

Without Proof

REDEMPTION'S EDGE
BOOK THREE

CHAPTER ONE

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JANET SKETCHLEY
www.janetsketchley.ca

DEDICATED TO YOU, THE READER. ENJOY!

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NOTE TO MY AMERICAN READERS:

This novel uses Canadian spelling, which is sort of a hybrid of US and UK English. You'll see words like colour, neighbour, practice, and licence, and they're not typos. That said, and despite the many eyes that have checked the manuscript, I can't guarantee perfection. But I've done my best!

Also, you'll encounter some French-Canadian and other words and names. Here's what you need to know for Chapter One:

Gilles: the "g" makes a zh sound as in "treasure", and the name rhymes with "hill," so say "zhil" (If you have to, call him Jill. Please don't call him Giles, or he may haunt you.)

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows,
is God in his holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families,
he leads out the prisoners with singing;
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.*

Psalm 68: 5-6, NIV

Chapter 1

The doorbell echoed from the main floor. Amy dropped the square of sandpaper onto the frame she'd been finishing and flexed her aching fingers.

Overhead, light footsteps headed for the door. Michael's aunt could sign for the delivery, but Amy wanted to check the boxes. She rolled her shoulders to work out a kink, then slid from the stool and brushed a layer of dust from her clothing.

Aunt Bay's voice met her at the top of the basement stairs. "She may not want to talk to you."

Not the printer order after all. *She, as in me?* Amy took a few silent steps but stopped out of sight.

"Please, I'm on a deadline." A male voice, light and with a hint of a quiver.

Amy grinned. Aunt Bay had that effect when she wanted. It might be fun to let her soften this guy up a bit more, but Amy stepped into the hallway. "Is there a problem?"

Aunt Bay huffed at the man. "Come in, then. But if she

says no, you'll be leaving."

The visitor took three quick steps inside before Michael's aunt could change her mind. "Amy Silver?"

"Yes?"

He wasn't much bigger than Aunt Bay, but closer to Amy's age. A bit older, maybe in his late 20s. Black, with tight-curved hair and black-framed glasses. Despite the passive voice, his gaze spoke determination. "I'm Troy Hicks, a friend of Michael's. I'm a journalist."

"Okay." Amy nodded, waiting. Did he want to write about the art studio? But why would Aunt Bay object?

Troy adjusted the laptop bag strap on his shoulder. "I know this is a sensitive topic for you, but I'd like to ask about your accident."

Amy glanced at Michael's aunt. Felt the quiet of this rambling house that had become her sanctuary. Looked back at Troy. "Why? It's been almost two years."

Dark eyes studied her. "There was a similar crash in the States recently. The local paper is interested in a follow-up on your recovery. Just a short human interest piece."

Pain radiated in Amy's hip and she shifted her weight to her good leg. "I live with the after-effects every day." She wasn't crazy about being in the paper, but after all Michael and his aunt — great-aunt, really — had done... A positive mention of the painter and his studio could bring him a new customer or two. She smiled at Troy. "Okay."

Aunt Bay's face relaxed. "Good for you. I knew you were healing."

Amy turned to Troy. "If Michael gets back soon enough, he can join us." She led the way into the living room and sank into the nearest chair. Pain lanced her hip, then began to ebb. She pulled a steady breath.

Troy settled opposite her, and opened his laptop on the low table in front of him. He pulled out his smart phone and tapped the screen. "All right if I record this? I'll take notes, but I like a verbatim backup."

"That's fine, I guess."

Aunt Bay entered the room carrying a tray with three glasses of ice water. Amy reached for a glass. "Thank you. My hip started to go. I needed to sit."

"I saw it in your face, child."

"You're too good to me." Aunt Bay and Michael, both. They'd taken in a virtual stranger because she had no family of her own. Amy had met Michael, what? Four times before the crash? Five?

Troy moved his laptop onto his knees. He held Amy's gaze for a few seconds, and flashed a reassuring smile. "I appreciate this. I'll ask a few questions, we'll chat, then I'll distill it into an article once I leave."

Aunt Bay set the tray on the coffee table beside Troy's phone, and carried her glass to a chair that let her observe them both. "You'll let Amy see what you've written first?"

One side of Troy's mouth curved down. "That's

actually discouraged. Second-guessing dilutes the original tone and causes missed deadlines.” He glanced at Amy. “Are you concerned I’ll misrepresent you?”

Amy shook her head.

“Okay.” Troy checked his laptop screen. “Two years ago this November, a private plane carrying you and your fiancé, Gilles Renaud, crashed on a rural highway.” He looked up. “I’m sorry, Amy. There are no words for your loss.”

Amy’s throat tightened. “I’ll always miss him. We talk about him a lot, and sometimes that makes it easier.”

Aunt Bay sniffed. “Far better than stuffing away the grief and pretending he never existed.”

Troy nodded. “Gilles was an experienced pilot, and weather conditions were fair. I’m told it took a great deal of skill to bring the plane down in one piece.” He glanced back at his laptop. “According to my notes, Gilles died from internal injuries, and you spent weeks in hospital. Everything changed that day, but you’ve found strength to carry on. And you’ve stayed in Nova Scotia instead of moving back to... Ottawa?”

“I brought everything with me when I came here to marry Gilles.” She’d had nothing — and no one — to return to. “Michael and Gilles were best friends. In his own grief, Michael gave me a place to stay when the hospital discharged me. His great-aunt moved in to help me.”

“And to keep folks from talking.” Aunt Bay levelled a stare. “I should have introduced myself. Beatrice.” She

pronounced it *BAY-a-triss*, then spelled it for him. “If you can get your tongue around that, feel free to call me by name. Otherwise, it’s Miss Rockland.”

A grin split Troy’s face. “BAY-a-triss it is. Thank you.”

Amy looked at the older woman. “It was Gilles who nicknamed you Aunt Bay. Michael told me.”

“Yes. That first summer Gilles stayed here. An irrepressible teenager ready to take on the world.” Beatrice turned to Troy. “This was my home then. When I bought a condo in the city, Michael took over the house for his studio. The light off St. Margaret’s Bay is perfect in his work room, and he gets tourist traffic in the summer.”

Troy typed a rapid burst and paused, hands over the keyboard. “Amy, you mentioned your hip. Is this related to the crash?”

“My leg was trapped when the plane crumpled, and I ended up with a dislocated hip. The surgeon repaired it, but if I stand too long, or over-exert it, the pain comes back.” Amy grimaced. “When I’m out with Aunt Bay, I’m the one with the cane. At twenty-five.”

She waited until Troy stopped tapping keys. “I wanted a way to give back to Michael and Aunt Bay, so I started helping with the paperwork and accounts between physiotherapy appointments. I’m good with numbers. Michael, your typical artist, isn’t. Then I learned how to do framing and other support work, to give Michael more time to paint.”

Amy sipped her water and rested the glass on the arm of her chair. “I could get back up to speed with the

banking world and apply for work in my field, but I like it here. Less money, but less pressure, and right now I don't want any stress." Her fingers twisted the end of her ponytail. "So am I still healing? Or am I hiding?"

Troy grinned. "I'm a journalist, not a doctor. Sounds to me like you've got a good thing going, win-win all around. Have you kept in touch with Gilles' family?"

Speaking of stress... "Please don't mention them in your article. They wouldn't appreciate it."

"Okay. Now, there's one other angle I wanted to look at in passing. Are you satisfied with the investigation into the crash?"

Amy pressed her back into the chair. "Why?"

"Coverage of the American crash suggests there are a few ways to sabotage a small plane that are virtually untraceable. Did Gilles do a pre-flight inspection?"

"I followed him around the plane. It was fascinating."

Troy nodded. "Forgive me — did he take it seriously, or was it a formality?"

Amy stiffened. "Gilles may have had a reckless streak, but he was obsessive about mechanical safety."

Aunt Bay snorted. "Daredevils can't risk equipment failure. Not that he'd try anything crazy with Amy in the plane. He treated her like spun glass."

"Here's the thing." Troy positioned the laptop more squarely on his legs. "Gilles' pre-flight should have caught

any ordinary mechanical issues. After your crash, I asked his flight club about the possibility of sabotage — just to cover every option. They shut me down faster than you can say ‘No comment.’ Fine. I thought it wasn’t likely anyhow. But now I know it’s possible. I asked again this morning, and they hit me with a guilt trip. Said to respect you, not to dig up past pain.”

“Yet you’re asking me about it.”

“Because I do respect you.” Troy sat forward, one elbow on the edge of his laptop. His features hardened. “If someone did this to you and Gilles, you have a right to know. To see justice done.”

Amy stared. “But who? Why?”

“That’s the other reason I’m asking. You and Michael knew Gilles best. Did he have enemies? Personal or business conflicts? I won’t put anything you say now in my article, but I’d like to keep recording for myself.”

This conversation was unreal. Amy rubbed her hip. “Gilles didn’t seem worried about anything. He was, when we met. Said he was running away from God — don’t repeat that. We fell in love, he settled whatever was bothering him, and we came here to get married.”

“Gilles had a reputation with the ladies, but this would be a pretty extreme response from a spurned lover. I don’t suppose you have any enemies yourself, Amy?”

Amy’s scalp prickled. Enemies? She forced a laugh. “Not the murdering kind.” Gilles’ mother. Her own unseen father. “Besides, I’m an easy target and I’m still here.”

Aunt Bay reached over and squeezed Amy's arm. "Thank God for that."

Troy checked his phone. "Michael hasn't replied to my text yet. When he does, I'll ask if he remembers anything. Thank you both for your time." He shut the laptop and slid it into his bag.

Amy sat forward in her chair, preparing her hip joint to stand. "It's been nice to meet you. Thanks for checking on me, and good luck with your article. I really don't think there's anything to the sabotage idea, though. Just because it could have happened doesn't mean it did. Everyone loved Gilles."

Aunt Bay stood without any effort. "I agree with Amy. But I hope Michael invites you back socially. He works too much."

Troy looked at the older woman. "Are you a praying person like Michael, Beatrice?"

At her nod, he took her hand. "Then pray for the truth to come out."

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