

I Found You

PART TWO

Chapter 10

Lily's mother wires her a hundred pounds. She uses some of it to take a train into London on Friday afternoon, to go to Carl's office, to retrace his steps. It's the first time she's been into London alone. She's flustered at the ticket machine: what does it all mean? She waits in a small queue to speak to a man behind a window. 'Yes,' she says when she finally reaches the front, 'I need to go to London. Can you help?' The man does not smile. 'Return?' 'Yes,' she says, 'I will. Later on.' Now the man smiles and she knows she's said something stupid. He takes her twenty-pound note, prints her off two tickets, passes them to her with her change and says, 'Platform three. Seven minutes.' She snatches the tickets and the money and says, 'OK.' On the train she watches her new world passing in fleeting vignettes: squares of scrubbed green and acid yellow, back ends of industrial estates, rows of red-brick houses with identical children's toys on narrow scraps of grass. She does not know this world. She only knows Carl. She plugs her mouth with two knuckles, holding down a throb of grief. She cannot cry. Not here, on a train, with strangers. She stares hard through the window, hard as steel. She's been to Carl's office before. It was during one of the weekends they'd spent in London, before they got married. They'd stayed in a West End hotel and eaten dinner in a sky-scraping restaurant with sparkling views across the capital. He'd said, 'Want to see where I work?' She'd shrugged and said, 'OK then.' It's a short building, symmetrical and fronted with black glass and brushed steel. In the centre is a large electronic revolving door, and beyond that a black and chrome foyer with a stainless-steel water feature on the back wall. She checks her watch. It's four forty. Twenty minutes until the time that Carl would have left work. She will wait here and play some Candy Crush. At five to five she pictures Carl switching off his computer, pulling his jacket from the back of his chair, clicking the metal clasps on his briefcase, calling out goodbye to some colleagues (would he? Would Carl say goodbye? Maybe not. Carl is not the type to call out goodbye. Maybe a raised hand. Or a brusque See you tomorrow). She sees him waiting for the elevator, checking his phone, checking his hair. She counts to twenty in her head and then pictures him walking into the elevator, the quiet ping ping of the floors as they pass, exiting into the foyer, and then into the revolving doors and then she starts to walk. Victoria is not far, just two minutes. She scans the boards for Carl's train, the 5.06 to East Grinstead, and heads towards platform four. She looks at the faces of the people heading the same way. Do they know him? Would they recognise him? The same train at the same time every day? She boards the train and sits down. Opposite her is a man. She draws in her breath and feels inside her handbag for a photo of Carl. 'Excuse me,' she says, her voice emerging more harshly than she intended. 'Could you help me?' He looks at her with unguarded suspicion and she knows that he thinks she is about to ask him for money. 'This is my husband,' she says, sliding the photo across the table between them. 'He takes this train every day and now he has gone.' The man recoils slightly. He still thinks she is going to ask him for money. She swallows down an urge to tell him to fuck off. 'He is a missing person,' she continues. 'Officially. The police know.' He raises an eyebrow and says,

'Ri-ight.' 'Do you recognise him?' she says grimly. He peers at the photo and shakes his head. 'Never seen him before.' 'Thank you.' She snatches back the photo and forces it into her handbag. Her face is flaming red and she can feel angry blotches forming on her collarbone. She walks to the next free seat and finds herself sitting alongside three female friends who have been drinking and smell of wine and cigarettes. She cannot possibly ask them, they are talking so loud and so fast and anyway, they are not commuters and commuters is what she wants. To her right is a man in a suit. She pulls out the photo, draws in her breath. 'Excuse me,' she says, talking quickly to get to the point, not wanting to leave him any time to jump to prejudicial conclusions. 'My husband is missing. He used to get this train every night. Do you recognise him?' The man pulls reading glasses from his jacket pocket, picks up the photo, examines it and passes it back. 'I'm afraid I don't.' His voice is soft and deep and gentle. She feels herself relax. She smiles, warmly, says thank you and then makes her way from carriage to carriage, from commuter to commuter, her confidence building with each encounter. People are generally kind, she finds, and a smile seems to go a long way with the British. It is not in her nature to smile without cause. Smiles are for friends and babies and jokes and family. Not for strangers on trains. But she smiles and she smiles and soon the train is pulling into Oxted and she has asked at least thirty people and at least thirty people have said, 'No, I'm really sorry.' And a few have even asked her more. 'What's his name?' 'When did he go missing?' 'I wish you all the luck, I really do.' At the ticket barrier she looks for the last person who would have seen Carl leave the station. The ticket person. But there is no ticket person, just a barrier. She sighs. She'd been pinning all her hopes on a person she could ask. And then she starts the long walk home. The walk takes her past some shops and, feeling buoyed by the nice people on the train, she goes into a couple, smiles the smile, shows the photo, asks the question. The man in the beer shop recognises him, says he used to come in for a bottle of wine occasionally. 'Good-looking fella,' he says and Lily nods and says, 'Yes. He is.' When the shops peter out she crosses the main road and takes the little roads of red houses that crisscross each other in a confusing grid, left right, left right, and then on to the other main road where the supermarket is and the chain stores, where she comes out for her lunch sometimes when she is lonely in the flat, where she sits in Starbucks and reads a newspaper so that she has something to talk to Carl about when he comes home from work. The last stretch of the walk is quieter. Widely spaced short houses which Carl says are called bungalows, with driveways. No shops. No people. And then a short section of road where they have been building yet another new housing development; it will be called Wolf's Hill Boulevard, according to the big hoarding outside. Carl laughs every time he sees it. 'Boulevard,' he says. 'In Oxted. What a load of crap.' Lily stops for a moment and stares at the development. There's nobody there. There hasn't been anyone there since she came to live here. She can see that the first of the blocks is all but built. It has been glazed and clad. The builders have moved along to the next block, which is all skeletal girders and flapping plastic sheets. The sun has gone, the early-evening sky is velvetblue, cars pass her in golden streaks and she is alone on this road. A strange chill runs through her. She looks again at the new block of flats and sees a flicker of light from a first-floor window. She turns and heads home. The flickering light is bothering her for some reason. She will tell the big policewoman about it. It might be something; it might be nothing. But right now the flickering light is all she has. She calls the policewoman the minute she gets home. 'Hello, Mrs Traviss?' 'WPC Traviss.' 'Yes. Sorry. WPC Traviss. This is Mrs Monroe. The wife of Carl Monroe.' 'I know. And actually, you must be psychic. I was about to call you. We need to bring your husband's computer in. His passport looks like it's probably a dark net passport. We'll want to check his browsing history and his email account.' 'I

don' t know what you' re talking about.' There is that pause at the end of the line, the one the big policewoman always leaves, the one that says that she thinks she is a nuisance and a fool. 'These passports, they' re bespoke, incredibly expensive, made to order by people in the darkest, deepest corners of the internet. Your husband would have been communicating with some fairly nefarious types. And probably for quite a while. So we need to find these people. And we need access to your husband' s computer to help us do that.'

'But what do these people have to do with finding my husband?' That pause again. 'Well, actually, it' s not a direct lead but they might know something. And it' s even possible they might be involved in his disappearance. Say, for example, if he owed them money or was threatening to expose them.' The image of the flickering light in the new-build apartment window flashes to the forefront of her mind again. Her blood feels cold and then hot. Gangsters. Criminals. These things had not crossed her mind in the dark of night. 'You know,' she says, 'it may be nothing, but last night I noticed, in the new building that has been built next to our apartments, a light. Just one light. In just one window. With no one living there. It made me think . . .'

She pauses. What did it make her think? She has no idea. It made her feel creepy. That was all. Creepy and cold. 'I don' t know,' she continues. 'It seemed strange.'

'Right,' says Beverly, hurtling straight past her comments and on to the next thing. 'Are you there now? Can I come now? And collect the computer?' 'Well. Yes. Of course. But you know, I don' t have his password.'

'We can get the guys on to that. That' s not a problem.'

'Well, then, fine. And maybe, when you come, we can go to the building site? We can look at that flat? With the light?' 'Not sure there' ll be time for that. But I' ll see what I can do.'

Beverly arrives with a young man wearing plain clothes and big glasses, carrying a filing box. He spends an inordinate amount of time in the spare bedroom where the computer lives and Lily sits anxiously at the edge of the sofa, cupping her elbows and checking the clock on the wall. 'What is he doing in there?' she asks Beverly. 'Oh, you know, just procedure. We can' t just walk in here and unplug it.'

Lily nods. A few more minutes pass. She hears drawers being opened and closed. Then the man appears at the door and looks at Lily. 'Do you have a key?' he says, 'For the bottom drawer of the cabinet?'

'No,' she says. 'I have been looking for it for two days. I think it must be on his key ring.'

She shrugs. 'Do you mind if I drill it out? See if there' s anything in there? Memory cards, that sort of thing?' Lily stiffens. She thinks of Carl walking into the flat, seeing his brand-new filing cabinet from Ikea with a dirty big hole in it, his personal effects plundered and rifled. But then she thinks: Carl has lied to her. She does not even know what his real name is. He has kept a locked drawer in their shared home. Taken the key to work with him. There must be a reason for that. 'Yes,' she says. 'Fine. But please don' t make a mess.'

The young man smiles and heads back into the spare room. Ten seconds later she hears the high-pitched wail of wood being ground away. A moment after that the young man appears again, holding the card box. 'Well,' he says, lightly, as though what is happening here is completely normal, 'all done here. Have you finished . . .?' He looks down at the sheet of paper he gave her earlier, the one with personal questions on it: memorable dates, pets' names, parents' names, nicknames, significant place names. 'Yes.'

She slides it across the table to him and he adds it to the contents of the box. 'Awesome,' he says.

'OK.'

He says this to Beverly, who gets slowly to her feet. They go together to the door and Beverly says, 'We' ll be in touch.'

There is no mention of the empty apartment with the flickering light. Lily stands still for a while after they' ve gone. She looks about the flat, as she' s done a hundred times since Carl didn' t come home on Tuesday night. At first all she' d seen was Carl' s absence. Now she sees his deceit. She walks slowly to the spare bedroom and kneels down to examine the contents of the locked drawer.