

Secrets and Lies

REDEMPTION'S EDGE
BOOK TWO
PROLOGUE

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Prologue

“Those brownies are for my movie night.” In the apartment’s galley-style kitchen, Carol Daniels stepped around her teenage son, Paul, and put away the cup she’d been drying.

He lifted another square of rich brown cake from the pan, balanced it on the stack already on his plate, and shot her a grin. “Jackie’s always on a diet. I’m reducing the temptation.”

“Right.” Carol flicked him with her tea towel and grabbed a dish from the drainer.

A knock at the door said her friend from downstairs had arrived. “Want to hang around and see what movie Jackie brought?”

Paul curled a protective hand over his food. “And risk sharing?”

He headed for his bedroom as Carol went to answer the door. The dog jostled past her, tail wagging. “Hey, Chance, I can’t let her in with you in the way.”

Carol nudged the dog aside with her knee and spotted a white envelope on the carpet. Someone in the building must be doing another fundraiser. She picked it up, checked the peephole, and pulled open the door. “Don’t trip over the welcoming committee.”

While Jackie stooped to rub Chance’s ears, Carol slit the envelope with her finger and pulled out a slip of paper.

Your brother thinks he's safe in jail, but you and your son are easy targets. Especially the boy.

Tremors spread from Carol's stomach, rocked her entire body. She read the words again. Then again. Studied the envelope. It bore her name in bold letters. "I — did you see anyone out there?"

"No, why?" Jackie straightened. One look at Carol's face and she reached for the note. "What's wrong?"

Carol held out the paper and wilted against the wall. Chance pressed his muzzle into her leg, whining softly.

Jackie took her arm and led her into the living room, sat beside her on the couch. "You need to call the police."

"Maybe." Carol stood, stepped around the dog and walked to the window. In the evening light, the traffic, pedestrians, and scraps of windblown litter on the street below looked the same as always.

What had she expected, a guy in a mask wearing a "villain" sign? Whoever he was, he'd left the note and was long gone. Just another nut case.

Except this one sounded dangerous.

Carol turned to Jackie, speaking low so Paul wouldn't hear. "What can the police do? Every time there's something about Harry in the news, the crazies start calling. Even with our unlisted number. And after the stunt that reporter pulled last week, they know where I live."

The memory sparked a slow burn in Carol's cheeks. She roamed the cramped living room, tidying what was already tidy, straightening already-straight pictures on the walls. Forget the new job she'd applied for, and her hopes of a higher salary to ease life for her and Paul.

Jackie's voice broke into her thoughts. "What about witness protection?"

"It's only been harassment until now, and we're not witnesses to anything. We're just related to a low-life."

Carol darted into the kitchen and grabbed the pan of brownies. She carried them back to the couch, plopped down beside her friend, and crammed the first one into her mouth whole. She forced herself to chew the second one slowly and concentrate on the taste, the texture.

Jackie waved off the food and drew her knees to her chest. "What are you going to do?"

The brownie went down in a lump that brought tears to Carol's eyes. "We have to move. Paul's all I have left."

"Where will you go?"

"Somewhere we can lose ourselves."

JANET SKETCHLEY

PRAISE FOR SECRETS AND LIES

“*Secrets and Lies* delivers engaging characters and a sweet romance in the midst of a single mom’s worst nightmare.”

~ Sandra Orchard, award-winning author of *Deadly Devotion* and *Blind Trust*

“*Secrets and Lies* takes up where *Heaven’s Prey* left off, and is another great thriller by Janet Sketchley. With the backdrop of music and family, *Secrets and Lies* could really be defined as a retelling of the Ultimate Redemption. Sketchley is very adept at writing about the sometimes intricate and confusing relationships that make up a family. This one is not to be missed.”

~ Linda Hall, award-winning author of *Steal Away* (Christian fiction) and *Night Watch* (mainstream)

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