

CHAPTER ONE

“IT’S NOT HERE,” Sara Lindley said as she dug through her purse.

Her husband Alan looked over her shoulder into the bag. “It’s gotta be there somewhere.”

“It’s not,” she told him, her tone of desperation growing. “It’s gone.”

“But you had it earlier.”

“I *know* I had it earlier. But I’m telling you it’s gone now.”

“Could you have left it somewhere? One of the shops?”

She was already shaking her head before he finished. “I never took it out.”

“Are you sure? Maybe you did but didn’t realize it.”

She looked at him, exasperated. “Now why would I have done that?”

“I don’t know. Maybe someone asked you for ID?” he suggested, trying to keep his voice calm. “I’m just trying to think of possibilities.”

Sara closed her eyes and took a breath. “I know. I’m sorry. Here.” She held out the purse to him. “You check.”

Not taking it, he said, “Honey, I believe you.”

“A second set of eyes is always a good thing.”

He almost smiled at that. It was something he’d said to her in the past. He let her give him the purse, then carefully searched through it. She’d been right. Her passport was definitely not there.

“Oh, God,” she said as he handed the bag back to her. “What are we going to do?”

Alan looked at the traffic that was backed up on the road beside them, each car waiting its turn to reenter the United States from Tijuana, Mexico. Unlike those in the vehicles, he and his wife had left their car in a stateside parking lot and walked in.

“Let’s retrace our steps, and see if someone found it,” he suggested. “Maybe you just dropped it somewhere.”

Though the frown on her face made it clear she didn’t think their chances of success were very good, she said, “Okay.”

Up until that point, it had been a wonderful day, finishing off an equally wonderful

weekend. They were celebrating, after all. While they'd been married for nearly a year, the final piece that solidified their life together had just been completed the previous week. He was now officially the father of Sara's two-year-old daughter, Emily. They were truly a family now, and nothing would ever take that from them. He couldn't have been happier.

Leaving Emily with Rachel and Kurt—his sister and brother-in-law who lived in Simi Valley—he and Sara had traveled south from their home in Riverside for a pre-anniversary romantic getaway. They'd spent Saturday in San Diego, splitting time between the beach and the zoo, then on Sunday, at Sara's suggestion, had gone even farther south to Tijuana. The plan was to drive back home that evening.

But now, Riverside might as well have been on the other side of the world, because without Sara's passport, she wasn't getting back across the border.

It took over an hour to check all the places they'd visited earlier, but no one had seen Sara's dark blue booklet.

"I'm sorry," she said, trying to hold back tears. "I don't know what happened."

Alan put his arms around her. "It's okay. Don't worry about it. We'll just explain that it was stolen. I'm sure it happens all the time."

"But they're not going to let me back through," she argued.

"They'll have to."

"No, they won't, Alan."

She was starting to get worked up again, but he knew she was right. A decade ago, a person could pass back and forth across the Mexican border with just a driver's license, but that all changed when the towers came down. These days, no passport, no entry into the States.

"There's got to be an American consulate in town," he said. "Someone there will know what to do."

"Alan, I'm so sorry."

He locked eyes with her and smiled again. "Sweetheart, it's okay. Really."

"I'm such an idiot."

"No, you're not."

"I am."

He chuckled. “Well, you’re my idiot.” He looked around. “I’ll grab a cab. I’m sure the driver will know where the consulate is.”

As he started to raise his arm, she said, “Oh, no.”

“What?”

“I don’t have any other ID on me. Since we were together, I didn’t think I’d need my wallet. My driver’s license...it’s in the car. I’ll need that to prove who I am, won’t I?”

It took all his will to suppress a groan.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Since I had my passport, I thought that would be enough.”

“It’s okay, don’t worry about it.”

“Don’t worry about it? We *need* it.”

“I know.” He paused for a moment. “Here’s what we’ll do. I’ll go back and get it, while you find out where the consulate is. We’ll meet...” He looked around. There was a restaurant across the street with a bar that spilled out onto a patio. He pointed at it. “Over there. You can grab a drink while you wait.”

“Do I look like I need a drink?”

“I think we both do,” he said, giving her an encouraging smile. “Now which bag should I look in?”

“The red one,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation. “In the pocket on the side.”

He gave her a hug and a kiss. “I’ll be as quick as I can.”

As he started to move away, she pulled him back.

“I love you,” she said, kissing him again.

“I love you, too,” he told her. “Now stop worrying. It’ll all be fine.”

“I know it will.”

AS ALAN CROSSED back into the States, he explained to the officer what had happened, hoping that maybe the guy would tell him just to bring her through. What he got instead was a confirmation that a trip to the consulate was in their future.

By the time he reached their car, nearly thirty minutes had passed since he left Sara by the restaurant. Anxious to get back, he immediately unlocked the trunk and popped it open.

For a second he thought he was at the wrong car, but his key had worked, and there,

against the side, was his suitcase. But where were Sara's bags?

He leaned in and looked beyond his luggage, but it was a ridiculous gesture. No way her bags could have been behind it without him noticing.

Thinking maybe he'd put them in the backseat and forgotten, he rushed around and looked inside the cab, but of course they weren't there. He *hadn't* forgotten. He'd put them in the trunk when he'd put his own bag there.

He returned to the rear of the car and looked into the trunk once more. Why would someone only take Sara's bags and leave his?

He was just about to pull out his cell phone so he could tell Sara what was up when he noticed the corner of an envelope sticking out from under his suitcase. He pulled it out, then nearly dropped it again when he saw his name written on the front in his wife's handwriting.

With more apprehension than he'd ever felt in his life, he opened it and read the letter inside.

Alan,

Don't come looking for me. You won't find me. I wish I could have told you in person, but I might never have left. Whether you can accept it or not, this is for the best. Please don't let this affect your relationship with Emily. She's blameless, and now, more than ever, she needs a father. She needs you. I love you. Believe that or don't, but I do.

I hope that one day you will be able to forgive me.

Sara

He read it twice, the words so hard to understand that it almost seemed as if they were written in a foreign language. When he finally finished he stared at the paper, his mind in a haze.

A voice started deep down in his gut—a whisper at first, but soon a scream that flooded his skull, jerking him back to the here and now.

“No!” it yelled. “No!”

He looked toward the border crossing.

The word then spilled from his lips. “No!”

Leaving the trunk of his car wide open, he started to run.

CHAPTER TWO

LOGAN HARPER WAS having lunch with his dad in the break room of Dunn Right Auto Repair and Service when Joy stuck her head in and said, “Harp, you’ve got a call. Line three.”

“Tell them I’ll call back when I’m done,” Logan’s dad said.

“They said it’s important.”

Harp frowned as he set his sandwich down and stood up. “Who is it?”

“Someone named...um...Mueller, I think.”

“Mueller?” Harp looked at Logan. “Your uncle Len.”

With a smile, Harp walked over to the phone mounted on the wall, and punched the button for line three.

“Len? What’s going on?”

The smile on Harp’s face froze, then faltered. “Oh, no,” he said as he closed his eyes for a moment.

Logan rose quickly from his chair and went over to him. “You all right, Dad?”

Harp shook his head and waved him off. He said into the phone, “When?...I’m so sorry...I understand. Don’t worry about it...Of course. What time?...We’ll be there.”

When he hung up, he just stood there, staring at nothing.

“Dad?” Logan said.

A second passed, then another, and another. Finally, Harp looked over. “What?”

“What’s going on?”

His father hesitated. “It’s...Len. He passed away this morning.”

Len Mueller wasn’t a blood relative, but that didn’t matter. He was as much an uncle to Logan and a brother to Harp as any man could have ever been. The Mueller family and the Harper family had lived on neighboring farms back in Kansas where Harp had grown up. Len had been best friends with Harp’s older brother Tommy. They had both served in World War II, and while Len had come back—minus two fingers on his left hand—Tommy hadn’t returned at all. Len had done what he could to fill in for Tommy—helping

Harp, advising him, teasing him, and eventually serving as best man at Harp's wedding.

Now he was gone, and with him Harp's connection not just to one man but two.

Two and a half days later, Logan and Harp drove up the coast to Marin County, north of San Francisco. They stayed in a motel in Sausalito that overlooked the bay, then headed to Mill Valley the next morning for Len's memorial service.

Church first, then a line of cars made their way out to the cemetery where at least three dozen people gathered around the gravesite. Sons, and daughters, and grandsons, and granddaughters, and a few old friends like Harp and Logan. Len had been a kind man, easy with his laugh and his smile. They had all hoped Len would live forever.

Because of his military service, an American flag was draped over the casket, and a four-person honor guard stood at the ready.

"You holding up okay?" Logan whispered to his father.

Harp's response was no more than a quick nod. Logan could feel every breath his dad took—the shallow, shuttering intakes, the deep gasps, and the pauses in between.

As soon as the reverend finished speaking, the honor guard surrounded the casket, raised the flag, and with practiced precision, folded it into a neat, tight triangle. The servicewoman who ended up with the flag walked over to where Len's five children sat and reverently handed it to Michael, who, at sixty-two, was Len's oldest.

The reverend said a final prayer as the casket was lowered into the grave. One by one, the mourners walked by the opening in the ground, dropping in a handful of dirt as they passed.

As Harp's turn came, Logan rose with him, putting a hand on his dad's back to steady him.

"I'm okay," Harp said, then walked to the grave unaided.

When he dropped in his dirt, he paused a second and said something Logan couldn't hear before he continued on. Logan tossed in his handful of soil and followed his father, catching up to him just before he reached Logan's electric blue El Camino.

"I don't know if I can go over there," Harp said once they were inside the car.

Logan knew his father was referring to the reception that was about to start at Len's house. "We can go back to the motel if you'd rather," he suggested.

Harp sat silently for a moment, then said, "It would be rude not to stop by at least."

“Don’t worry about it, Dad. They’ll understand.”

Harp looked at him, his face a mix of uncountable emotions. “You think so?”

“Yeah, I do.”

His father thought about it, then nodded.

WHEN THEY PULLED into the motel parking lot, Harp said, “Maybe we should have gone.”

“We still can, if you want.”

“I just don’t know.”

Logan hated seeing his dad like this. Harp was always the positive one, the one who kept things going and encouraged others to keep their heads up. And to Logan especially, he was also invincible, a stone that shouldn’t crack. That’s how most children saw their parents. Even when Logan’s mother had died, Harp had kept up a strong façade though Logan knew his dad had been deeply affected by her passing. Of course Harp had been younger then, more in control. Now he’d reached an age where he was outliving his friends, including the brother who was not his brother.

“Why don’t we go for a walk?” Logan suggested. “We can grab a coffee, look at the houseboats. They’ll be at Uncle Len’s for hours. If you want, we can go over after we get back.”

Harp almost smiled. “Yeah. I’d like that.”

Most of Sausalito’s famous houseboats were located along piers at the north end of town. It was a long walk, but it turned out to be just what Harp needed. After a while he started talking, telling Logan stories about Len, about Kansas, and even a couple about his brother Tommy—a subject he’d always been less open about. By the time they grabbed a coffee on their way back, Harp seemed if not himself then at least improved.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m up for an early dinner,” Logan said. “Maybe catch a movie on TV after?”

Harp said nothing for a moment. “I’d like to stop by the cemetery on our way home in the morning.”

“Sure, Dad. Whatever you want.”

“Okay,” Harp said, looking relieved. “That sounds good.”

As they crossed into the motel parking lot, Logan said, “There’s that Indian restaurant here that’s supposed to be pretty decent, and I thought I saw a sushi place when we drove in.”

Harp lit up. “Sushi sounds good.” He’d developed a fondness for California rolls in recent years. “Let’s—”

His pace slowed to a stop as his gaze locked onto something in the distance. Logan turned to see what it was.

Standing near his El Camino was Callie Johnson, Uncle Len’s youngest child and only daughter, still wearing the same black dress she’d had on earlier. She was somewhere in her mid-fifties now, and when she’d been a young undergrad at Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo, she’d make a few extra bucks by occasionally driving up to Cambria and babysitting Logan.

Harp shook off his surprise and walked quickly toward her.

“Callie. I’m...I’m sorry I didn’t stay around. I just...”

“It’s okay, Uncle Neal,” she said, using Harp’s first name. “I couldn’t hang around there, either.”

“Well, uh...we’re about to grab some dinner. Would you like to join us?”

“I don’t want to interfere.”

“You won’t be interfering,” Logan said, coming up behind his father. “I’m sure Dad would like a little more company than just me.”

“Well, now that he mentions it...” Harp said.

She smiled and nodded. “All right. Thank you.”

LOGAN ORDERED SPICY tuna, while Harp went for his usual. Callie, not as experienced at sushi, decided on the sampler plate.

As they waited for their food, Harp said, “I can’t tell you how sorry I am about your dad.”

“Thanks,” she said. “I know he meant a lot to you, too.”

“He was a special man. I don’t know what my life would have been like without him.”

Callie bit the inside of her lip, obviously attempting to keep her emotions in check.

Finally she said, “He left something for you.”

Harp looked surprised. “For me? What?”

“I don’t know.” She opened her purse and withdrew a padded envelope about an inch thick. “It was in a box of things Dad told Michael and me about. He said once he was gone, we should open it and we’d know what to do. There were packages for several people inside.” She looked at the envelope and then handed it to Harp. “This one has your name on it.”

Written across the front in thick black ink was FOR HARP. Below this was his address in Cambria. Harp stared at his name for a moment, then looked at Callie and said, “Thank you.”

As he started to set the package on the seat beside him, she asked, “Aren’t you going to open it?”

Logan was sure Harp wanted to wait until he was alone, but Callie was Len’s daughter, and the package was, in essence, one of his last messages. She’d want to know what was inside, too.

Harp also seemed to sense this. “Sure,” he said, and set the package on the table.

A single strip of packing tape held the package closed. Harp carefully ripped it off, then reached inside the envelope and pulled out the contents.

A book. An *old* book.

Harp looked at it, his face growing in wonder. “Oh, my god,” he said.

“What is it?” Logan asked.

Harp turned the book so Logan and Callie could see it. It was a hardcover, and though torn a little at one end, the dust jacket was still intact. Arched across the top portion was the title *Lost Horizon*, below this was a brown illustration of some buildings on a mountain, and at the very bottom was the name James Hilton.

Logan had read *Lost Horizon* in high school. It hadn’t been an English class requirement. It was something Harp had suggested he read. And while the story was long dated even then, Logan had enjoyed it enough to read it again in college.

In almost fearful anticipation, Harp opened the cover, sucked in a breath, then touched the inside near the top.

Softly, Logan said, “Dad?”

Harp looked at him, his eyes brimming with tears, and showed Logan what he'd found.

Written on the inside cover in pen was TOM HARPER.

Harp's big brother. Logan's uncle whom he had never met.

"I haven't seen this since before he left for...before he left home," Harp said. Logan knew his father had only been ten when his brother joined the navy during the war. "He used to have me read parts out loud to him when he was working around the farm. Said it was good practice for me."

Logan had never known that. He thought *Lost Horizon* was a book his father had wanted him to read just as a whim. How wrong he'd been.

"He took this with him," Harp went on. "I thought it got lost over there."

Callie said, "My dad once told me the day Tom's plane didn't return was one of the worst of his life. He must have found the book in Tom's things and saved it. He probably meant to give it to you long ago."

"I didn't realize they actually served together," Logan said.

Harp nodded absently, his attention still on the book. "They were both ordnancemen on PBVs, just on different planes."

Callie picked up the discarded packaging and looked inside. "There's something else," she said. She withdrew a white, business-sized envelope and handed it to Harp.

This was nowhere near as old as the book. On the front was scrawled MANILA.

"What's that mean?" Logan asked.

Instead of answering, Harp looked inside the envelope, then closed it again without showing it to anyone else.

"It's nothing," Harp told him. He put the book and the envelope back into the package, and set it on his lap, out of sight.

There were so many questions Logan wanted to ask—about Uncle Tommy, about the book, about the envelope—but Harp was a million miles away.

After their food finally arrived, and they'd started eating, Callie glanced at Logan. "Dad mentioned your, uh, trip a few months ago."

"My trip?" Logan asked.

"Where you helped that girl? Brought her back?"

Logan looked at his father. “I didn’t know we were sharing that with other people.”

“You can’t seriously think I wouldn’t have told Len,” Harp said.

Logan frowned, and turned back to Callie. “I got lucky, that’s all. There’s not much of a story to tell.”

She hesitated a moment. “I’m not asking you to tell me the story. I’m asking you for help.”

CHAPTER THREE

“HELP? WHAT KIND of help?” Logan asked, hoping he was wrong about where Callie was going.

“It...it actually wasn't my idea. It was Dad's.”

“Len?” Harp said, looking at her with interest.

She nodded. “When he went into the hospital last weekend, the doctors told us it was very unlikely he'd be coming out. My brothers and I took turns sitting with him so that he was never alone. He slept a lot, but there were a few times when he'd wake and want to talk.” She smiled at the memory. “He and I, we've always talked a lot, and when I became a lawyer, it seemed as if we talked more than ever. Every time I ran into a problem case, he was the first one I turned to. I can't remember a time when he didn't suggest something I hadn't thought about.” She paused. “One night at the hospital, he wanted to talk about how work was going, and about any issues I might be having.

“I told him I did have one case that had reached a point where I didn't know what to do next. Unfortunately, it wasn't something that could be fixed with a creative motion in court or a well-written letter on firm stationery. He said he wanted to hear about it anyway, so I told him. When I finished, I thought he'd fallen asleep, but apparently he was thinking. After a bit, he opened his eyes and said, ‘You need to talk to Harp.’”

As she said his name, Harp rubbed a self-conscious hand across his mouth.

Callie shifted her gaze to Logan. “That's when he told me about what you did for that girl, that you'd gone clear to Asia to find her.”

“It wasn't as big a deal as he probably made out,” Logan said.

Harp frowned. “Don't listen to him. It was a big deal. If Logan hadn't been there...” He shook his head.

Callie's eyes were still on Logan. “I've come to a dead end. I'm hoping there might be something you could do.”

“I'm sure there is. We'd be happy to look into it, won't we, Logan?” Harp said.

Logan adjusted himself in his chair. What he'd done for Harp's friend Tooney,

bringing the man's granddaughter back, had happened because if he hadn't done something, no one would have. He wasn't so sure that was a good habit to get into. Then again, Callie was basically family. You didn't turn your back on family.

"What exactly are you hoping I'll do?" he asked.

"Find my client's wife," she said.

Her answer did nothing to dissipate his discomfort. "If you think I'm some kind of missing persons expert, you're mistaken."

"Technically, she's not missing."

"Technically?"

Callie took a moment to collect her thoughts, then said, "My client's name is Alan Lindley. A month and a half ago, he and his wife Sara went to San Diego for a long weekend. On their last day, they decided to visit Tijuana. He says they had a wonderful time, but as they were headed back for the border, Sara realized she'd lost her passport and didn't have any other ID. Alan crossed the border alone to get her driver's license out of her luggage so they could get her a temporary passport, but when he got to the car, her things weren't there. Only a note telling him she was gone."

"Oh, that's horrible," Harp said.

"I'm sorry for your client, Callie, but people leave marriages all the time," Logan said.

Harp shot him a look. "Logan, where's your compassion?"

"I have compassion, Dad. But if this woman left, she must have had her reasons."

"I'm not finished," Callie said. "They went to San Diego because they were celebrating."

"Wedding anniversary?" Harp asked.

Callie shook her head. "At the time, their first anniversary was still a month away. Sara came into the marriage with a daughter. Emily is two now. What Sara and Alan were celebrating was that his adoption of Emily had been finalized the week before."

"She didn't take the girl with her, did she?" Logan said.

"No, she didn't."

Logan shrugged. "I'm still not sure what I can—"

"Naturally, Alan was distraught," Callie said, cutting him off. "He couldn't

understand why she'd left. By his account and others I've interviewed, they had a great marriage. He came to me because he wanted to find her, not to bring her back if she didn't want to come back, but to find out why she left. I was thinking it was going to be mostly a divorce case. We have other lawyers in the firm who handle those, but since Alan was one of my personal business clients, I agreed to help track Sara down. I did the obvious thing—hired a detective to look into it.”

“So what did the detective find out?” Harp asked.

“Nothing.”

Logan nodded, expecting as much. “She probably stayed in Mexico. That would make it hard for her to be found.”

“No, you misunderstand me. He didn't find *anything*. Sara Lindley doesn't exist.”

A thick silence descended on the table.

After several seconds, Logan said, “Maybe your detective didn't know what he was doing.”

“I don't waste my money,” Callie said, her tone serious. “I've used Joe Fulkerson dozens of times. He definitely knows what he's doing. Alan's wife has no history.”

Harp leaned forward. “That doesn't make sense.”

“Maybe it was a scam,” Logan said. “Did she take any of his money, or something valuable?”

“No,” Callie said. “The only things missing were a few of her possessions and pictures.”

Logan's brow furrowed. “Pictures?”

“That's the last thing. When Alan got home, every picture in their house that Sara was in was gone. Even the digital shots on their computer had been permanently erased from the hard drive.”

“*What?*”

“That's not all. Out of all Alan's friends and family, only his sister had a picture with Sara in it, and she was just in the background. Apparently, Sara was good at avoiding camera lenses.”

“But that's...that's crazy,” Harp said.

Callie simply shrugged.

“Have you gone to the authorities?” Harp asked.

“That’s...not an option,” she said.

Harp looked confused. “Why not?”

But Logan knew the answer. “Emily.”

Callie nodded. “Exactly.”

Harp was still lost. “Emily?”

“Sara’s been using a false identity,” Logan explained. “Which means the marriage, I’m pretty sure, is invalid.”

“It is,” Callie said.

“And if the marriage is invalid, then the adoption...”

Harp stared at Logan for a moment before it hit him. “Oh...oh, no.”

“If I were to get the authorities involved,” Callie said, “they’d have no choice but to take Emily away. I have a good friend in the FBI, but I don’t even dare ask her for advice. She’d ask me questions I couldn’t answer.” She looked at Logan again. “If this were a simple matter of a wife ditching her marriage, my dad would have never brought you up. But after what we’ve learned, both Alan and I are concerned that Sara is in trouble. If she is, Alan wants to help her, but he can’t if he can’t find her. That’s what I’m hoping you can do. Find her, see if she’s in trouble, then let me know.”

Logan looked down at his food. He still had four pieces of spicy tuna left, but he was no longer hungry. “I’m not sure what more I can do that you haven’t already done.”

“Maybe there is nothing,” she admitted. “But you’ll come at it with fresh eyes, and given what I heard happened in Thailand, from an angle that is less...rigid than mine.”

He glanced at his father, and could see that Harp was fully behind the idea. Helping Callie—and, through her, the memory of Len—was all the motivation his father needed. And if his father felt that way, could Logan really say no?

“I guess...I could at least talk to Alan. We can see where it goes from there.”

Callie reached out and put her hand over Logan’s. “Thank you.”