

**WHERE IS LUCIA?**

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# **WHERE IS LUCIA?**

By R Shannon

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## CHAPTER 1

"Why do I get the impression you're not being fully honest with me, Fiona?" asked Fr. Matthew.

"It's not that I'm not being honest. I think it's more about stalling for time. I just don't know what I want right now," she said.

"You've been telling me for five years you want to get married and have kids. Now that Thomas has come into your life and wants the same thing — marriage and family — you're suddenly not sure what you want?" He didn't even try to hide his exasperation.

"It's not that, Matthew. I do want to get married and have kids. Maybe I'm taking longer to get over what happened with Gus," said Fiona.

"Well, that's different than not knowing what you want. When guys hear a woman say *I don't know what I want*, they hear alarm bells go off in their heads, especially if they're looking for a wife."

"I understand. I misspoke," said Fiona. She wondered if her brother fully believed her even though she was only telling a half-truth.

"But Thomas knows you're still getting over a broken engagement. Look, you're my sister and I don't want to grill you like an FBI agent, but I'm worried that you're now giving off mixed messages about what you want, which can be sabotaging. That's all. I'm simply pointing it out to you. Fear makes people do and say crazy things. You can take it for whatever it's worth to you."

She heard only disappointment in his tone. "Matthew, don't be mad about this. I've been through a lot in my life, especially in the last six months. It's been an emotional roller coaster without let up."

"I know it has. I know, but I don't understand how being through an engagement breakup would make a woman completely change her mind about what she wants in life. Like I said, it's only feedback I'm offering you. Please don't hurt Thomas. He's a great guy. You've told me that yourself."

"He is wonderful. My feelings don't have anything to do with him not being a nice guy. I would love nothing more than to just snap out of my disappointment and jump into romantic bliss with Thomas, but I can't control my feelings like that," said Fiona.



He hesitated. "I understand."

"I'm not sure why finding a husband and having kids has turned into the equivalent of winning a gold medal in the Olympics, but it has," said Fiona. "Some women breeze into a nice marriage effortlessly and without ever going through a string of broken hearts. It hasn't been like that for me. I've had a series of disappointments, all of which I honestly feel were not my fault."

"I understand more than you think. It's hard for many women. I hear this from my parishioners all the time. Too many men got used to milking neighborhood cows without buying their own." He sighed. "I better not say anything more than that."

"So I'm not the only woman who's having this much trouble?"

"No, you're not the only one at all. In my opinion, which I know is unpopular, most men and women are victims of the culture we now live in. There seems to be a battle between men and women over power or something. I haven't yet figured out what the actual prize is for the winner of this war, but I'm still working on it. The fallout seems to be too many disappointments in love and life. So don't take these disappointments personally. That's my point.

"More importantly, Thomas is marriage-minded. He's a lawyer. He prepared himself to support a family. Don't you want to be able to stay home and take care of your kids?"

"Yes, I would like that. I'm thirty already and back at square one. I think maybe I should accept the reality that I ran out of time at this point."

"You didn't run out of time. This is what I'm talking about. You're acting like you're sitting at home with no one interested, with no options. That's not true. You're being fatalistic. Thomas is interested in getting serious with you."

"I understand. He's great. I'm sure the issue between Thomas and me is only timing. I know he's ready to be a couple right now and even start planning a future. I can sense he's holding back from talking about it. But I'm not at the same place right now," said Fiona.

"So you only need more time. That's different than telling me you don't know what you want. I'm worried that if you tell Thomas you

don't know what you want, that'll make him reluctant to take a chance with you," said Matthew.

"You're too harsh with me. I don't want my dating your friend to come between us. I can't control my feelings. Believe me, if I could talk myself into loving Thomas right now, I would do it in a heartbeat."

"Well, that's good to hear. I'm sure you just need a little more time. Forget I scolded you about changing your mind. I take it all back," he said, chuckling.

"I forgive you," said Fiona, somewhat relieved. "I have to go. I'm coming up to an intersection where I need both hands."

"All right. I'll call you tomorrow," said Matthew before hanging up.



Fiona drove through the one busy intersection of Cresentville before entering a more residential section that had one winding road after another. Central Florida in early November was quite picturesque. After several months of heavy summer heat, the arrival of a few months of cold and snappy temperatures was a welcome change.

She thought about what she and Matthew spoke about as she took in the dense canopies of wild oak, elm, and olive trees that lined the roads on her way to work. The end of fall created the perfect autumn backdrop. Over the last week, the trees had all turned vivid shades of red, yellow, and orange. One by one, the leaves dropped and formed a colorful carpet all along the curbs. This was Fiona's first autumn in her new town.

The streets finally felt familiar to her and she was now comfortable working in Cresentville. It wasn't always this way. About six months ago, she transitioned from city life in Deerfield Beach, South Florida, to her new country home. A lot had happened over that period of time. All the changes required quite an adjustment, but she had finally taken fully to small town America.

Looking back, she felt lucky to have cut her teeth as a police officer with a busy city police department. She was trained in the latest in safety and crime investigation. But now she had gotten used to the reduced level of stress working as a detective in a smaller town. Cresentville could be described as a second circle of suburbs outside the City of

Orlando. It was a suburb, but it had a more rural feel to it. It also took a little getting used to for a city girl.

As she drove, she thought back to her last three dates with Thomas Doyle, the estate lawyer. She also thought about her brother's lecture about changing her mind regarding what she wanted in life. Matthew was a priest at St. Bernadette's parish in Orlando. He had met Thomas in a men's group in his parish and the two had hit it off right away. They were about the same age and both avid readers of philosophical books. They always had something to discuss or debate about.

Thomas saw Fiona after Mass one Sunday and was immediately attracted to her. He asked Matthew to be introduced to her, which Matthew had arranged. Even at that time, she told Matthew she was not yet ready for anything but friendship. He said he understood perfectly. She wished she had reminded her brother about that when they spoke earlier, but she didn't think of it until now.

Thomas had everything any young woman would want for a nice boyfriend with great husband potential. The real problem was that her deepest feelings were dragging their feet for another reason. Unfortunately, her heart still pined for someone else. This was the true reason she felt blocked from moving forward with Thomas.

It was 8:30 and she was scheduled for the day shift from nine to five. The employee parking lot behind the Cresenville Police Department filled up fast. Like yesterday and the day before, she hadn't reached any conclusion about Thomas. Nor had any solution to her problem come to her, at least not yet. He was very patient with her, but she worried that she was running out of time. She worried, too, that her uncooperative heart had the potential to ruin things for them.

Thomas — and her brother — were still operating under her first cover story, which was about her broken wedding plans. She had abruptly ended an engagement with her ex-boyfriend a few months earlier. However, what they didn't know was that Fiona was already over Gus but had fallen in love with her partner even though he was a married man. It wasn't the easiest subject to broach with a potential mate or even your brother if he's a priest.

Her relationship with Matthew was always close. She could talk to him about anything, but somehow, her heart being stuck on a married man seemed to be a subject she couldn't discuss with him. A month ago, she mentioned her feelings for Jack to Matthew, and he reminded her

that it was a dead-end and that she should get a transfer to a new partner. He had said that *out of sight, out of mind* would work if she let it. Since then, she hadn't mentioned her feelings for Jack anymore.

She pulled into a parking spot behind the station and turned off the car. She remained sitting behind the steering wheel. She glanced over and watched Jack's car pull into a parking spot adjacent to hers. He was a few minutes early today, which was unusual for him. She watched him get out of his car and swing his suit jacket over his shoulder. He was thin, six feet tall, had blue eyes, and had been fully gray since his early twenties. He held his phone to his ear with his other hand, frowning as he spoke. He appeared to be arguing with someone.

She watched through the side window and then the rear-view mirror as he walked towards the employee entrance. The sight of him still stirred her on every level, sexually and emotionally. As she sat, she reminded herself that her main mission was to forget him. Being stuck on a married guy with a child was a dead end and she knew it. Of course, forgetting him turned out to be easier said than done.

His wife Megan had disappeared for over eight months, which is when Fiona fell for him. When his wife returned, she had a child, his daughter, Mia. He had now recommitted himself to his marriage, especially to his new baby. She respected him for it, but it didn't help her heartache. She had no desire to wreck his marriage or become his paramour. She wanted her own life and her own family with someone who was in a position to offer her that.

Her only conclusion on the Thomas situation was that as much as she wanted to, changing her feelings by force of will was not working. She tried a few different strategies, but they all failed. By going out the third time with Thomas and realizing she wanted to move forward but couldn't, she had her own epiphany: She had to ask for a transfer. It was the only way to allow her heart to let go. She just dreaded it.

It was the first week in November. She had been thinking about the transfer for a while now. She decided she would ask for a transfer at the start of the new year. On top of her recent engagement disappointment, she didn't want to work the holidays with a new partner. She convinced herself that a transfer in January would be the best way to handle the problem. That was her plan anyway.

Jack stopped walking and now lingered as he continued speaking on the phone. He paced back and forth, even in a circle or two. The

frowning let up once or twice as he fake-smiled at co-workers passing him by. *Is he fighting with his wife? Who else would he be fighting with?*

Thomas hadn't verbalized anything about where they were heading in the relationship yet. But she knew he would want to know soon enough where things were going with them. She sensed he had held back from talking about it already. She got out of her car, kept her head down, and walked towards the entrance.

"I can't talk about this anymore. We'll talk about it later," were the last words she overheard Jack say. *That has to be his wife he's talking to.*

Lately, she forced herself to stop asking about his personal life in an attempt to let go and forget him. She assumed all was well at home with his wife and daughter, but maybe this argument was a sign she was wrong. She reminded herself once more that it didn't matter because he recommitted himself to his marriage and his daughter. Some small fight they had wasn't going to change that.

Head still down, she continued walking. One minute later, she heard Jack call to her.

"Hey, Fiona, wait up."

He wasn't smiling or subtly grinning this morning. He did seem troubled. She repeated in her own mind what had now become her mantra: *He's only your partner.* Scolding herself throughout the day for secretly wanting more of him was now part of her daily routine. She prayed for him. She also prayed that she could take her heart back from him and fall in love with Thomas. She wanted her own life and her own family.

She waited for him to catch up.

"What's going on?" asked Jack.

"Nothing. You seem troubled this morning. You sounded like you were arguing with someone," said Fiona.

"Megan and I are fighting. She just informed me she's fired the nanny. She claims the nanny is spying on her."

"I remember you told me you *were* spying on her," said Fiona.

"Yes, of course I was. I caught her taking drugs again, and I'm worried about Mia being alone with her," said Jack.

"No one likes to be spied on," said Fiona. "What's going on?"

"I don't want to get into the whole thing. It's a long and aggravating story. But I need to find another nanny."

"Won't she just fire the next one?"

"Maybe. I don't want to talk about my life. Let's talk about your life. How is Romeo, the Legal Slayer?"

"Stop calling him that. His name is Thomas, and he's fine," said Fiona. "I want you to be nice to him." She laughed inside thinking about the names he used to call Gus during her engagement. Here he was, starting in on Thomas, too.

He raised one eyebrow and frowned. She couldn't read his expression this time. As they approached the entrance, he quickened his pace, reached out, opened the door, and bowed like a castle doorman. "After you, madam." She tried not to laugh but couldn't help herself.

Three steps over the threshold, their immediate supervisor, Sergeant White, met them on their way in. "I need you two to meet with someone who filed a missing person's report a few minutes ago. Her name is Marcella West. She's a neighbor of a woman by the name of Lucia Newman. Her last words to me were that she thinks her neighbor could be dead. I told her I'd get someone for her to speak with. She's also shaking like a leaf, so I need you to find out what all her nervousness is about and if the woman is missing or dead."

"Sure, Sarge. No problem," said Jack.

"She's been seated in Interview Room 1," said Sarge, over his shoulder, as he moved down the line to the patrol room.

"I need to drop my things at my desk. I'll meet you there in a few minutes," said Fiona.

"That's fine. Can you bring a pad and paper?" asked Jack.

"Sure." Fiona continued on to her desk in the Detective Room. She placed her personal things into her desk drawer and picked up two pads and pens for them to use in the interview. She stood still for another inner lecture. *Now, I want you to shift into professional mode and stay there. You need to pull away from him for your own good. Just try to*

*keep a certain personal distance. He's only your partner. Focus on you and Thomas.'*

## CHAPTER 2

By the time Fiona entered the interview room, introductions and preliminaries were out of the way. Marcella West, a forty-something upper-middle-class woman, had just begun relaying the story of her missing neighbor, Lucia Newman.

"When was the last time you saw Lucia?" asked Jack as he reached over and took the pad and pen from Fiona. "This is my partner, Detective Fiona Quinn."

"Hello," said Marcella West as she gave Fiona a lethargic smile.

Fiona knew right away Marcella saw her appearance as an intrusion. She seemed to already be in a state of flirtation with Jack. This was common with female witnesses as Jack was tall, handsome, and charming. He knew how to use this power over women to get information or cooperation. All it ever took was a half grin or a little tease or two.

"She was supposed to be at Jazzercise this past Monday, but she didn't show up."

"So she's only been missing for two days?" asked Jack. "Do you think maybe you're jumping the gun? Maybe she's gone away for a few days."

Marcella shrugged. She hesitated and then said, "No, it's been longer than a couple of days. She texted me last Thursday, so it's six days, I guess. But we text one another every day. If she was going somewhere, I would have known. It wasn't like her to get really distant or too busy to at least text."

"You said earlier she's your neighbor. What neighborhood do you live in?" asked Jack.

"Willow Creek. I live across the street from her."

"Do you both live alone?"

"No. I'm widowed and live alone, but Lucia lives with her husband."

"Did you go over to her house and ask her husband where she is?"

"I went there on Monday for exercise class. I knocked on the door, but no one answered. We go to Jazzercise class on Mondays every week. I know their maid was there. She usually answers the door, but



she didn't on Monday. Lucia's husband doesn't go into his office until the afternoon, so he may have been there, too. I knocked several times, but like I said, no one answered. I have a sick feeling that something is not right," said Marcella.

"So the last time you saw her in person was not three days ago but the previous Monday? This past weekend was Halloween weekend. You're talking about the Monday of the week before Halloween. Is that right?" asked Jack as he jotted down the date in his notes.

"Exactly."

"And you go to Jazzercise every Monday?"

"Yes, every Monday," said Marcella. "I live diagonally across the street from her, and I haven't seen or heard from her since Tuesday or Wednesday of last week."

"When was the last time you heard from her either by phone or text?" asked Jack.

"We texted during the week, but I guess the last time I actually saw her was at Jazzercise class last Monday." She reached into her purse, took out her phone, and began swiping up and down.

"Do you have the text messages from after the last Jazzercise class that we can see?" asked Jack.

"Yes, I do. Here they are. We texted Thursday and Friday, but she got quiet after that," said Marcella. "I got the impression something was going on with her. She seemed distant. She stopped answering me as quickly as normal. I felt like she was distracted, like something was going on." Her hands shook as she swiped up and down.

"I notice your hands are shaking. Are you nervous or on some kind of medication that causes that?" asked Jack.

"I'm nervous talking to cops. I'm not used to talking to the police."

"You don't need to be nervous. We don't bite that hard. When was the last text?" asked Jack.

"Friday. Out of nowhere, she texted me that she was going to Las Vegas. There had to have been something happening for her to say or do that. Las Vegas is where she lived before she married her husband, Lee."

"What is her husband's full name?" asked Jack.

"Lee Andrew Newman. He's a psychiatrist," said Marcella. She continued swiping up and then down on her phone.

"You said she decided — out of nowhere — to go to Las Vegas. What do you mean by that?" asked Jack. He glanced over at Fiona. She knew he was wondering why she was so quiet and distant this morning.

"Well, the previous week, we talked after Jazzercise and she told me about recommitting herself to her marriage. She told me she and Lee had a long talk about their relationship. They were both going to commit themselves to making things work. They were even going out to celebrate this on Saturday night —"

"You're referring to this past Saturday, on Halloween weekend? Or are you referring to the weekend before the last Jazzercise class?" asked Jack.

"We talked about it the week before Halloween, but the celebration dinner was going to be this past Saturday, which was Halloween. I did see them leave on Saturday after seven. I assumed it was for the celebration dinner. But I haven't seen her for several days. Besides the last few texts, it seems like she's missing. I called her a few times during the week, but it went to voice mail, which I know she doesn't check. That's not like her. We used to text all the time.

"Then, like I said, out of nowhere, she texted me that she was leaving town," said Marcella. "I told her to call me, but she kept putting me off. We were close. Like I said, we talked and texted most days."

"I see," said Jack. He looked at his notes.

"You know, she told me once, if anything ever happened to her, that they needed to suspect Lee. I can't stop feeling that she's not okay."

"When she made that statement to you about anything ever happening to her, what was the context? Did they have a fight and things got out of hand?" asked Jack.

"They had a huge fight, and she said he has a dark, angry side. He got so aggressive that she was afraid of him."

"Did he hit her or harm her in any way?" asked Jack.

"I asked her that. She said he didn't hit her or do anything like that, but he got so angry and shouted at her in a way that she felt assaulted by

it. He was shouting in her face, almost spitting on her. She said it frightened her," said Marcella.

"Did you see any bruises on her?"

"No, I never did."

"Did she say what the fight was about?" asked Jack.

"No. Right after she told me about the fight, that's when she said, if anything ever happens to me, you need to suspect Lee," said Marcella. "I can feel things at times. I have a strong feeling that something is not okay with her."

"Like a psychic feeling?" asked Jack, glancing over to Fiona.

"Psychic, or intuition, or something. Yes. I sense a shift in reality, like something doesn't seem right," said Marcella.

"I feel that way all the time," said Jack as he hesitated and half smiled.

"Very funny," said Marcella sarcastically.

"When you say *doesn't seem right*, are you referring to this sudden change in her decision to stay and work on her marriage? Or is there something else that's causing you to have this feeling?" asked Fiona.

"It's something else, exactly. We talked for an hour after the last Jazzercise class about her recommitting herself to the marriage. She had one failed marriage and she didn't want another one. She wanted this to work out. Lee was very good to her most of the time. He treated her like a princess and he was committed to her. And then — just like that, she said she was going back to Vegas one last time to say goodbye," said Marcella.

"To say goodbye? To say goodbye to who?" asked Fiona.

"I don't know. I asked her if she would be back. She said yes, but she didn't say when. After a day or so of not hearing from her, this feeling that something isn't right started," insisted Marcella.

"Can we see the last few text messages between both of you?" asked Fiona.

She handed over the phone, and Jack and Fiona read through the text messages together. Fiona took screenshots of them on her phone.

Text Message (TM) (Lucia to Marcella) Marcella, I'm going to be leaving town for a while. I think I'm going back to Vegas.

TM (Marcella to Lucia) What!?!?!? Why?!?!?! I thought things were going well. What about the dance studio?

TM (Lucia to Marcella) This is temporary. I will be back, but I have to get my head straight. I need to go one last time to Vegas for something. I'm meeting Dom about something. I can't tell you what it's about right now. He's going to help me with something.

TM (Marcella to Lucia) Dom is back in your life? When did this happen?

TM (Lucia to Marcella) He's back, but not in the way you think. I'm leaving for a goodbye trip. Really. Don't worry. I'll be back.

TM (Marcella to Lucia) What does Lee think? Is he okay with all this?

TM (Lucia to Marcella) He's not happy, of course, but he understands. He's a psychiatrist. He does always at least understand.

TM (Marcella to Lucia) Can't you call me? I'm in Dillard's right now. I'm shocked. I'll call you later as soon as I get home.

TM (Lucia to Marcella) Listen, I'm moving quickly here. I'll call you. Lee understands but he's not happy, if you know what I mean. I can't talk openly in the house right now. I'll call you when I can. I'll be in touch. I have to leave for a while. I'll be back. Don't worry.

Fiona and Jack read the texts together. Fiona said, "Then Marcella texted Lucia three times later that day, but there's only one reply."

(TM Lucia to Marcella) I can't talk now. Later.

"You kind of forgot to tell us about the *Dom is back* part. Who is Dom, and where is he coming back from?" asked Jack.

"I was going to tell you about him, but I didn't know how to say it. He's my ex-boyfriend, now my best friend, I guess you would call him. Lucia wound up having a brief affair with him a couple of months ago. He lives two houses away from me," said Marcella as she shrugged one shoulder.

"How long was Dom your boyfriend?" asked Jack.

"Well, we weren't officially boyfriend and girlfriend. Dom has a hangup about commitments and labels, but we spend a lot of time together. He had a thing about me referring to him as a boyfriend, so we just became normal friends, I guess you could say," said Marcella.

"By normal friends, does that mean before you became normal friends again, you were romantic lovers?" asked Fiona.

"Yes, that's what I meant to say," said Marcella with another shoulder shrug.

"When did Lucia have an affair with Dom?" asked Fiona.

"They were only together twice, so I wouldn't even really call it an affair. That's also what led to me deciding to be only friends with Dom. Lucia felt guilty about what happened with him and she didn't want to be in an affair. That's what led to the conversations about her wanting to work on her marriage and make it work. She told Dom they couldn't be together anymore," said Marcella.

"And what is this about a dance studio?" asked Fiona.

"Her husband was going to help her start a dance studio in town," said Marcella.

"How long has she been married to her husband, Dr. Newman?" asked Fiona.

"She got married to Dr. Lee — that's what everyone calls him — in Las Vegas last December. So it's almost a year," said Marcella.

"They were married for under a year and she already had an affair?" asked Jack, as a little scoff leaked out. Fiona knew Jack, who was still stuck in the 1970s, was having another collision with the modern world.

"Yes. What can I tell you? Dom is very charming and flirtatious. She tried to resist him, but she wasn't able to," said Marcella, chuckling. "That's what she told me. But she also said she was done with him after the two times they were together."

"Maybe she just married the doctor for his money?" asked Jack.

Marcella hesitated and shrugged, this time with a bit more attitude.

"Do you know what Dom is helping her with?" asked Jack.

"No, I don't."

"Do you have any ideas? If you had to guess what he was going to help her with, what would that be?" asked Jack.

"I can't imagine. Dom knows about gambling and real estate mostly. He used to live in Las Vegas so they had that in common, but I have no idea what he would be helping her with."

"Is there anything else that seems off, or are there any other secrets that you don't know how to broach?" asked Jack.

Fiona knew Jack's personal feelings on the subject of cheating wives were leaking out. His wife had cheated on him in the past; it was a sensitive subject with him.

"Nothing. I'm scared to death for her. I'm worried that she's not okay," said Marcella. She hesitated. "I'm worried she's no longer with us."

"We'll contact her husband and see what he says about her whereabouts. A copy of the missing person's report will go out to the other police officers, and the whole department will be on the lookout for Lucia," said Jack. "If you hear from her in the meantime, call us so we can close the file. As I'm sure you already know, statistically, most missing persons do eventually show up."

"I understand," said Marcella.

"Here is my card. If you think of anything else you forgot to tell us, call me, okay?" said Fiona. "And, of course, if you hear from her or she returns, call us immediately."

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