

CHAPTER 1

Nobody knows the value of family like the person who doesn't have one.

I'm speaking from experience. I didn't have any relatives for many weeks last year. That's when I had amnesia. My name is Carol Golden. Well, it's not my real name. It's what I called myself when I didn't know what my real name was. Now I like it better than my real name.

When I recovered my identity (but not my memory) I found one of my relatives—my grandmother, Elizabeth Horton. My parents and my brother, Michael, were dead. Recently, I'd learned about another line of relatives who were cousins of Grandma, which meant they were my cousins, also. I talked to one of them—Jason Boyd—on the phone, and promised to visit him in California at some nebulous future date.

Now, a few days later, I was standing in front of the counter at Raleigh-Durham Airport, checking a single suitcase and preparing to go through security and face scrutiny and possible humiliation at the hands (literally) of the TSA staff. I was on my way to California to visit Jason Boyd.

However, it wasn't a happy occasion. The day before I'd learned his grandson—also named Jason—had been murdered. I'd found relatives and already lost one of them. Grandma told me I'd never met either Jason. It didn't matter. Call it a compulsion to collect relatives born from my amnesia, but I couldn't not go.

