

On the Way

Chapter One

Logan McKenzie didn't like Mondays. But, as he stopped to think about it, this Monday was different. It was his first day as a captain. But even better was the fact that it was his first day as head of the Lakeland PD Detective Bureau. Wow! It had taken him twenty-two years, but he'd finally made it.

Not only that, but he'd had to wait an extra week to start. The chief had thought that Logan needed a week off before starting his new job. Why? Sure, he'd had a concussion several weeks ago. And sure, he'd been hit on the head with a metal pipe, but he was okay. He hadn't needed to take a week off.

Chief Tony Wilson was the kind of guy who would promote you one minute and turn around and stab you in the back the next. Logan had plenty of experience with the guy. Wilson had been a patrol captain when Logan was a rookie at LPD. And of course, later he was a commander before making chief.

But there was the problem. The guy had never been a detective! Unless you counted the six months that Wilson had spent there before he made sergeant which Logan certainly didn't count. Everyone spent six months in the detective bureau sometime in their first five years on the force.

Enough of those thoughts. He was finally going in to claim his new office, after his forced vacation. He stopped cold as he was about to open the back door of the station.

His next thought brought his mood down a few notches but only for a few seconds. If only Melanie had lived to see this. Of course, as good wives should, she'd always been positive that he would make captain someday.

He shook off those thoughts and entered the station from the compound. He knew he needed to take care of one little administrative detail before he did anything else.

So, instead of going upstairs to his new office, he made his way down the long hallway to dispatch. When he knocked on the supervisor's closed door, he heard a muffled voice call out.

He opened the door and greeted Rachel Stone, the dispatch supervisor.

She looked up at Logan and without a smile or any intonation in her voice said, "Congratulations Captain McKenzie."

He laughed. "Thanks. But I'm still Logan or McKenzie to everyone around here, okay Rachel?"

She motioned toward a chair and he took a seat. He didn't want to stay very long but didn't dare refuse the offered chair. He and Rachel had clashed too many times over the years, resulting in a strained relationship. And, yes, he had to admit that most of the time it had been his fault but not all the time. What could he say? She was a sourpuss with no sense of humor.

She was in her early fifties and had already been a dispatcher for ten years when Logan was a rookie. She was very tall and thin with brown hair that was turning gray. There were photos of her grandkids all over one wall.

"What do you need this morning Logan?"

"Well, I just wanted to ask you to change how dispatch calls out detectives."

He could see her tense up. She had to be expecting him to ask her to change everything.

"Okay," She managed through partially gritted teeth, "What do you have in mind?"

He almost laughed at her reaction but didn't since she wouldn't take too kindly to that.

"I know Captain Talbot always had a detective and a sergeant on call for each day, but I want to change that. I don't think it ever worked very well for us."

He paused and looked her in the eye. "I would like for your dispatchers to call me any time they need a detective. Then I will decide who to call out depending on the crime and the readiness of my detectives."

He noticed a slight smoothing out of her facial features then. She seemed to be relaxing from her earlier fight mode.

She leaned back in her chair and said, "Most people around here don't realize how much my dispatchers have to do when something major happens. If they have to make one less phone call, that would be good."

She wrote on a small pad on her desk. "I'll get this out to my people right away."

"Thanks Rachel."

As Logan was leaving dispatch, he remembered he needed to pick up his new badges and ID card from the front office.

Ten minutes later, he had his new belt badge pinned on his belt and the pocket badge and ID in his back pocket. With that taken care of, he headed upstairs to his new office.

He knew this was going to be strange for sure. He remembered the last time he'd been in that office only a week ago. Captain Talbot had been chewing him out for not following one of his petty rules. At least Logan had always thought they were petty.

As Logan stepped out of the stairway door, the first thing he saw was his new office. It was front and center with a door on each side of it that led to the two squad rooms.

Chief Wilson had assured Logan that all Captain Talbot's things would be out of the office by today. But he could see two boxes still sitting on top of the desk.

He stepped into the room and saw that everything else had indeed been removed. He heard a sound behind him and turned to see Mark Talbot standing there. The captain's son was a patrol sergeant at LPD. He seemed to be off duty today for he was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt that had the LPD logo on it.

Logan had always tried to get along with the guy. But his antagonistic relationship with the elder Talbot had always gotten in the way.

"Hey McKenzie. I've just got those last two boxes to carry downstairs and it'll all be yours."

Logan watched as Mark picked up both boxes and started to carry them out of the room. He had the stray thought that since he didn't work for the guy's dad anymore, maybe they would be able to get along a little better.

Mark stopped in the doorway. "I'll bet you're glad that my dad finally retired. You were always trying to go around him to do everything your way."

Well, so much for trying to get along with the guy.

"Let's not rehash history, Mark. I would like to start fresh with you, if you'll let me."

Mark snorted and went on out the door without further comment.

Well, Logan could hope they would be able to get along, couldn't he? He had enough enemies around there as it was. He blew out a sigh. Maybe now that he was the captain, he should try to mend a few fences. He'd think about that later, much later. He had more important things to do right then.

He went out of his office and through the door on the left which used to lead to his squad room but was now Sam's squad room. He'd hoped to get his stuff moved before she got there that morning, but he quickly saw that he hadn't made it.

Sam was standing in front of the sergeant's office, talking to one of the detectives, Pam Stillwell. And, it looked like the two of them were hitting it off right away. Great! Sam was going to need all the help she could get to win over her new squad, as well as a lot of other people around the station.

Sam had recently retired from the DEA and taken Logan's old sergeant position. She had worked with him to bring down a large drug operation and they had finally closed the case a little over a week before with Sam shooting the head man as he held a gun on a hostage.

Sam was a tall woman, especially standing next to Pam who was rather short. Actually, Sam was the same height as Logan. She was Hispanic and had high cheekbones which almost gave her an oriental look.

He knew she was a good detective since they'd spent a couple of weeks working closely together on that big drug case.

When the two women saw Logan, Pam waved at him and called out, "Congratulations Captain."

With that, Sam headed over to her desk. When Logan approached her, she stepped aside to allow him to enter his old office.

Sam was glad to see Logan, but she wished he'd waited a few more minutes to arrive. She was just getting to know Pam and she was sure that the detective was going to be on her side from the start. Great! She was going to need all the help she could get.

She turned to Logan and said, "Good morning Logan."

When he only nodded at her, she figured she'd better clear the air a bit.

"I'm not trying to push you out of your office. It's just that I'm a morning person, as you already know, and I like to get an early start, especially on anything new like this."

That was one thing about her that she knew was going to cause them to clash from time to time. He hated mornings. She almost laughed as she realized that it was due to too many late-night stakeouts over the years.

He tried to smile but she knew that it was too early for him to be very successful. He looked at her and she could tell that he noticed her new Sergeant's badge on her belt. She also noticed his new Captain's badge on his belt.

"No problem. Talbot's son just carried the last of his old man's stuff out of my new office. So, I'll get started on getting my stuff out of here."

"I can help. That is if you want my help."

He frowned at her then. "Don't you think we've gone a little way past the awkward stage Sam? You know I'd like your help."

She wasn't quite sure what he meant by that comment, but she decided to let it pass and followed him into her new office.

As they began gathering things, Sam tried to take a good look at Logan. She knew he was exactly three years older than her forty-two, since she'd found out that they had the same birthday. He was her height but had a solid built. He kept his brown hair cut very short. His most distinguishing feature was his bright blue eyes, which seemed out of place on a rugged man like Logan.

He had stepped out for a moment and came back with several boxes and began emptying his desk into one of them. She started taking things off the wall and placing them in another box.

The first thing she took down was a photo of him with his wife and daughter. It must have been taken shortly before his wife got sick. His daughter looked to be about thirteen.

Sam had met Logan's daughter, Melissa, who had Logan's bright blue eyes. On her, they were beautiful, especially against her golden blond hair.

"My, Melissa sure looks like her mother."

Oops! She hadn't meant to say that. She looked up at Logan to judge his reaction.

He stopped what he was doing and looked at the photo. She could tell that it still hurt him to look at his wife. The fact that the photo was still on his wall said a lot about the man who was Logan McKenzie.

“Yeah. She did back then when she was only thirteen, but now, she’s even looking more like Melanie every day.”

They soon had everything out of Logan’s old office and into his new one. They just stacked everything on the desk and in the hard, wooden chairs that Captain Talbot had liked and no one else had. She wondered how long it would take Logan to get rid of those uncomfortable chairs that he’d always complained about.

Sam smiled at Logan and said, “Why don’t I get us each a cup of coffee and we can take a break?”

She could feel Logan watching her as she left his office for the break room.

When she came back in, he said, “How was your week of forced vacation?”

She laughed. “Yeah, I was like you in that I didn’t want to take any time off. But now I’m glad the chief made me take that week off before I started my new job.”

He shook his head. “Yeah. I guess I did need to take it easy for another week. The effects of that concussion I had were still lingering and I didn’t even realize it. I did a lot of sleeping.”

He looked closer at her then. “You look well rested too.”

She chuckled. “Yeah, I spent the week in Tucson with my family and they all fussed over me a little too much. I’m glad to be back though. I’m more than ready to get to work.”

Sam took another good look at her new boss. It sure was going to be strange to have Logan as her boss now. They’d worked so well together when she’d been with the DEA that they’d formed a bond that she was sure went beyond just being temporary partners.

But now, he seemed to be trying to put distance between them. Well, that just might be best, at least for a while. She was sure that everyone at the station was watching them to see how they worked together.

She knew he could take care of himself since he had a black belt in karate. Well, they were at a standstill there, since she did too.

Logan was talking now, so she’d better pay attention.

He laughed when he realized that she’d been daydreaming.

“Maybe a week off was too much for you. Or was it not enough?”

She shook her head. “No, one week with all my relatives was more than enough for me to want to get back here and get started.”

“You say that like it was an ordeal.”

She laughed. “You don’t know the half of it. Once, at my grandparents’ house there were more than fifty people there ... all relatives.”

He shook his head. “I can’t imagine that. It’s just Melissa and me.”

She wasn’t sure, but she thought she detected a bit of sadness there in his tone. But he kept on with the conversation.

“You get moved into your new apartment okay?”

“Yeah, I did. You wouldn’t believe how much help I had. Not only that but everyone seemed to have extra furniture for me to fill my two-bedroom apartment.”

He had a strange look on his face, so she kept talking. “I was able to get a six-month lease. I sure hope I can find a nice house by then. I’ve lived in apartments for too many years. I want a place of my own now.”

Logan was looking away, then he turned to Sam. “I don’t blame you.” He looked her in the eye then. “Are you ready to officially meet your squad, Sergeant Farley?”

She wasn’t sure how he meant that but said, “I guess.”

“Okay then. Why don’t you go have a short meeting with them? When you’re finished, I’ll have a meeting of the whole bureau in the large conference room.”

He pointed across the hall at the room he mentioned.

So, here Sam was, about to meet with her four detectives for the first time as their sergeant.

When she entered the squad room, all four of them were at their desks but their eyes were on her as she closed the door behind her. Quickly, all four turned to face the front where her new office was.

Impulsively, she decided to have her meeting right there with them still sitting at their desks. That way, at least they’d be comfortable whether she was or not.

She made her way to the front of her office and turned to face them.

“I’ve already met each of you when I was here working with Sergeant McKenzie on the drug case.”

She paused to see if that produced any reaction, which it didn’t, not even from Pam who had already been super nice to her.

“I need your help.”

That got a reaction from most of them. Three of them were leaning forward now. Only Larry Horton was still sitting back in his chair. Interesting.

“Yes, I’ll need your help to acclimate myself to working at a local PD. I also know that it’s going to be a different type of detective work here compared to what I did with the DEA.”

“One thing I will promise you is this. I will never compare anything here with anything at the DEA. That part of my life is over, and I am now a Lakeland Police detective.”

As she watched, she thought that the three relaxed a little, but Horton was still giving her a hard look. Okay, she could deal with that, or him, if she had to.

“As far as changes, there won’t be any.” She smiled. “At least not until all five of us have had a chance to see what works and what doesn’t work for us as a squad.”

“Other than that, my door will always be open to all of you. Do you have any questions for me?”

She looked at each face again and when no one spoke up, she said, “Okay then. Captain McKenzie is having a bureau meeting up in the large conference room.”

They all four left their seats and headed toward the door.

Sam thought that her meeting with her squad went well. She went away from it thinking that she might not have too much trouble. But, there was a little doubt in her mind about Larry Horton. He had looked everywhere but at her when she’d looked his way. She’d seen that kind of behavior before and made a note to herself to keep an eye on him. He could be trouble down the road.

Sam had just taken a seat in her desk chair when she looked up to see Pam Stillwell standing in the open doorway.

She was sure she was going to like Pam who was short and a little overweight. Sam couldn’t help but think that Pam must be a good detective to be able to get away with the extra weight. But then, she remembered that Captain Talbot had been very much overweight. That might at least be part of her answer.

Whenever Pam opened her mouth, Sam could tell that she'd grown up somewhere in the deep south.

"Don't you pay Horton no never mind. He's all bluff and no action. His biggest problem is that he thought he should have been made sergeant."

She laughed loudly. "When pigs fly!"

Before Sam could decide if she should thank Pam or not, the woman was gone. She had to smother a laugh. Yes, she was going to like working with Pam.

Logan looked up as Sam came into his office and sat down. He was pleased that she waited for him to look up before speaking though.

"Well, I think that little meeting went as well as could be expected."

He looked closer at her and could tell she was frustrated about something. Then it hit him. Horton! Yeah, he'd been afraid the guy was going to give her some trouble, at least at first.

Sam was looking down at her hands in her lap and when she looked back up at him, Logan just said one word.

"Horton?"

Surprise showed on her face before she quickly wiped it off and nodded.

"Don't worry about him. He's still a holdover from the good old boy network that used to be strong here."

He looked past her and saw the other detective sergeant standing in the open doorway.

Dave Hernandez said, "You ready Captain?"

He said that with a big grin on his face, giving Logan the answer he hadn't been sure about. Dave didn't seem to be upset that Logan made captain and not him. Good! They'd all three need to work closely together.

Logan said, "We'll be there in a minute, okay?"

Hernandez left, and Logan said, "Is there anything you need to ask me before we go?"

She grinned back at him and shook her head as they both stood to leave the office.

A few minutes later, there were eleven people spread out around the big conference table. Logan was at the head with Hernandez on one side of him and Sam on the other.

Logan was surprised to see that Sam was on his right and all four of her detectives were spread out down that side too. Hernandez and his squad were on the other side of the table. Interesting. It had never been that way with Captain Talbot's meetings.

Logan stood and began. "I don't think any of you will have much trouble adjusting to my way of doing things."

Pam Stillwell, who quite often brought levity to the situation, spoke in a loud whisper. "Yeah, Logan's Way."

Laughter broke out around the room and after that, almost everyone seemed to be a little more at ease.

He tried to go with that a little. "Those of you who were in my squad know more of what to expect and I hope you'll bring the other squad up to speed."

There was a little laughter at that then he decided to forge on.

"Okay. Here's the main change that we'll all need to get used to right away. No more detective or sergeant on call."

He let that settle for a moment, while a murmur went around the table. Then he went on. "I've asked dispatch to only call me when a new case comes up. I will then decide who needs to go and make those calls."

Logan paused to let the mumbling around the table settle down before continuing.

"I will decide who takes each case based on your caseloads and the type of case it is. The main point is that if you already have a heavy load, you won't be called out. If you don't have a heavy load, then you might be prepared to be called out."

"Is that clear?"

Affirmative comments went around the room.

He waited for them all to turn back to him then added, "One more big change will be that each of you will be working with a partner and you will have a caseload that you will work on with your partner. Only when it's necessary will a whole squad be working on any given case."

He thought about that for a moment. "And since the squads are now only four detectives and a sergeant, the sergeants will no longer

partner up. Instead, they will each have their own caseloads and work with each pair of you or the whole squad as needed.”

He waited as long as he dared then dropped the bomb. “I will be carrying a caseload the same as the sergeants. I will work with the sergeants on their cases as well each of yours when needed.”

That brought a buzz of excited chatter from most of them then and he waited for them to settle down again.

He looked around the room at each person one at a time. Then straightened up and said, “Now, any other changes will be eased into as we go. But right now, I need to introduce our new sergeant to you.”

He looked at Sam and she kept her face neutral as she looked back at him.

“Most of you met DEA Special Agent Farley when she was working with me on the Marshall and Morales case. She has retired from the DEA and Chief Wilson asked her to take my old sergeant position.”

Logan didn’t wait for the noise to settle down this time but stood to leave the room.

As he was leaving, he heard Hernandez speak to Sam in Spanish. “I think we will all be good together now, you think?”

He strained to hear and thought he heard Sam say, “I think so too.”

As Logan entered his office, his intercom buzzed. When he picked up the phone, Chief Wilson said, “Stay there a while Logan, I’m on my way up. Oh, and ask Sergeant Farley to join us.”

Now what? Logan knew that Wilson was unpredictable. Behind his back, they called him ‘The Willow’ because he leaned whichever way was most beneficial to him at the time.

He buzzed Sam to join them and sat there waiting to see what was going to happen next.

As soon as Sam stepped into his office, Logan could tell that she noticed the new chairs. He’d had Talbot’s old wooden chairs taken out while they were in the group meeting. She reached out and touched one of the comfortable stuffed chairs.

Sam was sitting in one of those new chairs when Chief Wilson came in. She stood when he entered, and he shook her hand. The chief took the chair next to her.

“I hope that you’re both getting accustomed to your new positions and offices. Things need to be nice and quiet for a while, so you can get everything organized the way you want them.”

Logan looked at Sam and he was pleased when she realized that he expected her to respond to the chief.

“Yes, Sir. I will definitely need a little time to get used to the way things are done here.”

Wilson smiled at her. “I’m sure you’ll be up and running in no time Sam.”

Logan still wasn’t sure why the chief had come up there unless it was to see how things were going. So, he figured he’d better say something.

“Well, Chief, I don’t think Sam will have any trouble getting used to the way we do things here.”

Wilson looked at Sam. “Yes, I’m sure of it or I never would have made you the offer.”

“Thank you, Sir. I’ll try my best to make sure you never regret that decision.”

“Good.” He looked at each of them then back at Logan.

“I want you two to know that I expect this detective bureau to start working together. I want to see all our cases closed much quicker than they have been in the past.”

Logan wasn’t sure where the chief was going with that, so he sat there without responding.

The chief stood and said, “Well, I’ve got to leave a little early today. Got that big campaign kickoff rally for Representative Wiggins tonight.”

He blew out a noisy sigh. “I don’t like that sort of thing. There’ll be too many people there who are full of themselves. Should be at least fifty of them all together.”

With that, he was out the door and down the hallway.

Logan watched as Wilson left his office and headed for the stairway. He noticed that Sam had been watching the guy closely too.

He laughed and said, “Don’t worry Sam. You’ll get used to the guy popping in and out at unexpected times. He thinks that’s his way of keeping everyone on their toes.”

She turned her head back to look at Logan. “I’d say that’s typical of a micro-manager, wouldn’t you?”

He laughed again. “Okay, are you ready to start your orientation into Lakeland PD?”

He could tell that she was trying to keep from laughing but simply said, “Ready when you are.”

They worked until lunch going over all the department regulations and procedures.

Finally, Logan looked at the clock and said, “I’ve got a lunch meeting over at the CA’s office about Morales. So, I’ll see you later this afternoon.”

He watched Sam as she left his office, thinking that she was one fine looking woman. He was trying to fight the attraction that he’d felt for her when they’d worked together before.

Now that he was her boss, he had to be very careful. Yeah. Very careful.