

THE LAKE TEARAS TRILOGY ● BOOK ONE

Finding Me

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Published by Scrivenings Press LLC
15 Lucky Lane
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

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Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-642-4

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-643-1

Editors: Elena Hill and Suzie Waltner

Cover design by Karen Procopio and Linda Fulkerson

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*For my dad, James G. Mains,
who loved Michigan—
its sparkling lakes,
its turning leaves and the musty scent of fall,
its forests stilled by winter's sharp snap,
and its thawing promise of spring.*

*This story was shaped, in part,
by your love for those places
and by the memories they still hold.*

Prologue

Susan McDermott

Winter—Nineteen Years Earlier

DUPED.

Completely and utterly betrayed.

I opened the white envelope. A bundle of cash tumbled onto the bed. Three ... four ... five thousand dollars.

My stomach went cold.

I stared at it.

Then at everything else.

The wristband.

The letter. I couldn't read it again.

I gathered everything, shoved it back into the envelope, and slid it under the pillow.

I lay in bed the rest of the night.

Couldn't cry.

Couldn't think.

But at dawn, I kicked off the blankets.

Get it together, Susan.

I packed the Mercedes. Devised a plan.

First: Cut them off. All of them.

Second: Protect my child.

Third: Leave town.

Fourth: Become someone no one could break.

Ruthless.

Wouldn't need anyone.

Wouldn't trust anyone.

And I would never, ever, be fooled again.

On my way out of town, I stopped for gas. I tossed the orange-and-black motorcycle cover into the dumpster. It hit the bottom with a dull thud.

I yanked the wristband from my wrist and dropped it into the envelope beside his.

I held the envelope over the dumpster, wanting the pain to go with it.

I stopped.

No.

I would crush it. Grind it under my heel. Use my rage to fuel my fire.

I lowered the envelope, rolled it tight, and fastened it with a rubber band. Then I shoved it into the glove compartment and slammed it shut.

I pressed a hand against my round belly.

"It's just you and me, little one. I'll protect you."

I climbed into the car and slammed the door on everything and everyone.

Lake Teras faded in the rearview mirror.

Just a memory.

I accelerated toward the place where no one could ever hurt us again.

New York City.