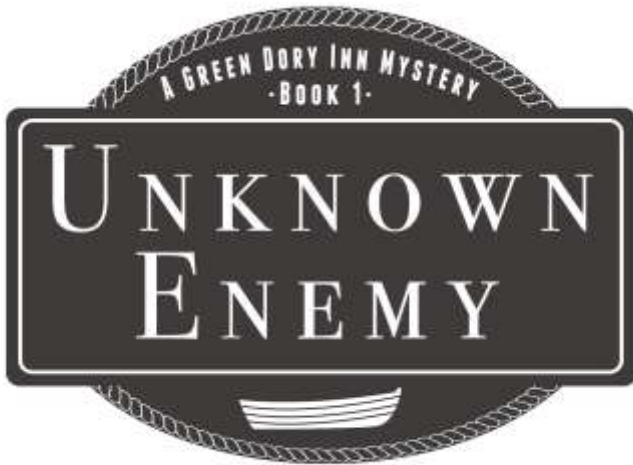


Excerpt: Chapter 1



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Unknown Enemy, A Green Dory Inn Mystery

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The Redemption's Edge Series:

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Heaven's Prey

Secrets and Lies

Without Proof

The Green Dory Inn Mystery Series:

Unknown Enemy

Hidden Secrets (releasing next)

Book 3

Book 4

Non-fiction:

A Year of Tenacity: 365 Daily Devotions

NOTE TO READERS

Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, is a real town—a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Green Dory Inn and most other places mentioned in this novel are purely fictional and in no way intended to represent real locations.

I have taken some liberty with the geography around the inn, for reasons that will become clear by the end of the next book.

Also, for my non-Canadian readers, please note I'm using Canadian spellings in this book. 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!

Chapter 1



Thursday

DRY-MOUTHED, LANDON watched the runway speed beneath her window. Vibration from the landing gear drilled into her core.

She shouldn't have come back. But she couldn't refuse, not when Anna needed her.

The plane's intercom crackled. "This is your captain speaking. Welcome to Halifax. Local time is two twelve."

Around her, seat belts clicked open despite the warning lights. A few people stood and rummaged in the overhead bins. The plane hadn't fully stopped. What was the hurry?

Yet the other passengers' sense of urgency had her reaching for her purse.

She followed the herd into the terminal, pulling her borrowed carry-on and checking the overhead signs. When she reached the baggage area, she stood against the wall, watching reunions. Friends, lovers. Two women, clearly mother and daughter, crying as they embraced. She turned away.

A scruffy-haired man with glasses hurried toward the meeting point. He dodged a woman with a pet carrier and stopped beside a pillar. Scanning the crowd, he raised a

white cardboard sign: *Landon Smith*.

Anna's neighbour had promised to send his grandson to meet her at the airport. Funny, she'd expected a teenager. This guy was closer to thirty, five or six years older than she was. Tousled hair and a few days' growth of beard made him look like he'd just crawled out of bed.

He gave the room another once-over, and then angled himself to face the passengers still straggling through the arrival gates.

She grasped the handle of her carry-on and walked up beside him. "Hi. I'm Landon."

He turned to her and froze, wide-eyed, a half-formed smile suddenly dead on his lips.

Really? Landon had been gone almost ten years, but this guy had clearly heard something about her. Truth or speculation, he must have thought he could handle it until they were face to face.

It could be a long, silent drive to Anna's inn.

Landon glanced around at the crowd, giving him time to compose himself. When she looked back, his cheeks had darkened to an ugly, mottled red.

Stepping back, he swallowed hard, not meeting her eyes. "Roy asked me to meet you." He lowered the sign as if he'd just realized his arm was still in the air. "Bobby. Bobby Hawke."

He waved a hand toward the luggage carousels. "What colour's your bag?"

Landon danced the little black carry-on on its wheels. "I have everything here."

Bobby looked at the luggage, eyebrows raised.

She flipped her hair with her free hand and forced a bright tone. "I'm only here for a few days. Why bring all my worldly goods?"

"My girlfriend needs a full-sized case for one night, and my mother's just as bad." He turned toward the door. "Let's go, then."

He set a brisk pace from arrivals to the parking garage.

They weren't outside long, but the misty air raised goosebumps on Landon's bare arms. "It was hot and sunny in Toronto."

He paid at the ticket station and she followed him along the rows of cars. Ahead of them, a white Corvette beeped and flashed its lights.

The trunk lid opened, and Landon gave her carry-on a push that sent it skittering to Bobby's side.

He stowed it and headed for the driver's door. "Hop in."

The guy hadn't made eye contact since he broke out of his initial stare. She'd had awkward encounters before, but the emotion bleeding through his barriers felt like fear. Or shame. It stirred her homecoming dread into queasiness.

She buckled her seat belt as loosely as she could and gripped her purse on her lap.

They'd been on the highway for a good fifteen minutes before he opened his mouth. "How was your flight?"

"Fine." She hadn't flown before, but he didn't need to know that. "Thank you for picking me up. This is most of your day."

He pulled out to pass an SUV, driving fast, but without the typical sports car swagger. "It's only a few hours, and I like a good highway run."

Landon tried to block out their destination and concentrate on the ride. Her seat felt like it'd be amazingly comfortable if she could relax.

When she couldn't take any more silence, she cleared her throat. "Whatever you heard about me..."

Bobby's fingers whitened on the wheel. "It's not you."

His tone slammed the door between them.

She shut her mouth and stared at the trees streaking past.

Eventually Bobby let out a soft groan. "I'm sorry. You look like someone I used to know." His laugh sounded forced. "I guess you have an evil twin."

A strangled gasp became a giggle that she barely caught in time. She turned it into a cough.

He'd never understand her crazy relief, and it'd sound like she was minimizing his pain. Plus, it could get him asking questions she didn't want to answer. Still, she had to say something. "I get it. The past has long fingers."

She sneaked a glance at him. The set of his stubbled jaw and the pinch at the corner of his mouth said his wound ran deep.

He wouldn't want her sympathy, nor words of comfort from a stranger.

At least the silence had lost its threatening undertone. Landon turned her gaze out the window again. The mixed forests, the occasional glimpses of water along the way, even the names of towns they passed, whispered "home." Her breathing quickened. This would never be home again.

Lunenburg held nothing for her but pain and memories of lost innocence. The worst had come later, but this was the flash point. Because of that, Landon had vowed to never return.

Until Anna's need overrode her fear.

At least Anna's inn was a neutral place unconnected to the past. Anna and her husband hadn't lived there when Landon was a child.

Bobby avoided the town of Lunenburg and drove along a winding coastal road. By the time he slowed at the Green Dory Inn sign, she was practically vibrating in her seat.

As long as Landon could remember, Anna had been a family friend. She'd taken the girls to vacation Bible school, sometimes to church when their parents agreed, although her own children were a few years older.

When Landon's world shattered, it was Anna who became her surrogate mother, mentor, and confidante. Always ready to listen, or talk, or pray—once Landon was open to prayer.

Anna's prayers were a big part of the reason Landon was

whole today. And now something had Anna's neighbour worried enough to beg Landon to come.

"What's going on with Anna, Bobby? Roy didn't want to skew my perceptions, but it means I'm going in blind."

"He thinks it's emotional more than physical. I've only been here a few weeks, but yeah, maybe. Or maybe she just needs cheering up. Seeing you could turn it around."

Emotional? Anna was one of the most cheerful, stable people Landon knew. Still, sudden widowhood would rock anyone's world.

The long, narrow driveway led past a green fishing dory, brimming with yellow and orange flowers in the middle of the lawn. Beyond it rose a grey-sided house, two storeys with twin dormer windows framing the traditional "Lunenburg bump" extended dormer above a sunshine-yellow front door.

Instead of parking with the other car in the lot behind the house, Bobby stopped beside the walkway to the front door. "Leave your suitcase for now. Let's see if we can get in before she knows it's you."

Landon heard the little boy in him, bursting to surprise a favourite teacher with a gift. It made a nice change from Mr. Prickly. "She knows someone's coming?"

"Gramp didn't want to spring an unexpected guest on her. She thinks I'm bringing my girlfriend."

They hurried along the walkway and up the wide, shallow front steps. A chime sounded as they stepped into a spacious hallway.

From the rear of the house, a voice called, "Hello."

Anna bustled toward them, sandals slapping on the hardwood floor. A black cat with white bib and paws trotted to keep up. "Welcome. How was your—"

She gave a little cry and pulled Landon into a hug. "You're home!"

Landon leaned in, absorbing the unconditional love.

When she stepped back, their gazes held. Anna's eyes

were shadowed, and a surprising amount of grey streaked her bobbed brown hair, but her wide, face-lighting smile hadn't dimmed.

Some of the tension unwound in Landon's stomach. She breathed a silent prayer of thanks. Anna was a constant. She had to be okay.

Anna pressed the cuff of her light cardigan against her eyes. "I thought you were in the middle of another course."

"I have to be back in class on Monday, but at least we'll have the weekend together. And I didn't need to bring too much work with me."

Some of the joy faded from Anna's face. She spread her hands to the rooms on either side of the entryway. "Well, you're here for now, and I'm so glad. I wish I'd known, I'd have bought something special for supper." A tiny frown creased her broad forehead, as if she were mentally inventorying the fridge.

Bobby held out a hand. "You're both invited to eat with Gramp and me tonight, like Jessie would have done if she'd really been your guest. I hope you'll forgive the deceit."

No way would he want to see Landon's face any longer than necessary. She glanced at him. "We can't impose. Especially with Roy's leg in a cast. Kitchen work must be hard."

The clench his jaw beneath the stubble showed how hard it was to meet her eyes, but he did it without changing colour. He even managed a tight smile. "Stew and a fresh loaf from the bread machine. I set everything up before I left. Gramp'll be disappointed if you don't come."

Breakfast had been rushed, and Landon had only brought an apple and some trail mix for her flight. "That sounds great."

Bobby reddened slightly, but it looked like pleasure and not more awkwardness. "A slow cooker is a writer's best friend. Next to a laptop, of course."

Landon felt some heat in her own cheeks. All the silence

in the car, and she hadn't even asked what he did. "What do you write?"

His gaze cut to the side. "Science fiction. You probably haven't heard of my books."

"I'm not much of a reader." Oops, that sounded like a put-down. "I go for podcasts and audio books."

"Those are great ways to get the content."

Bobby backed toward the door. "I'll set your suitcase just inside, here, and go tell Gramp we're back. You two can start catching up."

"Thank you, Bobby. We'll see you in about an hour and a half?" Anna's tone held an unfamiliar stiffness.

Landon glanced at her. As soon as they were alone, she asked, "Don't you want to go? Save us cooking?"

"Let me show you around."

Anna led her to the left, into a cozy common room with upholstered chairs and a heavy wooden bookcase. By the window stood a polished oak table with a half-completed jigsaw puzzle of a schooner. Chunks of blue sky and water lay waiting to be filled in.

The main door opened and shut. A minute later, Bobby's car drove back toward the road. The look Anna sent after it wasn't altogether friendly.

Anna, who loved everybody. Landon touched her shoulder. "Is something wrong?"

"Roy should mind his own business." She marched across the hall.

Landon bit her lip. *Emotional*, Bobby had said.

She followed Anna into a cheery breakfast room with white-painted tables and chairs. Each of the pale yellow tablecloths held a little vase of bright blue pansies.

Anna's fingers curled around one of the chair backs. "This was Roy's idea, wasn't it? How did he get in touch with you—dig through my files for your number?"

This suspicious tone was so not Anna. And from everything she'd said about Roy since she and her husband

had moved here, the older man was a good friend as well as a good neighbour.

Landon made eye contact, trying to project calm. “He phoned your daughter, but she couldn’t get away. She had my phone number from the funeral, so she put us in touch.”

“The old gossip! No wonder my kids are fretting at me. Grief takes time. They should know that.”

“Anna...” Landon adjusted a vase on one of the tables. “Nobody’s conspiring against you. Roy wants to help. That’s what friends do. It’s what *you* do.”

“Did he tell you I’m going crazy? Seeing things at night?”

“No.” Her fingers twitched and she caught the vase just before it tipped. Turning to face Anna, she tried for a casual tone. “What have you seen?”

“Lights. Movement in the shadows. Sounds, sometimes. Voices. Whistling. Not every night, but just when I start convincing myself it was my imagination, it happens again.”

“You’ve phoned the police?”

“An officer’s been out a few times. He can’t find any sign of trespassers. Bobby hasn’t found anything either.” Her lips twisted. “The only one who believes me is Nigel Foley, and he thinks it’s aliens.”

Chill settled in Landon’s stomach. “You’re not on any kind of medication, are you? To help with the grief, or for sleeping?”

Anna’s eyes narrowed. “No.”

“Hey, it’s a fair question.”

She waited until Anna gave a reluctant nod. “So if anything happens while I’m here, wake me. You’ll have a witness.” There must be a rational explanation.

“The guests haven’t seen anything, but they’re usually in the front rooms with the water view. What I’ve seen has been in the back.”

Anna started toward an arched doorway with white

swinging doors. "This inn was Murdoch's dream. It's hard without him, but I'm coping. I've hired a friend's daughter to help when I need her."

Likely another girl who needed someone to believe in her.

Landon followed Anna into a gleaming white and stainless steel kitchen. A wide window over the double sink overlooked a wooden deck, then a grassy stretch leading to an airy, mixed forest. The small parking lot was to the left, with a windowless grey barn at its edge. Along the tree line to the right lay a flower garden and a small shed.

The outbuildings would give easy shelter to anyone skulking around. If he approached through the trees, guests facing the water would never see him.

She turned back to Anna. "The inn and grounds are lovely. Are you busy?"

"It's early in the season. Bookings are slow, but we have enough for now. Meaghan's still learning the ropes, and I'm feeling my age."

Anna was what, fifty-two? She'd never been bouncy, but her steady, purposeful bustle should keep her motoring well into her nineties.

Anna's shoulders straightened, and she seemed to shake off her melancholy. She pulled a key from her pocket. "Let me show you your room. We'll grab your things on the way."

At the top of the stairs lay a wide, open space bordered by four doors, each one ajar to reveal a glimpse of an inviting bedroom. The dormer windows over the main entrance sheltered a cozy conversation nook.

Anna led her to one of the rooms looking out on the forest.

Good. She'd be able to keep an eye out for the prowler.

The bedroom walls were a warm peach, with stretched-canvas prints of brilliant-coloured butterflies. A plain sage duvet on the four-poster bed held a butterfly-shaped pillow,

wings outspread. Above the window, the wall sloped inward to the ceiling.

She spun in a slow circle, taking it all in. "It's perfect!"

A smile lit Anna's face. "I'll leave you to settle in. Come down when you're ready."

Alone, Landon ran a hand down a satin-smooth bedpost the colour of aged honey. This room could have been designed for her. A shiver chased across her shoulders.

The glow in Anna's expression at her reaction to the room. Before that, the tear-filled welcome "home" when she hadn't known Landon was coming. The poorly-veiled disappointment that it was only for the weekend.

She leaned her forehead against the post. Anna was big on reconciliation. Restoration. The woman's prayers had played a huge part in Landon's salvation and healing, as had her wise counsel these past few years. How long had she secretly been praying for Landon to "come home"?

Pain closed her throat. This visit was supposed to help. Not add to Anna's hurt.

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When she couldn't stall any longer, Landon slid her phone into her back pocket, picked up her room key, and headed out. No need to lock the door with no other guests here, but if she set the pattern now, she wouldn't forget later.

The scent of baking wafted up the stairs, and before she reached the kitchen, a timer beeped. When she walked into the room, Anna was taking a pan from the oven.

Landon waited until she'd set it on a trivet before speaking. "Mmm, smells good. What is it?"

"Cinnamon coffee cake. I didn't have time to make anything complicated."

Anna plopped stained blue oven mitts onto the counter and swiped the back of her hand across her forehead. "All settled in?"

Hospitality filled her tone, but there might have been an

underlying wistfulness, too. Landon pretended not to notice. "It's a beautiful room. A beautiful inn, Anna. Your guests must love it."

"So far, so good. Would you set the deadbolt on the front door? We'll go out the back way."

When Landon returned, Anna plunged her hands back into the oven mitts and cradled the freshly foil-covered pan. "Let's go."

Apparently Roy was forgiven. Smiling, Landon pulled the door open.

Anna stepped through and pitched forward with a cry. She landed hard on her knees. The pan shot from her hands and skidded across the deck.

Landon helped her stand. "What happened? Are you hurt?"

Anna brushed off her knees and turned back to the door. "I tripped—what are they doing here?"

She picked up a red rubber gardening clog, the sole caked in dirt, then reached for its mate. Frowning, she propped them against the deck railing and retrieved the cake pan from where it lay.

"Still right side up, at least." She peeked under the foil. "No harm done. But I know I cleaned the mud off my clogs and set them aside to dry."

She fixed Landon with a look that dared her to argue. "I always do."

"Could Timkin have been playing with them?"

"That cat can be trouble, but even if he'd left them in the way, he wouldn't have muddied them again."

Landon locked the door and followed her down the steps to the grass. "It's a silly prank for someone to play. You're sure you weren't distracted and forgot? If the phone rang, or you had to go to the bathroom—"

Anna's sigh sounded like the earth itself groaning. "I don't think so, but it's possible."

Landon squeezed her elbow. "It happens to everyone."

“I know. Just don’t tell Roy, okay? He’s been acting like a mother hen since Murdoch died.”

“It’ll be our secret.”

Anna led the way to the left, past the barn and into the trees. She might resent Roy’s perceived meddling in her life, but the neighbouring homes had enough traffic between them to wear a path among the trunks.

Landon walked beside her through the wide-spaced tree trunks, inhaling the tangy mix of pines and salt air. The scent brought memories of simpler days. Summer games of hide and seek. Family picnics, when they’d still been a family.

It hurt.

No, she couldn’t stay, but she could take this visit as a chance to give back to the woman who’d given her so much. They’d enjoy their time together until Sunday, and hopefully they’d both see this prowler. A witness would help Anna’s credibility, plus she might be able to spot something that would help the police figure this out.

Anna said it always happened at night, but it didn’t make sense that the prowler left no traces. There should at least be a footprint, or flattened grass or something. No wonder nobody else believed her.

Landon scowled at the dirt path. Whoever was playing these tricks on Anna could have set up her shoes this afternoon, too.

As for the lack of witnesses, who else would see? A thin forest bordered the inn on both sides and to the rear, and on the other side of the road the guardrailed shoulder ended in a steep drop to the ocean. When there were no guests, it was an isolated spot for a woman alone.

Too bad Anna didn’t have someone living with her long-term to keep her company, but however wishful her thinking, she wouldn’t really expect Landon to leave school and move back here.

The trees opened to a ranch-style home with a roofed-in



front porch facing the ocean. The houses Bobby had driven past on the way to the inn were all older two-storeys. “Why’s this one so different?”

“Roy’s place? The old home burned down years ago, and he said he wanted something more practical to get old in. Everything’s on the one level, and he only uses the basement for storage. After I’ve been up and down the stairs to the guest rooms a few times, I start to envy him.”

“But your inn has character. There’s history in those walls.”

Half a dozen steps led up to the back door. It would be easy to add an access ramp here, if Roy’s mobility ever required it.

Bobby let them in and showed Anna where to set the cake pan. “You didn’t need to bring anything, but that smells great.”

He’d regained his composure, but Landon tried to stay out of his line of sight.

A white-haired man in a short-sleeved button shirt shuffled toward them with a walker. He looked a good twenty-five years older than Anna. Old enough to fill the unofficial father role Anna said he’d taken on.

The set of his mouth gave him a formidable expression that matched his gruff voice on the phone. Yet he cared enough about Anna to worry about her and to reach out for help. And to pay for Landon’s plane ticket when she admitted the need.

He lifted a hand from the walker frame. “You must be Landon. Good to meet you.”

She squashed her nervousness and stepped forward. Up close, his sea-blue eyes gleamed as if he were still sixteen. Or perhaps twelve, given the mischief in his sudden smile.

The strength in his handshake surprised her.

“Thank you again for the flight.” She dropped her voice so it wouldn’t penetrate Anna’s conversation with Bobby. “You’re right, she’s not herself. I hope I can help.”

Roy's jaw twitched. "Losing her husband was enough. I'd hate to see anything else go wrong."

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Landon woke gasping for air. She catapulted from the bed into a defensive stance and scanned the dimly-lit room, waiting for reality to overcome memory.

This was Anna's inn. A safe place.

Pacing softly to the door and back, she concentrated on slowing her breathing, anchoring in the present.

Quiet night sounds came through the partly-open window. Wind stirred the trees, and in the distance a dog barked. The moon gave enough light to see Anna's parked car and the outbuildings. At the edge of the darkened lawn, the trees made a darker mass.

A human shadow flitted from the barn to the trees. Landon's breath hissed.

Outside, all was still, but she knew she'd seen someone. Had Anna seen him too?

Landon snatched her phone from the bedside table and left the room. A stained-glass sailboat night light in the open area lit her way to the stairs. She hurried down to the main floor.

Navigating by moonlight, she reached Anna's private quarters at the rear of the inn. She crossed the sitting room to the bedroom door and tapped gently. "Anna? It's me. Don't turn on your light... there's someone outside."

Bedclothes rustled, then Anna pulled the door open, blinking. "Where?"

"By the trees."

Anna charged into the kitchen, slowing before she reached the window.

Landon caught up to her. "I don't see him now."

A nudge at Landon's ankles made her bite back a squeal. Timkin the cat butted his head against her again and moved to Anna's feet with a quiet mew. He trotted to the door.

Anna flicked on the outside light. She hesitated, then shot back the deadbolt and cracked the door open just wide enough for the cat to squeeze through before slamming it shut.

Landon stayed where she could watch through the window. Would the signs of activity scare the intruder away?

The cat walked to the edge of the deck and stood looking into the darkness. Then, tail erect, he jumped between the posts of the railing and streaked for the woods.

“Timkin took off—toward the spot I saw the person moving.”

“Then it’s someone he knows. He wouldn’t run to a stranger.” Anna turned the light off. She pulled a giant flashlight from a drawer and grasped the doorknob.

“Anna, don’t—”

But she was already on the deck, light lancing toward the trees. “Come out. I know you’re there.”

Silence. Landon stepped onto the deck beside her, the smooth boards cool against her bare feet. “This is crazy. Of course the cat knows him. He’s been bothering you for weeks. Come back inside.”

Anna’s light swept the tree line. “Where did you see him?”

“A little to the left. There. But—”

“Shh.”

Anyone could be out there in the dark, sneaking up on them from another direction. Landon took an involuntary step back toward the safety of the inn. “Anna, please.”

“If you come out now, I don’t have to call the police. Just come talk to me.”

Landon gripped her cell. “But I have a phone right here. Don’t make me use it.” The guy—or girl—was likely long gone.

Something rasped against a tree trunk. Anna’s flashlight beam darted and pinned a slim figure who trudged toward

them, one hand shading his eyes.

She aimed the light at his feet, making a path to the deck. "Corey! What on earth were you doing out there?"

He was only a kid, maybe fourteen. Scruffy hair, dark clothes that let him blend into the night. Timkin paced behind him like a rear guard.

As the boy came up the deck stairs, the fear and defeat in his face pulled at Landon's heart.

Shoulders slumped, he spoke to the floorboards. "I wanted to spy on your prowler. Find out what he's after."

"You could have been hurt. Or arrested."

His chin came up. Defiance twisted his mouth, but then his expression drooped. "I could have run."

"Corey, Murdoch would be proud of you for looking out for me, but he wouldn't want you putting yourself at risk like that. Please promise me you won't do it again."

When the boy nodded, Anna thanked him. "This prowler upsets me, but I'd be more upset if anything happened to you. Come inside for hot chocolate."

Corey's gaze met Landon's for a millisecond. He bent to rub the cat's back. "I should go."

They watched him trudge back into the woods, then Landon followed Anna into the kitchen. "And you said nobody believed you."

"They don't say it, but I hear the doubt in their voices. Corey's so loyal to Murdoch, he'd believe me even if I'd imagined the whole thing." Anna's heavy tone said it was no comfort.

"You're sure he hasn't been the prowler all along?"

"Positive. Plus, if he were, he wouldn't have hidden out in the woods to keep watch."

"Some people might. And then take credit for scaring the guy off."

Anna shook her head. "He's just a kid who needs a break."

"I hope so. But your gift is to see the best in people. What

they can be, not necessarily what they are.”

Anna filled the kettle. “Since we’re up, how about some herbal tea? Or can you go straight back to sleep?”

Wisps of nightmare fluttered, and Landon shivered. “A drink would be nice, if you’re having one. Or I could just keep watch for a bit and see if the real troublemaker shows.”

“We’ll turn out the lights and watch together.”

Anna pulled a green cardboard box from a drawer and dropped two tea bags into the pot. “Spearmint blend. It’s soothing.”

Once they carried steaming mugs into the private sitting room, Anna turned out the lights and angled the vertical blinds so they could look out.

“There’s no telling when—or if—he’ll show up. He’s left me alone the past few nights, but I’m so on edge I kept waking anyway.”

Landon embraced the quiet, waiting for her eyes to adjust to the dim glow from the clock on the DVD player.

Anna sat beside her on the couch. Timkin jumped onto Anna’s lap, turned three tight circles, and lay in a tidy knot. She stroked the black and white fur. “Did Corey wake you? I didn’t hear a thing.”

Landon set her mug on the coffee table and drew her knees up to her chest. “I was already awake.”

“Ah. I wondered if being here would bring more shadows to light. You’re strong enough to face them, now.”

The back of her neck prickled, and she pressed her fingers against the spot.

After all the counselling, all the prayer and heartache, she’d worked through most of the pain. In her mind, she’d revisited it all, picturing Jesus at her side, letting His healing presence wrap her like a soft blanket still warm from the dryer. His own blood covered her stains, washed her wounds. He called her whole. Precious. His delight.

Remembering the dream, she felt again the sweat-

slicked film of fear that would vacuum-seal her into oblivion. “That was too real for a shadow. Anna, I can’t go back there, I’d—”

Anna squeezed her hand. “Healing, growth, it’s always in layers. You are healed, you’re being healed...”

“...and I will be healed.” She nodded in time to the words. How many times had she heard that mantra? “But it has to end. I was doing fine. I had a life and a future.”

Shivers took her. She picked up her mug and gulped some tea. It hurt to swallow.

This was why she hadn’t come for Murdoch’s funeral. Anna had enough family support, and she’d accepted Landon’s desire to stay away from here. This time there was no one else. Anna’s children didn’t live nearby, and neither could take time off again so soon.

She couldn’t regret coming for Anna, but she couldn’t face the pain, either. She clutched Anna’s fingers. “Pray for me? We can keep our eyes open in case anything happens outside.”

“God will look after the mystery man. Right now we need Him to look after you.” Anna bowed her head and lifted her free palm, open to receive. Her words came out calm and sure, naming the need and thanking God for His good response.

As Anna’s prayer moved into praise, Landon’s peace returned. Warmth wrapped her, and her spirit caught tender words she couldn’t quite discern. She leaned back in her seat. “Thank you.”

“Dear one, I appreciate you coming more than I can say. I hope you can back up my story about this prowler, but even if he hides until you’re gone, I believe this is for your healing. You had a barrier against returning, and now God can work there too.”

No point saying it was a reasonable boundary, one she hadn’t intended to push. Landon sat up and rubbed her eyes, and glanced out into the darkness. “Maybe your

prowler took another night off. About ready to go back to bed?”

“I think so.” Anna stood, cradling the sleeping cat, and settled him onto the couch. “Something to pray about, long-term... see what God does here these next few days, and then ask what He thinks about coming back once your courses are done? Lunenburg needs social workers too, and you understand how the rural dynamic affects our youth.”

Only Anna would pray her into peace and then press on the heart of the bruise. The request should have undone her, but the warm blanket sensation held her fast. Beneath it, her heart constricted.

She faced Anna and shook her head. “This is not my place. I’m sorry.”

A NOTE FROM JANET SKETCHLEY

Well, **what did you think** of my imaginary friends at the Green Dory Inn?

If you enjoyed this sample, I hope you'll check out the full story. It's a novella, under 150 pages, so it's a quick read.

If you're not on my mailing list, **connect** at bit.ly/JanetSketchleyNews for **advance notice** of when the next book releases.

Thanks for spending time at the Green Dory Inn, and I hope you'll come back again!



~Janet

Janet Sketchley is an Atlantic Canadian writer who likes her fiction with a splash of mystery or adventure as well as a dash of Christianity. Why leave faith out of our stories if it's part of our lives? Janet's other books include the Redemption's Edge Christian suspense series and the devotional collection, *A Year of Tenacity*. You can find her online at janetsketchley.ca.