



Find Me in California

A Novel

Kerry Lonsdale

Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

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No More Words

“Lonsdale expertly maintains suspense throughout. Psychological-thriller fans will be well satisfied.”

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“A perfect summer read.”

—Red Carpet Crash

“[A] mesmerizing first installment in her newest No More series . . . *No More Words* simmers with drama and secrets, sure to dazzle readers as an unmissable summer read.”

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“Kerry Lonsdale starts her latest trilogy off with a bang! Brimming with drama, suspense, and family secrets galore, *No More Words* will have you tearing through the pages to figure out what really happened to this broken family, and who is playing whom. With beautifully drawn,

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“*No More Words* burns and smolders with the tension of a lit cigarette. Kerry Lonsdale has created a page-turning story of family secrets and assumed truths that forces readers to ask what they would do if the buried past came calling at their door. Nothing and no one can stay hidden forever.”

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“Every family has its secrets, and the way Kerry Lonsdale twists the truths in *No More Words*, you’re guaranteed to lose sleep over this perfectly blended tale of suspense, intrigue, and emotional betrayal. Lonsdale has done it again, gripping the hearts of readers with her complex characters and layered storylines. This is a must-read thriller that will leave you stunned at the end!”

—Steenia Holmes, *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of *Lies We Tell Ourselves*

**Find
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California**

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THE EVERYTHING SERIES

Everything We Keep
Everything We Left Behind
Everything We Give

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All the Breaking Waves
Last Summer
Side Trip

THE NO MORE SERIES

No More Words
No More Lies
No More Secrets

**Find
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A Novel

Kerry Lonsdale

LAKE UNION
PUBLISHING

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*For Orly:
to a friendship founded on words that's as lasting as language itself*

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Friday

CHAPTER 1

MATT

Matt turns his Porsche into the driveway and stops at the sight before him. Fifteen large boxes stacked five across in towers of three block his garage. Bleary eyed and exhausted from his flight, he stares. Somebody screwed up a delivery, because this is too large of an online order to forget. These boxes aren't his.

Sucks for whoever they do belong to. It's monsoon season.

He glances up at the sky. Bloated clouds are moving in fast and he's not leaving his silver metallic baby outside overnight. The boxes, however, will remain in the driveway unless the owner lives nearby and can pick them up before the rain starts. There's only so much space he's willing to give up in his garage.

Grabbing his phone, he unfolds from the car, intent on moving the boxes out of the way and calling the number on the shipping label. But what he reads stops him cold. SHIP TO: MRS. ELIZABETH HOLLOWAY C/O MATTHEW GATLIN.

His grandmother. What the fuck?

He hasn't seen or heard from her since he was eighteen, when he moved out of her house and left California. That was twelve years ago. Alarming that she knows where he lives. But not as disturbing as the boxes being left in his care.

Matt grips the back of his neck and looks up and down the street. Please don't tell him she'll show up next.

To say they have a complicated relationship is an overstatement. Their relationship is nonexistent. Elizabeth Holloway made sure of it after his mom's death. Which prompts another thought . . .

Maybe Elizabeth finally croaked.

For one glorious, fantastical second, giddy satisfaction explodes inside him. God rest her soul, but trust him: ever since he moved away, his life has been better without her in it.

But the feeling doesn't last long. If she were dead, the boxes would have been addressed specifically to him and sent with an explanation. A phone call giving him a heads-up that he had inherited her belongings would have been nice. A letter informing him of her passing would have been sufficient. Anything but this inconvenient and unwanted surprise.

Only one way to find out what's going on and stop this impending train wreck.

He calls the number on the label, reading the return address. Weird, they were shipped from Pasadena. His grandmother lives in Beverly Hills. She inherited her house from Matt's great-grandfather, a producer who made his riches during Hollywood's golden age. Matt can't imagine she would have sold the place and moved out.

A woman answers after the fourth ring. "Rosemont Assisted Living and Memory Care, this is Julia. How may I direct your call?"

Ah, that explains the address.

Matt mentally calculates Elizabeth's age, putting her at eighty-three. He wonders what she did with the house.

"Elizabeth Holloway." Matt keeps his tone neutral. Inside, his stomach churns at the thought of having to speak with her. This is not how he planned to start the evening. He's starving and has to curate the several thousand photos he took at the International Auto Show. After a seventy-two-hour, whirlwind trip to New York and back to Santa Fe, he still has a long night ahead.

"We don't have an Elizabeth," says the woman on the other end of the line.

"You sure? Because someone there sent me—"

"Wait, do you mean Liza? We have a Liza Holloway."

"Yeah, that's her."

A light, self-deprecating laugh comes over the line. "I blanked out there for a second. Long day. Forgot Liza and Elizabeth are the same. She goes by Liza here."

He should have remembered that. Everyone called her Liza. Everyone but him. He wasn't allowed. To him, she was Grandmother Holloway. Always formal, never familiar.

"One sec. I'll transfer you." She puts him on hold.

Matt switches the phone to his other ear, ruminating on how succinctly he can tell his grandmother that she isn't welcome at his house and neither is whatever's inside the boxes.

He doesn't have to wait long before the line connects. But his grandmother isn't the one who picks up.

"Liza's with her nurse at the moment. May I take a message?" says the woman he was speaking with. "She'll call you back."

"Who's in charge?" Maybe he doesn't have to speak with his grandmother at all. Surely whatever's going on has to be some mix-up on the center's part.

"That would be Lenore Pullen, the facility director."

"I'll speak with her."

"She's in a meeting right now. I'll transfer you to voicemail."

Slumbering memories from when he was first sent to live with his grandmother begin to wake. Choppy water. Small boat. An empty stomach. A heartache that stole his breath and almost his life.

His answer is sharp and short. "No." He can't revisit that time.

He then pushes out a long stream of air. He didn't mean to snap. But he does need this resolved *pronto*. "What did you say your name is?"

"Julia."

"Hi, Julia. Matt."

"Hello, Matt." Her voice is pleasant with an undercurrent of cheer. It helps calm his nerves. "Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"I'm hoping there is. I'm tired and I've got a long night ahead." He pushes a thumb into his temple where his head aches the most. If he doesn't pop an edible soon, that throb will turn into a full-blown migraine within an hour. His photos won't get edited. He'll miss the deadline with *Road & Track*. Dave will be furious.

"I'll try my best to help, sir."

"I just returned home to find fifteen boxes left on my driveway. Do you have any idea why Elizabeth sent them to me?"

A gasp. "You're Matt, her grandson."

Unfortunately. “That’s me.”

“I can’t believe I didn’t make the connection when you first asked for her. I’m more tired than I thought. I’m so glad you called.”

“So what’s up with the boxes?”

“She didn’t send them. I did.”

“Come again?”

“I helped her pack and arranged the delivery.”

He has so many questions about that statement. One makes it to the front. “Why didn’t you call ahead and warn me? A heads-up would have been nice.”

“Lenore did call. Quite a few times.”

“When? Never mind.” He doesn’t need to look at his call log to know there are likely many missed calls from Rosemont’s director. He doesn’t listen to voicemail and rarely answers calls from unknown numbers. That’s why he has Dave. His partner handles the business end of things, books Matt’s shoots, and negotiates the contracts.

“She has no one else, Matt. She wanted me to throw everything away. I get that she isn’t sentimental, but I couldn’t bear for her to let everything go because she has to move out, so I convinced her to send her things to you.”

“You lost me.” He’s so confused. None of what she’s said makes sense, especially the part about his grandmother having no one else. She had tons of friends, people she regarded as more deserving of her attention than him.

“I shouldn’t share this. It isn’t my place.” Her voice lowers conspiratorially. “Liza is broke.”

He scoffs. “That’s absurd.” His grandmother descended from Hollywood royalty. He can still recall being awestruck when he first entered her palatial two-story estate. Her wealth was beyond the imaginings of his ten-year-old self.

“She’s only been with us for a year, and granted, she isn’t the most pleasant resident we have. But nobody deserves to be homeless, not even Liza.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Liza is out of money, and the man she appointed as her power of attorney has gone missing. The center’s evicting her in five days.”

Five days?

Empathy floods his chest, but he immediately shuts that shit down. He will not feel sorry for her.

“What does this have to do with me?”

“You’re listed as her secondary power of attorney, and you’re her only living relative. You have to come get her.”

“Like hell I do.” The thought escapes before he can censor it.

“Matt,” she pleads, and he instantly feels the guilt. Not because of what he said, but because of what Julia must think of him. He sounds like an asshole. He probably is one. But Elizabeth always brought out the worst in him. “She has no one.”

He swore he’d never sacrifice his sanity for her peace of mind again. He’s kept the memories from that period of his life locked away for years. He can’t lower his guard and risk Julia’s bleeding heart—or his grandmother—letting them out.

“Why am I hearing about this now? What happened to thirty days’ notice?”

“Mrs. Pullen has been trying to reach you.”

Right. The missed calls.

“Can I tell her you’re coming?” Julia asks.

Matt’s gaze drifts over the boxes hogging up driveway real estate, and his mind reels back in time. He remembers all the things Elizabeth didn’t say to him and didn’t do for him. The comfort she didn’t give, and the love she withheld when he’d been his most vulnerable self.

No, he isn’t coming to get her.

“Elizabeth Holloway is a resourceful woman. She can figure out where she’s going to live, so long as it’s not with me.”

That said, he ends the call.

CHAPTER 2

JULIA

Julia gapes at the phone's receiver. The grating dial tone from Matt's severed call loud enough to hear despite her holding the earpiece away from her head.

Liza mentioned she and her grandson are estranged, but she didn't tell Julia that he is downright rude.

She'd like to add *inconsiderate*, *ungrateful*, and *disrespectful* to his list of flaws. He abandoned a frail eighty-three-year-old woman and has no issue admitting this to Julia's face. Or, more precisely, her ear.

Julia plunks the phone in its cradle, miffed. That must be some rift between the two of them.

She waffled about asking Liza what had happened between them because she didn't want to pry. Liza wouldn't hesitate putting Julia in her place. But she does feel sorry for the woman. From what she's seen, Liza doesn't have any regular visitors other than her missing power of attorney.

It makes Julia all the more grateful for the relationship she used to have with her grandmother, Ruby Rose Hope. She was fortunate to have been raised by the free-spirited and passionate woman, and she appreciates every hour she volunteers as Rosemont's in-house massage therapist so she can be close to Mama Rose, even if her grandmother rarely remembers who Julia is nowadays.

"Any calls come in?" Shelly asks, returning to the reception desk after her break.

"A few that I forwarded. Nothing urgent. You'll see them in the log." Julia stands, giving up Shelly's seat. She almost tells Shelly about Matt's call but decides against it. That's between Matt and Lenore. And Julia. Liza's financial and living circumstances are confidential. Julia only knows Rosemont is giving the elderly woman the royal boot because Liza complained to her during her massage session. She asked Julia for assistance to bag and toss her personal possessions. She said she has no use for them if she'll be homeless. Initially, albeit reluctantly, Julia cooperated. But when she came across Matt's birth certificate and asked Liza about it, the older woman admitted Matt is her grandson. When Lenore confirmed Matt is Liza's backup power of attorney and that her calls to Matt had gone unanswered, Julia convinced Liza and Lenore to allow her to box and ship Liza's possessions to Matt. She hoped the delivery would prompt Matt into action.

It did, just not in the way Julia had expected. A resounding *no*. He's not going to help Liza.

What a mess she caused. She took a risk and it backfired.

She should update Lenore. Judging from the phone conversation, Matt won't be calling back.

“Jules, do you have a moment?”

Julia glances over her shoulder at Lenore Pullen. Just the woman she needs to speak with. “Sure. One sec.”

“Are you here tomorrow?” Shelly asks.

“You know me. Every day after my shift ends at the club. Like clockwork.”

“I have an extra ticket for Margaret Cho at the Ice House. Starts at eight. Come with me? Dale’s going to the Dodgers game.” Her husband lives for baseball.

“I wish, but I’m here past nine tomorrow night.”

Shelly’s bottom lip curves into a dramatic pout. “You need a life, girl.”

Julia works a full shift five days a week at the Pasadena Country Club spa, then puts in a four-hour shift volunteering at Rosemont. She also spends her days off from the spa at Rosemont, to upward of twelve hours a day.

What Julia needs but can’t manage is a social life. With her disastrous record with romantic relationships plus her mounting debt, she can’t afford one—emotionally or financially. Whenever she feels lonely, she overcompensates by working. So far, she’s never felt alone. But that feeling has an expiration date. Once her grandmother passes, Julia will truly have no one. She tries not to think about it.

“Next time.” Julia’s smile is apologetic. She hopes there will be a next time, one day. But that day is far off, and after repeated rejections, Shelly will likely stop inviting her out. Her invitations will dry up like Julia’s other friendships.

Shelly wiggles her fingers goodbye, and Julia follows Lenore to her office.

Lenore’s private space overlooks Rosemont’s side yard garden, a beautiful display of foliage and color. The facility’s grounds solidified Mama Rose’s decision to move in during the earlier stages of her dementia. This is where she wanted to be when Julia could no longer care for her. The cordial and experienced staff impressed Julia. She believed they’d treat her grandmother as family. But she wasn’t entirely sold on the idea until she crunched the numbers. Between Mama Rose’s social security and portfolio disbursements, and how long the doctors expected her to live, they could afford Rosemont. Barely. Julia would have to volunteer at least thirty hours a week in exchange for a reduced monthly fee. That was on top of her full-time job to keep herself fed and not lose Mama Rose’s house, which she had to mortgage to cover her grandmother’s expenses after they exhausted her retirement savings.

“Have a seat.” Lenore gestures at the chair before her desk. Her features look strained behind her sapphire blue-framed glasses, her expression guarded underneath the Chianti-red lipstick as she settles in her own chair.

Julia suddenly has the distinct feeling she’s being laid off. Silly, given she’s a volunteer.

She warily sits across from Lenore. “Is something the matter?”

Lenore folds her sturdy hands on the desk. Doe-brown eyes rove across Julia’s face before lowering. “This isn’t easy, so I’ll get right to the point.”

“Okay.” Julia tugs at her hot-pink Dickies pants. This isn’t good if Lenore can’t make eye contact.

“Not many people know yet. It hasn’t been officially announced. Rosemont has been purchased by a larger corporation. Effective immediately, we are under new management.”

Julia’s mouth parts. “Oh.” Maybe Lenore’s being laid off. “Have you been let—”

“No.” Lenore shakes her head. “Not yet anyway. I’ve been told they intend to keep the existing staff. Our new parent company will act more in the capacity of oversight. It’s one of

the reasons the board agreed to the terms. We don't want disruption in care."

"That's good." Julia slouches with relief, but she wonders how this could affect her grandmother's care. Lenore's gaze turns troubled. "That is good, right?"

Hands steepled on the desk, Lenore taps her fingertips together. "I know we have an arrangement for Ruby."

Their arrangement has been a lifesaver.

Julia's knee starts to bounce. "Yes, and?"

"We can't honor it anymore."

Her knee stops, and Lenore's announcement sinks in. "What do you mean?"

"They're cracking down on our finances. All residents must pay their full contracted fee."

Their agreement to exchange Julia's volunteer hours for a discount on Mama Rose's fees isn't in writing. It's between her and Lenore, who's become a dear friend. As long as Lenore worked at Rosemont and Julia volunteered, they would be good. Julia knew Lenore could renege on the monthly discount and the fee could revert to the contracted rate. But thinking something could happen is not the same as it actually happening.

"You swore you—"

"I swore I'd honor Ruby's discount as long as I could. There was always the possibility rates would increase or the board would crack down. I made that clear in the beginning."

Julia chides her selective memory. Lenore had explained all this and more. She was just in denial this day could come. Ignorance is bliss until it rains on your parade.

"I don't have the authority I once had, and I no longer have sway with the board, not under the new management structure. I can't make exceptions, Jules. I'm sorry."

"I'll volunteer more hours."

"When?" Lenore peers at her through thick lenses. "You're already putting in twelve-hour days."

Julia throws up her hands. "I don't know. I'll figure something out." She has to—she doesn't have other options. She's exhausted her income sources.

"Even if you could find the time, I still can't honor our deal."

"Lenore . . ."

Lenore slumps over her desk. "Jules, please. I love your grandmother. Don't make this harder for me than it already is."

Harder for her? Lenore's grandmother isn't the one getting evicted if Julia can't make the full payment.

"How much time do I have?"

"End of the month."

Five days until the full fee kicks in. And not for just the upcoming month, but for every month thereafter. They'll burn through the remainder of the cash Julia put aside when she mortgaged Mama Rose's house.

"And if I can't make the payment?"

"We're left with no choice but to give her notice. We have several others on the waiting list."

And the center's new parent company sees only dollar signs on the ledger.

"We'd hate to lose Mama Rose, but I understand if you see fit to move her to another facility." Someplace more affordable. Lenore's suggestion goes without saying.

As much as Julia would love to save money and cut back on her hours, she can't. She can't move Mama Rose. For reasons her grandmother refused to share, Mama Rose insisted she spend her remaining days at Rosemont. She begged Julia to promise that under no circumstance would she move her elsewhere unless it was back home for hospice care. She has to live here.

Julia pushes up from the chair. "She's not moving out."

"Julia." Lenore rises with her. "Please listen to me as your friend. You're already overextended, and you're practically broke. You told me yourself. You're also not being fair to yourself."

A small price to pay. She made Mama Rose a promise and she intends to keep it.

"I'll come up with the difference." Who knows how.

Julia leaves Lenore's office in a daze, her mind grappling for solutions and coming up empty handed. It isn't until she reaches her grandmother's room that she remembers. She forgot to tell Lenore about her conversation with Matt.

CHAPTER 3

MATT

Dave wraps a putrid yellow scarf around his neck. “Your grammie has some wild shit.”

“Get off her stuff.” Matt yanks the scarf from Dave and shoves it in the box. Dave showed up twenty minutes ago, as Matt brought in the last of Elizabeth’s boxes, stacking them on the side of the garage opposite his Porsche 911, between the side wall and the ’67 Chevy Chevelle he’s rebuilding. He sliced open and dug through a few boxes. When he couldn’t find a note from her, he gave up on the rest. Childish of him to think *Grammie* cared enough to write him a letter explaining how she got into this scrape.

He closes the box flaps. “Don’t ever let her hear you call her that.” Matt let slip “Grandma” once and *Grandmother* Holloway grounded him for the weekend.

“Until a hot minute ago, I didn’t know you had a grandmother. You never mentioned her.”

“Nothing worth mentioning.” Ten-plus years of friendship with Dave probably does warrant a mention or two. But Matt chooses not to talk about the eight years he spent with Elizabeth or why he had to move into her house, because he’d rather forget it ever happened.

Dave leans against the workbench where Matt stores his tools. “When do I get to meet this mystery woman?”

“Never. And consider yourself lucky,” Matt adds when Dave screws up his face. “Toss me the packing tape. It’s behind you.”

Dave tosses over the tape and nods at the boxes. “What are you going to do with those?”

“Ship them back.” He’ll put in a UPS pickup order first thing on Monday.

He reseals a box and moves to the next one he opened.

“I thought she was being evicted.”

“Yeah, so?” He casts Dave a sidelong glance.

“Dude.” Dave gives him a pathetic look. Matt knows he’s being selfish. In his defense, his attitude isn’t any different from hers toward him.

“Whatever she’s gotten herself into isn’t my problem.”

Dave snags the tape from him. “This is your grandmother.”

“Give it back.”

“Your flesh and blood.”

Matt holds out his hand, waving his fingers for the tape.

“Not until you talk to me,” Dave says.

Elizabeth is the last person he wants to talk about.

“There’s nothing to discuss.” Matt grabs for the tape.

Dave moves out of reach. “She’s old, you freak.”