.

"That's not unusual. You never knew him. Besides the fact that he's your biological father, you have no emotional connection to him. If you choose to have a relationship, it's going to take time."

"I wish I never read the letter my parents left me."

"Were you doing it for them or for yourself?"

“Of course it was for them. I loved them and that was their wishes, not mine,” I said, a little too forcefully.

“Do you think there might have been some part of you that wanted to know why your birth parents gave you up for adoption, and the letter was just the impetus to seek them out?”

“Why would I. They abandoned me. For all I know, they were junkies.”

“Maybe that’s what you needed to believe. Sometimes we tell ourselves all sorts of things to keep from being hurt. Is it possible when you read that letter it gave you the freedom to do what you always wanted, to search for your biological parents?”

“I never looked at it that way.”

“Why don’t you tell me what it was like meeting your birth father?”

“We met in the hotel lobby where he and his wife Jennifer were staying. I was relieved she wasn’t with him when I got there.”

“Do you know why she wasn’t with your father?”

“He thought I’d be more comfortable if it was just the two of us since it was our first time meeting.”

“It sounds like he was taking your feelings into account.”

“I guess.” I didn’t say anything for a while. I finally said, “We went into the hotel lounge and talked.”

“Can you tell me about your conversation?”

“He told me about his life growing up in Philadelphia and his relationship with my biological mother.”

“How did that make you feel?”

“I was a little uncomfortable hearing him talk about her. When I had called him out of the blue, he was angry that he never knew what happened to Lydia, my mother, and that he had no say in my adoption. It was difficult listening as he was telling me how he felt not knowing of my existence.”

“That must have been hard for you to hear.”

“I’d rather not talk about it now.”

“We can talk about something else, but at some point, you need to confront those feelings. Did you tell him anything about yourself?”

“Just what I do as a private investigator and the kind of cases I get involved in.”

“So nothing personal?”

“Can we change the subject?”

“How are things going with Jesse?”

“What do you mean?”

“Have you made any decision about moving in with him?”

“It weighs on my mind but that’s as far as it goes.”

“You can use fear as a crutch but that won’t help you move forward. You have to decide what’s more important, your relationship or holding on to the fear. It’s that simple. There is no in between.”

I was glad when the session finally ended. My head felt as if it was going to explode. I knew Dr. Goldberg was right, but I knew from my past that at any moment you can lose everything.

I parked my car in the garage and took the elevator up to my apartment, my home on the Upper West Side of Manhattan for the past thirteen years. The Upper West Side is an affluent, primarily residential area bordered by Central Park and Riverside Park. It is known for Lincoln Center and its wonderful museums, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

After changing into my boxer shorts and an oversized T-shirt, I opened my refrigerator in search of something to eat for dinner. I pulled out some leftovers and made a salad. Thankfully, the bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon on the counter was still half full. As I was pouring myself a glass, I heard my phone ringing from inside my backpack.

“Hey, you. I was just about to take a sip of my wine,” I said to Jesse.

“Far be it for me to stand between a lady and her wine.”

“Cute. You definitely know me.”

Jesse is also a private investigator. I have my own firm and Jesse works for two criminal attorneys in Connecticut.

“Are you going crazy without a case to keep you busy?”

“Actually, for the moment it’s nice, though I’m not sure how long that will last. You know how I thrive on the excitement when I’m involved in an investigation. There is a possibility I might have something. It’s a wait-and-see situation,” I said.

“If we got married, I’d have to take you in sickness and in health,” Jesse said, chuckling.

“Good to know.”

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

“There’s not much to tell at the moment. Samantha made a surprise visit to my office, all upset about a friend of hers from school that was accused of raping a girl. She wants me to help him since she’s convinced he didn’t do it. He’s there on a scholarship and according to Sam, the mother has no money.”

“Do you plan on taking the case if the mother contacts you?”

“I haven’t made any decisions.”

“It could be interesting.”

“We’ll see.”

“I was thinking you could drive up to my place this weekend?” Jesse lives in Chester, Connecticut, a small rural town on the Connecticut River with lots of charm and cute little shops and restaurants. We normally take turns on the weekends, but with the weather being fairly warm for September, it would be nice to take advantage of Jesse’s outdoor grill and patio.

“If you’re still at work when I get there, you can find me out back relaxing with a glass of your finest wine. On second thought, maybe I should stop at the wine store in town,” I said.

“Wiseass. Sleep tight.”

“And you do the same.”

The nightmare is always the same. I’m driving in the car with my parents. It’s late at night and it’s raining. My father told me we’re going on a surprise trip. I was excited. I could hear my parents in the front seat singing

and laughing. And then there's a horrible crashing sound, the car tumbling and flipping over. I'm being thrown from side to side, hitting my head against the window, the roof, and the door of the car. I'm yelling for my parents but they don't answer me. I'm trapped. I can't get out. I'm screaming but no one hears me. And then I black out.

I bolt up. I'm drenched and my heart is racing. I run to the bathroom and rip off my T-shirt, splashing water all over me. Eventually I drift off but sleep fitfully for the rest of the night until the alarm wakes me.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank all my readers. Without you my books would have no voice.

Thirty years ago, I started writing my first novel in a notebook. At that time my career as a private investigator was just beginning and I put my writing aside to concentrate on developing my business. Twenty-five years later, I reached into my closet and grabbed that notebook and realized how much I wanted to continue writing. Little did I know at that time how much joy writing would bring into my life. Now seven books later the love I feel every time I sit down to write inspires me.

My heartfelt gratitude to my wonderful friends for their love and support. Their continued encouragement gets me through the rough patches. A special thanks to the beautiful Scarsdale Library where I came everyday to write this novel.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



As a private investigator with more than thirty years of experience, Ellen Shapiro's professional expertise has brought an authenticity to her characters and the storylines she has created for her novels. Acting on her passion for writing, she enrolled in the Sarah Lawrence Writing Institute where she took courses in creative writing.

Ellen has written articles in her field for both local and nationwide newspapers and is the author of seven mystery novels. Ellen is a member of Mystery Writers of America and resides in Scarsdale, New York.

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