



[Before she disappeared]

By Gardner, Lisa

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Genre and Subject

Missing persons -- Fiction

Women private investigators -- Fiction

Cold cases (Criminal investigation) -- Fiction

Detective and mystery fiction

Synopsis

Frankie Elkin is an average middle-aged woman, a recovering alcoholic with more regrets than belongings. But she spends her life doing what no one else will--searching for missing people the world has stopped looking for. When the police have given up, when the public no longer remembers, when the media has never paid attention, Frankie starts looking.

A new case brings her to Mattapan, a Boston neighborhood with a rough reputation. She is searching for Angelique Badeau, a Haitian teenager who vanished from her high school months earlier. Resistance from the Boston PD and the victim's wary family tells Frankie she's on her own--and she soon learns she's asking questions someone doesn't want answered. But Frankie will stop at nothing to discover the truth, even if it means the next person to go missing could be her.

Author Biography

Lisa Gardner is a #1 New York Times bestselling crime novelist. A self-described research junkie, she has parlayed her interest in police procedure and twisted minds into a streak of twenty-plus thrillers.

Meet Frankie Elkin, an everyday, average person who specializes in finding missing people. When the locals have given up, when the media has never bothered to care, Frankie takes on the challenge. Her latest mission has brought her to Mattapan, Boston, to find a missing Haitian teen. Eleven months later, Angelique Badeau's disappearance remains a mystery. What happened to the quiet, studious teen? Frankie learns quickly the dangers of asking too many questions, but that won't stop her from learning the truth behind what happened before she disappeared.

Lisa lives in the mountains of New Hampshire with two crazy pups and an ancient rescue dog. When not writing, Lisa loves to hike, play cribbage, and, of course, read!

Discussion Starters

1. Discuss the role of addiction in determining Frankie's life course. While alcohol addiction led her down a painful path before the story started, we now see Frankie "addicted" to the mission of solving and caring for the victims of cold cases. She puts this purpose the sole focus of her life.
2. How needed are victim advocates, like Frankie? Have you seen this role being fulfilled in real life? What are the limitations of the police? I am not well-informed about victim needs or culture, but it seems that advocates are very needed. Police are limited by bureaucracy, funding, and caseload demand, whereas Frankie had the capacity to fully dedicate herself to a singular case until it was solved, however long it took.
3. Angelique was well-loved by her family. How did these relationships play a role in her welfare? Angelique's aunt put her niece's well-being above all, which included welcoming Frankie into their lives despite any discomfort. Angelique's close relationship with her brother allowed him to make informed insights that helped lead to saving her.
4. Why was JJ so resistant to Frankie's help? He lived in a culture that taught its members to protect and care for themselves while distrusting outsiders. Perhaps the ineffectual help of outsiders, even while potentially well-meaning, contributed to his resistance.
5. What factors contributed to Angelique and Livia's vulnerability at being so controlled? So many! Their age, gender, race, and economic status could have all contributed to most truly being "at-risk" teens. By attending the center, they and their community placed a certain level of trust in the center's leadership.
6. How did the girls try to find a way out of their situation? Is there more they could have done? I loved all the ways Angelique relied on the close relationship with her brother to communicate secret messages to help lead him to her. I admire her strength in taking the risks to share these messages and think she was doing all she could within the confines of her imprisonment.
7. What shaped Lotham's relationship with Frankie, both initially and as the story progressed? I imagine his wariness of an outsider presuming competence in solving a case was the result of too many well-intentioned citizens who ended up offering only unnecessary complications. As Frankie's unique skills and strength revealed themselves, I love how he was not only drawn to her but came to rely on her.
8. Did you guess the ending? At what point were you clued in if so? I did not guess ahead of time. In fact, I was rather convinced it was the school teacher for a bit!
9. How realistic do you think this story is? Have you ever heard of a similar crime? I have not, but I can imagine in this age of digital and 3D technology and the increasing competence of and tools available to students that this scenario could happen.
10. What do you see for Frankie's future? Do you think she will ever stop moving around? What would it take for this to happen? I would like to think if she ever found a person who ever truly challenged her life choices and committed to caring for her, she might find some peace and settle into one place.

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