

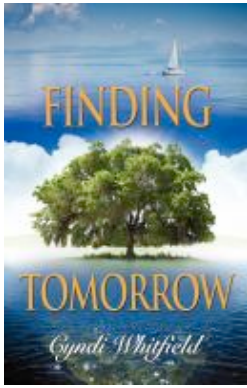


FINDING



TOMORROW

Cyndi Whitfield



When her husband drowns while sailing on the Pacific, Eve is faced with raising their young son on her own. But as time passes, their lives change in ways they couldn't have imagined and Eve finds herself involved in the many unexpected twists and turns life can take. Through it all, Eve realizes she's stronger and more resilient than she'd thought and may even be open, once again, to love.

Finding Tomorrow

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Cyndi Whitfield

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PROLOGUE

September 28, 1990 – 8:03a.m.

Brian Hall backed his 28-foot Bristol Channel Cutter out of the slip. It was a beautiful morning and the sun shimmered off the calm water as he eased *Westwind* through the channel. Brian considered himself an expert boatsman, sailing single-handedly almost every weekend.

The wind picked up as he left Margate Marina and headed out to the Pacific. Throwing his head back, he laughed into the wind. Never did he feel as free as when he was sailing into the blue on *Westwind*.

Today, of all days, was especially good. He took a long drink from the coffee cup that sat beside the binnacle. When he had cleared the slow-wake area, Brian pushed forward the throttle, motoring until he was well away from shore. He then raised the main and let out the jib, coming about on a beam reach. Conditions were perfect today, and he skimmed across the water, loving the feel of the wind in his face.

Yes, it was a great day for sailing.

11:32 a.m.

The water was cold and getting colder. *Westwind* was taking on water at an alarming rate and Brian, water to his knees in the salon, was reaching panic stage. He had broadcast a mayday to the Coast Guard giving them his coordinates and they would be here before too long.

Grabbing binoculars that hung from the wall, he rushed up the steps and, standing on deck, swept the horizon. There! A powerboat from the southwest, coming straight for him. *Please, please*, he prayed. *I haven't got much longer.*

Westwind tipped at that moment, almost onto its side, and he was thrown into the shimmering water.

CHAPTER 1

Nick's soccer shoe was under the bed in just the wrong spot. Reaching as far as she could, Eve swiped at it and it rolled further away.

"Nick! I can't reach your shoe. You'll have to crawl under the bed and get it!"

Eight-year-old Nick came running into the room and dropped to all fours. Shimming under the bed, he pulled out the shoe and stood up again, waving it in the air.

"Got it, mom!"

Eve stood up. "We are so late for your game. I hope the coach doesn't hold you out till the second half."

"Awww. He did that a couple weeks ago when we were late."

Eve brushed hair out of her eyes impatiently. "I know. We have to leave NOW."

She looked at her watch. It was almost 11:30.

A half hour later, Nick was on the field, the game well underway. Eve sat in a canvas chair on the sidelines with the parents of Nick's team members. A lot of dads were there and it bothered Eve that Brian hadn't made the effort to see his son play. Again.

Thinking about Brian these days just made her anxious and angry. Things had changed so much in the last couple years. Slowly, he'd started pulling away from them. They didn't go out for family dinners anymore, and usually he was too busy working from home to have a movie night in their own living room. It was hard enough on Eve, but Nick was the one that really felt his absence the most.

Even on weekends when Brian didn't have work, he preferred to be out on his sailboat. Eve and Nick went with him occasionally, but Nick suffered from seasickness and usually ended up leaning over the side of the boat for part of the trip. That made for great family time

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together! She knew Brian was disappointed they didn't enjoy the boat as he did and impatient with Nick for his "weakness" on the water.

Becky Hillerman sat down beside Eve.

"What's new with you?"

"Not much. Same old....." Eve smiled.

Becky leaned over conspiratorially, one hand to her mouth. Her blond, curly hair ruffled in the wind. "Brian's not here again today, huh?"

Eve sighed. "I can't force him to come."

"And you shouldn't have to. He's his dad for heaven's sake. He should *want* to be here." She put an arm around Eve. "I'm sorry. I should keep my mouth shut. It's none of my business."

"You're a good friend, Becky. You're the only one I confide in, other than Paris. I appreciate you listening when I need to talk." Paris was her best friend in the world who happened to live across the country in Michigan. Needless to say, they saw little of each other, but kept in contact by phone and email.

Eve hugged Becky back with a sad smile. "I just wish he'd talk to me. He has excuses for everything. Maybe I'll give it another try tonight. Maybe he's just going through a mid-life crisis. That's all I can figure."

Becky looked a little doubtful, but nodded. She had her own ideas of what might be going on with Brian but kept them to herself. If there *was* another woman involved, she certainly had no proof of it.

The game ended on a happy note. Nick's team won by a landslide and he was ecstatic. The coach announced he was taking the whole team out for ice cream.

It was almost three o' clock when they got home. Nick ran upstairs to change his clothes and Eve headed to the freezer to pull something out for dinner when the phone rang.

"This is Lieutenant Cooper from the Group Operations Department at Marine Safety in Long Beach. Is this Eve Hall?"

Eve had pulled a package of chicken from the freezer and was trying to decide whether to bake some potatoes when she stopped.

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"I'm sorry. *Who* is this?"

"Lieutenant Cooper, Ma'am. The Coast Guard?"

"The *Coast Guard*? Oh, my God. What's wrong? Is my husband alright?" Eve felt the panic rising. The package of chicken she'd been holding slipped to the floor.

"Please calm down, Mrs. Hall, and I'll tell you everything we know. Your husband radioed us from his boat, *Westwind*, at 11:13 this morning. He said the boat was taking on water and he needed help. He activated his EPIRB so we could track him--"

"Wait, what is an EPIRB?"

"It's an acronym. It stands for Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon. It's a tracking device that can be automatically or manually activated. It allows our search and rescue teams to find his location. In the case of your husband, we know the EPIRB was manually activated."

Eve grabbed the back of a kitchen chair and sat down heavily.

"So did you find him?" To her own ears, her voice sounded high and panicked.

"I'm afraid we haven't yet," the lieutenant answered gravely. "Mrs. Hall, we lost the EPIRB signal after just a few minutes. Our petty officer has been charting the location of the Search and Rescue team or SAR helicopter. We have a number of boats in the area, but so far we haven't found a trace of him. We haven't given up, though, Mrs. Hall, and you shouldn't either. We're going to continue the search until dark and pick up again tomorrow if necessary."

"He could still be out there, though, right? Maybe in the lifeboat or floating on a piece of wood or something?" She knew she was grasping at straws but what else could she do? "Can I come out there? I want to be there when you bring him in."

"Of course, Mrs. Hall, you're more than welcome to come out." His voice was gentle and that alarmed her. Was he expecting the worst? Was he already assuming Brian was dead? Eve Shivered.

"I have to find a sitter for my son. Can you give me directions and I'll be there as soon as I can."

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Lieutenant Cooper gave her directions and then asked if she was sure she could drive. "Maybe you should have someone drive you," he suggested.

"No, I'm fine, Lieutenant. I'll be there soon." Eve hung up the phone.

Now what to do with Nick? She immediately thought of Martha Lake next door. She was an 83-year-old widow that baked cookies and brownies continuously and then delivered them to all her friends and neighbors. She'd helped Eve out with Nick before a number of times when Brian wasn't home to watch him.

Brian.....

Eve dialed Martha's number and explained the situation quickly.

"Oh, my. You bring Nick right over. I'll keep him for the night if you want. That's not a problem."

Martha's calm demeanor usually calmed Eve, too, but not today.

"Please, Martha, don't mention any of this to Nick. I don't want him to worry. They may have found Brian by the time I get there and he'll never need to know. I'll just tell him I forgot about a meeting I had this afternoon and you offered to watch him."

"That's perfect, dear. Just bring him right over. I've got cookies in the oven and they'll be out just in time for a nice snack."

Eve hung up and called to Nick. He bounded down the steps from his room, brown hair flying. He didn't question the urgency with which Eve ushered him over to Martha's.

On the road, she drove at the speed limit, although her mind was screaming to go faster. On the other hand, if she took her time, maybe Brian would be at the Coast Guard base when she got there. Lieutenant Cooper would tell her how they found him clinging to a large piece of the boat and how he smiled and waved when he saw the helicopter overhead.

Eve was surprised to see the speedometer read 80mph. She lifted her foot from the gas and slowed down. The next exit would take her to the base. Five minutes later she was pulling into the parking lot. The man that met her at the door wore a white dress shirt, sleeves rolled up, looking slightly ruffled. He looked about 40 years old, she thought as she got closer.

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“Mrs. Hall? I'm Lieutenant Andrew Cooper.”

“Hi.” She was breathless from running from the parking lot. “Have you found him?”

“I'm afraid not. But we still have more than three hours of daylight left. Come on in. Let me get you some coffee and I'll show you what we've got.”

He led her to a large room with offices along one wall and a small kitchen in one corner. A long table sat at the opposite end with a number of folding chairs.

“Would you like milk? Sugar?”

“Yes to both.” When the Lieutenant left for the kitchen area, Eve looked around. Almost one entire wall held a map of the western coast and the entire Pacific Ocean. She walked over to look more closely. There was a key that noted spot depths and elevations. Principal ports were listed. At that moment, the ocean seemed overwhelmingly large. How would they find Brian in that huge expanse of water?

“Don't let that map intimidate you.” Lieutenant Cooper had come up behind her and handed her a mug of coffee. “As I told you on the phone, your husband activated his EPIRB which gave us coordinates on where to find him.” He made a small circle with his index finger on the map. “He was right about here. We have to take into account any wind shifts and drift patterns that may have taken place in that area, too.”

“You mentioned that you lost his signal after just a few minutes. What happened?”

The Lieutenant took a deep breath and let it out before he answered. “Frankly, we don't know. Your husband's EPIRB, as I said, is manually activated. The signal can last up to 72 hours, but that's assuming it's fully charged. If the battery power was low, it may have just stopped. The only other reason for the signal to stop is because it's manually turned off.”

Eve sipped the hot coffee and it made her feel a little better. She pulled out a chair at the long table and sat down. Cooper followed suit.

“Why would Brian manually turn it off?”

“No reason I can think of. He obviously needed our help or he wouldn't have activated the EPIRB.”

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Eve stared at the large wall map. “What can *I* do? I feel so helpless.”

“Right now it's all up to us. I assure you we are doing everything possible to find your husband. We're checking with all marinas on the coast to see if he's pulled in anywhere. It's always possible he was able to get to help.”

“But wouldn't we have heard from him by now if that were the case?”

Cooper nodded and shrugged his shoulders. “Probably, but at this point, we can't rule anything out.”

One question had been troubling her since the Lieutenant had called her at home. “Tell me honestly, how long can someone last out there in the water? I mean, his body temperature falls, right?”

“The water temperature in the LA area at this time of year is about 66 degrees.” He hesitated for a moment and then continued. “Anyone in the water at that temperature would lose consciousness after 6 or 7 hours.”

At the stunned look on Eve's face his formal mood softened a little and he added, “Are you a religious woman, Mrs. Hall?”

“Yes, I go to church if that's what you mean.”

“That's exactly what I mean. Now would be a good time to start saying some prayers.”

CHAPTER 2

At just after 8pm that night, Eve was driving home. Lieutenant Cooper had given her all the information he had. He wore an earpiece while she was there and, through it, a radio technician gave him continual updates on the situation as he was getting them from the SAR helicopter.

There had been no sign of Brian or *Westwind* at any of the marinas on the western coast. By seven thirty, it was dark. A Coast Guard cutter would continue the rescue operations through the night until dawn when the helicopter would resume its pattern over the water. That was when Eve put her head in her hands and began to really lose hope. How could they possibly find Brian tomorrow if they couldn't today? What if he was alright out there now, but didn't make it through the night? How much could they really see out there in the dark with a spotlight? Brian's seven hours were already up. The situation seemed hopeless.

Lieutenant Cooper was sympathetic and even gave her a hug. He made her promise not to give up hope yet. The search would continue. He suggested she return home for the night and try to get some sleep. They would call if anything was found.

Eve was in for a long night. How could she sleep knowing Brian was out somewhere in that great expanse of black water?

Martha had kept Nick entertained and well-fed and Eve was relieved to find he had no idea what was going on. She was able to pull Martha aside for a minute to fill her in on the details. The older woman patted her shoulder and promised to keep Brian in her prayers that night. She offered to keep Nick for the night, too, but Eve wanted him close to her and declined the offer.

"Why isn't Dad home yet?" Nick asked as they walked through the garage to the kitchen door. Of course, Brian's car was still at the marina.

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Eve had already put together her answer. "He decided to stay out on the boat tonight, honey. It's a beautiful night."

"Oh." Nick seemed a little surprised.

Eve quickly changed the subject. "I think you should hit the hay. It's almost eight thirty."

"Aww, Mom. Can't I stay up later? Can't we watch a movie? I want to watch Star Wars."

"Star Wars is a three hour movie. I don't think so. Go up and get your pajamas on and I'll be up to say prayers in a minute."

Nick complained under his breath, but he did as she asked.

Eve started a pot of coffee for herself and then went to tuck him in. She waited a half hour to be sure he was sleeping and then called Becky. She had to talk to *someone*. By the time she finished telling her friend, Eve was in tears. Becky was shocked to hear the news and insisted on coming over to stay the night with them.

"I would love to have you come for my sake, but I can't alarm Nick right now. He'll know something's up if his dad is not home and you've spent the night."

"I suppose you're right," Becky agreed. "But, Eve, you'll have to tell him the truth if Brian's not found tomorrow. He's a smart kid. He's going to know very soon that something is wrong."

Eve sighed. "I know. But for now, I can't bring myself to tell him. They're *going* to find Brian tomorrow and then it won't be necessary to tell him anything."

They hung up shortly after with Eve promising to call Becky with any news.

Pouring a cup of coffee, Eve walked outside to the balcony. Their home was just four blocks from the water and she had a clear view of the open expanse of ocean. The same ocean Brian was in tonight. Was he thinking about her and Nick right now? She closed her eyes and stood still for a few minutes. Would she be able to feel if he was still alive? People were always saying they knew a loved one was still alive because they could *feel* them. But she didn't feel anything but the breeze coming in off the water.

She sat down in one of the Adirondack chairs, took a sip of her coffee. She really should call Paris, but it seemed like a lot of work

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right now. She was exhausted. Telling Becky the whole story was enough. And she knew Paris. She'd have a flight booked to California before they'd finished their phone conversation.

Eve closed her eyes again and focused on breathing deeply. In and out, in and out. Her thoughts turned to the first time she ever saw Brian. She was working as administrative assistant to the president of Baker and Cashe Advertising. Brian had come in for an interview. He walked up to her and introduced himself. Their eyes locked and she felt a jolt of electricity. He was a walking magazine cover. Beautiful sandy blond hair, blue eyes and a smile that lit up the room. He obviously worked out regularly, too.

For years after, she wondered what he'd ever seen in her. What's so special about brown hair, brown eyes, average looks? And she was always about fifteen pounds overweight. But he noticed her, too. He was hired the next day and went to work as Baker and Cashe's newest ad man. Jingles were his trade.

He'd invited her to dinner soon after and the rest was history. They were married two years later and she'd never stopped feeling she was the luckiest woman in the world.

Brian was a good husband and a great dad. Until.....well, until about two years ago, she decided. He just started pulling away from her and Nick. He didn't want to go out to dinner with friends anymore (which was very surprising because all of the people they hung out with were *his* friends anyway). It became important that he work longer hours at the office. Sometimes he worked on Saturdays, too. And on his occasional day off, *Westwind* took prominence.

You can't die on me like this, Brian. We have to talk and try to work this out.....

Eve was brought back to the present by the feel of warm tears on her cheeks. The air had cooled considerably and she wandered back inside, closing the door behind her.

She turned on the TV. Played with the remote. Shifted through channels. Found an old movie that kept her mildly entertained for a while.

It was going to be a long night....

She awoke with a start. The room was dark except for the television screen and the strange light patterns it threw around the room. She looked at her watch. Almost four a.m. It was Monday morning.

Everything came back to her in a flash and she sighed. Her thoughts were jumbled with so much rattling around in her brain. If she could just smooth everything out, maybe she could come up with a plan to find Brian. Then laughed ruefully to herself. *What plan? The Coast Guard can't find him and you've got a plan?*

She thought of Paris again and looked at her watch. It was seven a.m. Michigan time. She could catch her before she left for work. At that moment, she wanted to talk to Paris like never before.

Her friend answered on the third ring.

"Hey, Eve! What are you doing up so early?"

Hearing her friend's voice brought tears to Eve's eyes. When she didn't answer, Paris spoke again, uncertainly.

"Eve? Eve, what's wrong?"

"I have some bad news. Brian is missing."

"Missing? What do you mean?"

"He took the boat out yesterday morning and the Coast Guard is looking for him but they haven't found him yet."

"Whoa. Start from the beginning, Sweetie. I'm not following you."

Eve started again and told Paris everything. When she finished, there was silence for a moment. Then she heard Paris sighing heavily.

"Okay, Sweetie. We've all heard the stories about people lost at sea for weeks at a time and then being rescued. Who's to say that won't happen with Brian? He's a good boatsman." She was quiet for a moment. "The Coast Guard doesn't know why *Westwind* was taking on water?"

"No. He just radioed in that he was taking on water and needed assistance. He set off the EPIRB as they directed him to, but it only stayed on for a few minutes. They don't know if the battery died or what."

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“Okay, I’m going to hang up now and book the next flight I can get for LA. I’ll call you when I have--”

“No, Paris. Not yet. Let’s wait and see. If....if he isn’t found, I’ll need you then. Okay?”

“Well, this goes against what I really want to do, but if you want me to wait, I will. But I’m only giving it a short time.”

“Okay. Are you leaving for work soon?”

“I have a job starting at nine today. Some prima donna in Bloomfield Hills that wants three rooms painted *today*. You know that saying ‘busier than a one-armed paper hanger’? Well, that’s me. I told her I can only work so fast, but she’s got some kind of soiree going on this Friday night and *must have* everything back in place by Thursday. Maybe she’s afraid they’ll throw her out of the rich folks’ club or something.”

Eve knew her friend was telling her all this to lighten the mood and despite herself, she smiled. Paris was one of a kind. They had met as kids when they both lived in Ohio. Paris had been polishing her fingernails before English class when they were in the seventh grade. Eve brushed past her desk on the way to her own and accidentally knocked over the nail polish bottle.

Needless to say, the teacher was not pleased, and the two girls spent the rest of class cleaning up the bright red mess. Their friendship was cemented after that and the two became inseparable. After high school, Eve left Ohio to attend Berkley in California and Paris, always the artist, started up her own painting service. She painted murals, borders, anything you needed. Paris was named after the city in France because that’s where she was conceived during her parents’ honeymoon. It had been her mother’s dream to see the Eiffel Tower, so her new husband took her there.

Paris always laughed over her name. “I know it’s a strange one, but at least they didn’t name me Eiffel!”

But Paris’ name suited her. She could never be called Ann or Judy or Susan. She was as unique as her name and it fit her perfectly in Eve’s opinion.

“Well, I won’t keep you. Just say a prayer for us today.”

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“Kiddo, you know I will,” Paris said gently. “I’m going to call you every few hours today and if...no....*when* they find Brian, you call *me.*”

They hung up after that and Eve felt lonelier than ever.

She washed the kitchen floor after that and then cleaned out the linen closet. Keeping busy made her feel useful. If she just sat in a chair and waited for a phone call she would go crazy.

She woke Nick at seven and got him to the bus, knowing that if Brian wasn't found by the time he got home from school she'd have to tell him. She'd let the poor kid have this last day before turning his world upside down.

Lieutenant Cooper called at nine o'clock to let her know the search and rescue was again underway and had been since seven o'clock. He invited her to come down to the base again. By that time, she was feeling the effects of very little sleep and told him she'd be there by noon. He promised to call her if they found anything before then.

Becky called shortly after for an update, but Eve had no news to give her.

Finally, frustrated and exhausted, she set the alarm near her bed for eleven a.m. and fell into a deep sleep. She dreamed she was on *Westwind* with Brian. They were in the cabin, she sitting at one end and he at the other. He was holding a box in his hands and, while she watched, he pushed a button. She heard a ringing sound. She thought: *He activated the EPIRB! They'll find us now....*

But the ringing continued. It wouldn't stop. Eve woke to the phone going off beside her bed. She quickly put it to her ear and looked at the clock. It was ten forty two.

“Yes? Hello?” she mumbled.

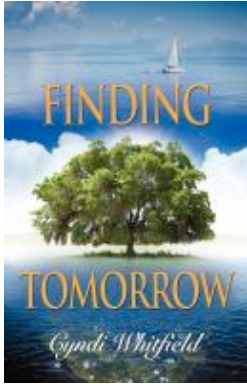
Mrs. Hall, it's Lieutenant Cooper. We've found something.”

Eve sat up in bed, immediately wide awake.

“What? Did you find him?”

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“No, we haven't found Mr. Hall. But we did find a life jacket in the water. One of our people brought it in. It has the name *Westwind* on the back.”



When her husband drowns while sailing on the Pacific, Eve is faced with raising their young son on her own. But as time passes, their lives change in ways they couldn't have imagined and Eve finds herself involved in the many unexpected twists and turns life can take. Through it all, Eve realizes she's stronger and more resilient than she'd thought and may even be open, once again, to love.

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