

# **CABIN IN THE WOODS**

*A PARANORMAL MYSTERY*



**MJ KRAUSE-CHIVERS**

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## CHAPTER 1



### STORM

*A*my's idea of a getaway weekend at their friends' cottage was sipping her morning coffee by the fireplace gazing at the pristine snow-covered wilderness — not fearing for her life getting there. Had she known they'd be driving through a blizzard, she would've insisted on staying home in their cozy apartment in Toronto.

"Don't worry, Red. It's just snowsqualls off Georgian Bay," her husband, Jack, said. "This'll blow over."

"But there's black ice, Jack. This isn't safe. Let's turn around and go home."

"Relax. I'm a good driver. Trust me." Jack poked his finger in the air and dove into a rant about the 'right' way to drive in wintery conditions.

Amy crossed her arms and glared at the drifting snow. When they passed two semi-trucks parked on the shoulder of the road, she took a deep breath and exhaled slowly through her mouth. If those experts wouldn't chance it, why was Jack risking their lives?!

"Jack, please!" She screamed as their car fishtailed around a tight curve. "At least slow down."

"I'm not speeding." Jack hunched forward and tightened his grip on the steering wheel.

Amy gritted her teeth and focused on the fluttering windshield wipers that were barely keeping up with the white onslaught. *Squeak, flap, squeak, flap, squeak.*

“Jack, I’m scared. Cottage country is nothing but sheer granite, dense forest, and a gazillion tiny lakes. What if we smash into a rock-cut? Or fly off the road into the bush? No one will find us until spring,” Amy curled both fists until her fingernails dug into her palms. “We’ll end up at the bottom of some little lake. Dead.”

Jack cranked up the windshield wipers to high speed, “Relax, Red. And stop exaggerating. Jerry and Sandy drive up almost every weekend. If they can do it, so can we.”

“But they drive a Jeep with winter tires. We only have this ancient piece of crap. When’s the last time you changed the tires? Are they any good?”

Jack grimaced. “Please don’t call my baby names. I’m rather fond of my daddy’s hand-me-down. And to answer your question, these radials are perfectly good. They’re only three years old.

Amy cringed at the petulant tone in Jack’s voice, but she couldn’t help herself. “Five. They’re five years old. I remember when you bought them.”

“How could you possibly remember? We weren’t even together then,” Jack snapped.

“You were late for the ballgame because you’d just bought them. At least, that’s what you *said*. You interrupted the first inning and spilled Jerry’s beer. I couldn’t help but notice.”

She remembered the day like it was yesterday. The broad-shouldered blond Viking had tumbled into the row carrying beer and a food box in his giant hands. As he jostled past knees to get to his seat, fries flew in every direction. Then, upon plopping down, he elbowed the two neighboring spectators and knocked his friend Jer-

ry's beer into his lap. She overheard him apologize profusely for the spill and explain his reason for being late — the purchase of new tires for his Honda coupe.

Then, when he stuffed the hot dog into his mouth, mustard squirted onto his Blue Jay's jersey, and he burst out loudly with a string of profanities. She'd passed over her soda water to help deter the stain. But he obviously didn't remember that!

At the time, she'd thought he was the funniest goof she'd ever met. But now, five years later, she found his bull-in-a-China-shop approach embarrassing and tiresome.

"Oh. Were you there?" Jack jested.

Amy rolled her eyes and gaped. "Of all the nerve! I can't believe you don't remember that. It was the first time we met." She leaned across the center console and playfully punched Jack's shoulder with her fist.

The glint in Jack's blue eyes didn't match the exaggerated frown on his face or the purposeful eyebrows knit together in one straight line. "I thought we met at a Christmas party. At least, that's what I tell everyone."

"You jerk! You know perfectly well the Christmas party was the second time we met. That's only when you asked for my number. Do you ever pay attention to detail, Jack? I can't believe how oblivious you are."

The muscles in Jack's square jaw flexed angrily. "Is there anything else you want to criticize me for?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. This snow squall, as you call it, is not ending. In fact, it's getting worse."

"Oh, relax, Red. We're driving through a snowbelt. We'll be on the other side of it in a few miles." Around the next bend, their car

skidded into the oncoming lane, but Jack expertly jerked the steering wheel left and right.

Amy took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. *Focus.* "I think we should talk about the house."

"What about the house? It's a done deal."

"I think we made a mistake, Jack. It's a lot of money. What if something happens to you? I can't afford those mortgage payments by myself."

"You'll either get a raise or a better job. If I die, you can rent out a room. There's lots of options. Don't be so negative."

Amy grimaced. *He's only thinking of himself.* "I suppose."

"Besides, we need a house. You want to start a family. You seem to think you're running out of time."

Amy brushed the copper strand from her amber eyes. "I'm thirty-three. I'm not dead."

"Right. You've lots of time," Jack said sarcastically. He pointed to a patch of blue sky above the trees. "Look. It's clearing up."

"Thank God," Amy puffed as the rumble of dry asphalt confirmed the end of the icy section. She twisted sideways and leaned her knees against the center console so she could face him more directly. "Jack, don't you want a family?"

Jack reached over and grabbed his wife's hand. "Of course, I do. Listen, sweetie, we're gonna be ok. Don't sweat about the money. Mortgages have fixed monthly payments. There're no worries about increasing rent or unruly landlords. Budgeting will be much easier."

"As long as the furnace or A/C doesn't die," Amy grunted.

Jack burst out laughing. "We can budget those, too. Don't be such a worrywart."

"We'll need a new car soon."

"No. We'll fix this one until we can't. Honestly, Amy. You're overthinking again. Let's just take it one day at a time."

"Should I ask for a couple of extra shifts at the restaurant? Dinner tips are higher."

Jack coughed as if she'd just said something ridiculous. "Not a good idea. Christine runs a tight ship and you two are like oil and water. Besides, lunch has faster turnarounds. You can earn almost double."

"I could work the bar."

"That's my space. Trust me, it's not a safe workplace for my gorgeous wife. The men would hit on you constantly. I've seen how they harass the girls. You'd probably come home in tears every night." Jack pointed to the roadside welcome sign built into a tall crag. "Look, we're in rock country. Check out those windswept pines."

Amy sensed a snag in the conversation. Jack had dismissed her suggestion much too quickly and then abruptly changed the topic. Her eyes narrowed. Was he hiding something? And why had he mentioned Christine?

## CHAPTER 2



### HUNGER PANGS

The first turn-off from the main highway twisted through thickly forested granite hills. Opaque white sheets sailed from between bushland and lake, blanketing the road, and obscuring the shoulders. Artic winds whipped ice pellets against the vehicle, grating it like fine gravel.

“Dang.” Jack white-knuckled the steering wheel, his eyes fixated on the slippery, snow-covered asphalt. “This wind’s trying to throw us over the edge.”

At each successive gust, Amy sucked in her breath, gripped the edge of her seat, and bit down hard on her bottom lip until she tasted blood. After the third reprieve, she berated Jack, “I told you we shouldn’t have come. This backcountry’s no place for light vehicles.” *Or city drivers.* “My grandfather died during a blizzard. Somewhere up here.”

“Sorry. I remember you said he raised you.”

“Afterwards, the social workers took me away.” Amy spat. “I’ve never been back.”

“I didn’t mean to trigger you.”

“You didn’t. The trees do that.” Amy rubbed the fog from the passenger window and peered at the dense woods. If anyone lived

in there, it was impossible to tell. There were no driveways, gas stations, or any other obvious signs of life. Layers of white cloaked everything, even the highway markers.

Amy shivered, then checked her watch. It was getting late, and she was sure they hadn't seen another vehicle in at least thirty minutes. "Jack, where are we?"

"I'm not sure, exactly. The app stopped working." Jack mumbled softly. A fatigued tone replaced the previous cockiness in his voice.

Amy dug into her purse, pulled out her phone, and tapped on the screen. "I'm not getting a signal either." Her heart raced. "Jack, we don't have a working GPS! How will we know where to turn?"

"Can you call out?" Jack hugged the steering wheel, peered left and right, then stretched his head to each shoulder. "Did you notice the last mileage marker?"

Amy punched a number into the phone, then switched the cell signal on and off and tried to call again. "No to both questions."

Jack's jaw tightened and the veins in his neck bulged. "Come on Amy. You're supposed to be navigating."

"What?" Her head snapped left to glare at him. "Are you blaming me, now? You said you knew where to turn. Sideroad 181. Or was it 121?"

"118. Jerry said that the only access road into Mirror Lake is from 118. And we're to watch for colorful cottage signs. If we miss the cut-off, we'll have to turn around."

Amy's jaw dropped. "Handmade signposts? How can we spot those in this weather?"

Jack blew a long stream through his mouth and shook his head. "It's ok. We're not there yet. It's a three-hour drive. We've only been traveling for two hours."

"In total? Or to the turn-off?"

Jack's eyes widened, and he bit his bottom lip. "Don't worry, Red. We'll find a gas station or a cell signal soon."

Amy flexed her feet against the floor of the vintage coupe and rubbed her arms. "Jack, I'm scared. The storm's getting worse. I'm cold. My feet are frozen. And the heater's barely working."

"That I can fix." Jack adjusted the temperature controls, then turned up the radio. It whined and whistled as the station faded away. "We need some music. Did you bring any of those old CDs?"

"No, I never thought to. I always use my phone." Amy checked her purse. "Rats. We can't use it either. I didn't pack the right USB plug."

"How about a snack? Can you grab me a water and a sandwich? I'm getting hungry."

"Jack, we're lost! How can you think about food now?"

"A man's gotta keep up his strength."

"The cooler's in the back. I'm not crawling between the seats while you're fishtailing all over the road."

"Can't you reach it?"

"No, Jack! Not until you pull over."

"I'm not stopping now. I can't see the shoulder. We're in the middle of a white-out."

"No kidding. There's zero visibility. Do you have your lights on?"

Jack fiddled with the controls. "Yeah, they're on now."

"Jack, are we still on the right road? Did we miss a turnoff or take the wrong one?" The fear of being lost washed over Amy. Her stomach turned.

"No. I'm positive we haven't." Jack wiped his brow with the back of his hand.

“But we haven’t seen another car in miles. We’re in the middle of nowhere. I think we’re lost.” Amy ran her tongue over her dry lips and glanced at the cooler on the floor behind the driver’s seat.

“I don’t think so. I’m sure I recognize this spot from our guy’s weekend last summer.” Jack tucked in his chin and stretched his neck against the headrest.

“How can you tell? The rocks and trees all look the same to me,” Amy scoffed.

As they zigzagged around a hairpin curve, the wind and driving snow eased, and visibility improved. Ahead, the road sliced through the gray granite. On the right, the sheer rockface rose thirty feet above them. On the left, the tree-covered hillside dropped sharply toward the shoreline of a tiny lake. The narrow shoulders left no margin for error.

The postcard-like scenery — with its snow-dusted evergreens, the white-pillowed nooks of the naked birch trees, and the ice-covered lake below — awakened memories of steaming maple syrup layered on crystalline blankets, deer skins tanning on the smoking fire, and drums thundering with the heartbeat of mother earth.

*A lifetime ago.* Amy shook her head to clear the childhood images and eyed the cooler again. “Are we out of the worst of it?”

“Looks that way. At least for a bit. This hill is protecting us from the wind.” Jack peered up at the gray sky. “For now.”

“Okay. I’m getting food.” Amy unsnapped her seatbelt, got on her knees, and hunched over the console to grab the cooler behind Jack’s seat. “The lid’s stuck. You put it the wrong way, Jack.” She wriggled between the seats, then twisted to sit on the back bench. “Never mind. I got it. What do you want?” She yanked the cooler off the floor and set it beside her.

“Throw me a water and a sandwich, please. I’m starving.”

"Here." She passed the food between the seats.

"Thanks. You should get back up here before the wind picks up again. We're coming around the backside of this ridge."

"Nah. It's cozier back here. And I have pillows and blankets. It's too nerve-wracking sitting up front and watching you fight the road."

"Suit yourself. But strap in. We're coming around the bend."

"Fine." Amy punched the pillow, arranged it against the two-door-coupe's back frame, and wrapped the blanket around her legs. Then, ignoring Jack's seatbelt warning, she stretched out on the bench, tossed the cap on the water bottle, ripped open the bag of chips, and settled back to watch the snowfall and scenery through the rear windows.

## CHAPTER 3



### CRASH

When they came around the next rock-cut, the wind walloped head-on, and the car swerved violently to the left.

“Jack!” Amy screamed at the top of her lungs. But it was too late.

The car slammed against a fallen timber, somersaulted, then sailed through the woods towards the lake.

Amy’s neck snapped back, and her body contorted. She went up, then down, backwards and forwards, bouncing between the hard roof and the bench. The cooler became airborne and bashed into her chest, sending her sailing against the rear window.

The car hit a tree and flipped upright, then coasted down the hill until it snagged on the underbrush at the edge of the water. It came to a stop, gave a mechanical cough, and died.

Amy landed crumpled in the fetal position, squished between the back bench and the passenger seat. She lay there for an interminable length of time, shaking uncontrollably and trying to catch her breath. She waited for the car to shift again, barely noticing the incessant blaring of the horn. When she realized the noise was coming from their car, she pushed aside the blankets and pillows that had landed on top of her and jolted upright but immediately doubled over from the stabbing pain in her ribcage.

“Jack? Jack? Are you okay?” Amy cried out, then inhaled sharply. Every movement hurt and her body trembled violently. A loud whooshing noise pounded in her ears and her heart raced as if she’d just run a marathon. Her stomach threatened to heave. She grabbed the headrest of the passenger seat to pull herself forward, but stopped and stared, shocked by the surreal scene.

The car looked like a crushed aluminum can with its hood and roof flattened on the right side. The trunk of a tree lay crosswise between the shattered front and the passenger windows. It had narrowly missed Jack. If she’d been sitting in the front, she’d be dead now.

As she took in the truth of their close call Amy inhaled sharply. The stench of burning plastic from the exploded airbag filled her lungs and searing pain shot through her side. She gagged and hugged her ribcage, then held her breath until the discomfort lessened.

She spotted Jack slumped between the driver’s door and the steering wheel. Blood dripped from his nose. Gritting her teeth to fight the pain, the shakiness, and the pounding headache, she wriggled under the partially collapsed roof. Upon reaching him, she yanked at his jacket. He fell back and the horn stopped blaring.

“Jack, Jack! Answer me!”

A garbled groan rose from Jack’s throat. His eyes opened, and he slowly turned his head. “What happened?”

“We’ve had an accident, Jack. Please tell me you’re okay.”

He blinked several times before answering, then stared at her with a glazed expression on his face. “Yeah. Okay. I guess. You?”

“Fine. I think I broke a rib.” She pointed at the timber. “It could’ve been worse.” She shimmied to straddle the warm exhaust hump on the rear floor. What are we going to do, Jack? There’s no

cell service. I checked just before we hit. We need help. No one will see us in this storm."

"I'll go." Jack undid his seatbelt and yelped while pushing the door open. "Ow. My shoulder." He swiveled in his seat and stepped out of the car. "Yikes! The car's buried!"

Amy watched Jack's knees disappear in the snowdrift and glanced back at the steep cliff. "Are you sure you can make it, Jack? It looks like a long way up."

"I want to see what we hit. I'll flag down a snowplow. One has to come by soon."

"Then stay here, Jack. There's no point in standing beside the road, freezing to death. They'll find us. We can honk the horn to get their attention," Amy pleaded. But she knew it was futile to argue with her husband's stubborn nature.

Jack took a couple of steps, before collapsing in the snow and sinking to his armpits. "You're right. The cliff's too steep and the snow's too deep." He crawled back to the car. "And it's still snowing. Now what?"

"Honk the horn until someone hears it." Amy clutched her chest to stem her racing heart.

"Right." Jack returned to his seat and leaned on the horn. But the only response to the blaring note were wisps of snow floating down from the evergreens above them.

Amy wrapped a blanket around her legs. "Do you want something to eat or drink? I think there're still a few sandwiches left," she said, noticing the smashed-up cooler. "But I can't promise what shape they're in."

"Why not? I've got nothing else to do."

"Are you warm enough? Do you want a blanket and pillow?"

“Just a pillow.” Jack maneuvered sideways to lean his head against the door and raised his feet against the console.

Amy opened the cooler and groaned at the crushed sandwiches floating in a puddle of water. She fished one out and shook the water off the plastic. “Here. They’re rather squashed. But they’ll keep us alive.”

“Thanks. Did we bring a flashlight?” Jack tucked the pillow behind his sore shoulder and wiped his bloody nose on his sleeve before accepting the food. “A real one?”

She shook her head. “But we can use the app on the phones. Until the batteries die.”

“Right.” Jack retrieved his phone from his jacket pocket and switched on the app. He shone the brilliant LED into the wilderness and around the perimeter of the tiny snow-covered lake. “See those lights over there? It looks like a house. It’s not that far. I can walk across.”

“Don’t you dare! What if the lake isn’t frozen and you fall through the ice? And it’s getting dark. Don’t be stupid, Jack. Let’s stay here together until help arrives.”

Jack chomped on his sandwich and shone the flashlight around the crash site. “So, it looks like you just got your wish.”

“Huh?”

“The car’s toast. We’ll have to get a new one.”

“Great,” Amy answered sarcastically. “More bills.”

“Yeah. The insurance won’t give us much for this old heap.”

“I told you we shouldn’t have signed the house deal.” Amy’s heart fluttered with dread. She didn’t know which was worse — their injuries or the financial crisis that would confront them when they got home. They were in the middle of a nightmare, and they needed a Christmas miracle.

## CHAPTER 4



### GONE

*A*s dusk darkened, the clouds shrouded the rising moonlight and blocked the stars. Amy's spine prickled with fear. This was not how she'd envisioned her final days.

After flicking their flashlights on and off several times, Amy left hers on, setting it by the rear window and aiming the steady glow at the road above. Jack pointed his at the house across the lake.

"Let's hope someone sees us before the batteries die," Jack said. He leaned on the horn again.

"Or before we freeze to death." Amy sobbed and tightened the blanket around her shoulders. "I can't stop shaking. I'm so cold." She tucked a second blanket around her legs.

Jack handed his pillow back to her. "Here, sweetie, I don't need this. Lie down and get some rest. Someone will be by soon and call for help."

"I hope you're right." Amy curled up on the bench seat. As her head sank into the soft pillow, a calming warmth spread over her, and her splitting headache abated. "I'm so tired, Jack."

"I should've gone across the lake earlier. It's too late now." Jack twisted to look directly at her. His icy blue eyes flickered in the glooming darkness like two shiny pinpricks of light.

“Yeah. Too late. Don’t even think of it.” Overcome by exhaustion, Amy pulled the blanket over her shoulders and closed her eyes.



*F*lashing yellow lights, the whine of a big engine, and the grating of a plow blade against the asphalt woke Amy from a deep sleep. The scraping stopped and a male voice boomed down from the road, “Is anyone down there?”

“Jack?” Amy croaked. “Jack, someone’s here.” She sat up and shifted onto the floorboards to shake her husband. But her hand only met the frigid breeze.

“No! Jack?” Her heart raced and the image of Jack disappearing through the thin ice darted through her mind. “Please tell me you didn’t ....” She inhaled deeply, then winced from the jabbing pain in her side. “Help! Help, over here,” she screamed. But her weak voice couldn’t surmount the noise from the loud idling motor, and she doubled over from the wasted energy, coughing.

Frantically, she retrieved her cellphone from the back window. Staring at the black screen, she shook it repeatedly. A red line popped up, then disappeared. “Come on. Don’t die on me now.” In disbelief, she powered the phone off, then on again, but there was no response.

*How long was I sleeping?* She scanned the dashboard for a beam of light. But there was only darkness. Jack had obviously taken his phone with him.

Discouraged, she sank back on her haunches. *Now what?*

The snowplow’s engine whined back to life and the blade screeched against the pavement. Amy scurried into the front seat, “No, stop. Don’t leave!” But the machine swallowed her voice and

rolled forward, slamming against the offending debris on the road. After a long squeal and a rustling crash, a pole tumbled into the bush and bumped into the car. The machine roared into high gear and rumbled down the highway.

“Wait!” Amy lunged from the car and promptly sank to her hips in the snowdrift. The plow moved on.

Disheartened, she stood there, studying the shadowy landscape in the moonlight. The embankment rose sharply on a steep incline of at least twenty feet. “There’s no way I can climb that!” Amy considered her options: risk her life crossing the lake, hike around it through the forest, or stay put.

Suddenly aware that the wind had quietened, she gazed in awe at the moonlit woods. Her grandfather’s voice whispered in the soft breeze. *If you listen closely, you can hear the wind and trees speak.*

Soft, white flakes floating from the midnight sky cast a ghostly glow in the evergreens. The tall timbers surrounded her like a dense army of towering black and green sentinels draped in glittering white coats. The howling wolves in the distance amplified the haunting ambience.

If this was any ordinary winter holiday, she’d be roasting marshmallows over a crackling fire, while marveling at this pristine view.

But there was nothing romantic about freezing her butt off in this hostile frozen terrain. And the spooky quiet made her feel lost, forgotten, and alienated from the world. Amy exhaled and watched her breath crystalize into the void.

“Jack, where did you go?” She scanned for tracks in the snow, but there were none. Then, she toyed with her dead phone, willing it to life. Remembering the area’s lack of cell service, she tucked it into her pocket.

Shimmering golden lights across the lake beckoned through the trees. If Jack went there, help would arrive soon. *But what if he didn't make it?* The terrifying possibility filled her with dread. "Then I must save myself," she said out loud. "I'll freeze to death if I stay here."

Amy plodded through the first drift, then second-guessed her choice, and stopped. The car had blankets. What was she thinking? She didn't have the strength to fight nature. It was hard enough to breathe. Her side ached. She'd never make it. *No. Keep moving, Amy. Focus on the light. You can do this.* Breathlessly, she pushed on — denying relief to the plaguing pain — floundering through the cumbersome white powder with the entire weight of her petite frame. The snow's crust yielded easily but the base held firm. Amy lifted her knees high, stamping down, crunching through the deep layers, and pulling herself forward like a cross country skier — one step at a time. With the trees along the lakeshore as her goalposts, she steered from one to the next.

In the densest part of the forest, a packed trail with ankle-deep snow emerged. Amy trekked along it, praying it would guide her to civilization. But as the clouds moved in and overshadowed both the moon and the path, the snowstorm returned.

Overwhelmed, she sank to her knees and sobbed, pleading to the heavens for a supernatural rescue. Tears streamed down her frozen cheeks. "I can't quit now," she scolded herself. "I've come too far. I must keep going." But her jellied legs refused to budge.

She collapsed against a giant pine to wait for her heart to stop racing and her rubbery legs to strengthen. Her throat felt like sandpaper. She peered back through the dark woods, but the car was no longer in sight. "I should've brought water. What was I thinking?" Exhausted and numb from the cold, she put her head back and closed her eyes.

Across the lake, a snowmobile engine clicked and buzzed, then sputtered to a low whining purr.

## CHAPTER 5



### THE CABIN

*S*nip, snap, pop. Amy awakened to the crackling of a roaring blaze and the sulfuric incense of a hardwood fire. She took a deep breath and stretched her arms, then cried out from the stabbing pain in her side. She opened her eyes and blinked. Then blinked again.

A few feet away, flickering flames danced inside a massive stone chamber with an equally impressive chimney that extended upwards some twenty feet to the rafters of a rustic hand-hewn A-frame log house.

Amy wracked her brain. She remembered falling asleep at the base of a large tree in the middle of the forest, but that wasn't where she was now. Instead, she lay under a downy blanket on a rose-colored couch in front of the magnificent fire.

Her gaze drifted around the dimly lit room. On the opposite wall, moonlight beamed through ivory lace curtains covering an antique wavy glass window. A chilly draft blew from another window behind the couch. To the left of the chimney, silky cobwebs floated from the timbered joists and light shone from behind the double-sided fireplace.

Decorating the pine logs, between the rows of grayish chinking, hung a scattered array of native beadwork and framed retro photos.

A large dreamcatcher dangled from the rafters beside a hewn staircase that led to an open loft.

Amy knew the pine by its knots and whirls. When she'd helped her grandfather carve planks and tree stumps into useful and ornamental objects to sell at the market fairs, he'd taught her how to identify the various woods. But after he died, she'd lost interest in the art. A part of her missed it, missed him. Missed his twinkling amber eyes and wrinkled smile. If only they'd had one more summer together.

She sniffed at the familiar smudgy essence of burning cedar, sage, and pine. The smoke evoked nostalgic memories of talking circles around the sacred fire and sparked a yearning to reconnect with her estranged Indigenous roots.

Amy traced the long beams of the open rafters with her eyes until she spotted Jack nestled beside her in a padded rocking chair, sipping on a steaming cup of coffee. The heady, invigorating scent invited her to sit up. But as soon as she lifted her head, a queasy wooziness flooded over her and a sharp pain shot through her side.

"No. Don't get up," Jack put his hand out to stop her. "You almost froze to death in the woods. You need to rest."

She palmed her mouth and lay back, waiting for the nausea to pass. Despite the warm fire and the downy coverlet, her bones felt icy cold, as if she was still lying on the snowy ground in the forest. She couldn't stop shivering. "How did we get here, Jack?"

"When the storm let up, I hiked across the lake. God only knows when help would have arrived if I hadn't. I'm sorry for abandoning you, Red. I couldn't take the risk of us both freezing to death."

"You walked *across* the lake? What if you'd fallen in, Jack?"

"But I didn't. And you're here now and we're both safe." Jack held the coffee cup to his nose and inhaled deeply, then sipped. "You

should be grateful.”

“I am. Sorry. Thanks. I guess.”

“You’re welcome. By the way, do you want something to drink? The coffee is out of this world.” Jack’s blue eyes twinkled over the rim of the mug.

Amy shook her head. “You know I don’t drink coffee at night.”

“Orenda swears it’s caffeine free.”

“Who?”

Jack jerked his chin towards a matronly woman with salt and pepper hair sitting on a rocking chair under the hewn staircase, knitting. Above her, a gray cat with yellow eyes purred from its perch on a crossbeam. “Orenda, come meet my wife.”

The woman set down her wool and padded over, her leather moccasins swishing and slapping the plank flooring with a soft percussive beat.

Amy twisted her head to get a better look, but a wave of vertigo knocked her back to the pillows. “Whoa. Why am I so dizzy?”

“We were in an accident, Amy! Don’t you remember? You must’ve hit your head.”

“I remember the accident. And waking up to find you gone.” Amy frowned, fighting the blank spots in her memory. “I went to look for you, Jack. How did you find me?”

“Snowmobiles. You were under a tree on the trail. Unconscious. Didn’t you wake up when we moved you onto the sled?”

Amy shook her head, “I don’t recall.”

“How are you feeling?” Orenda straightened the covers over Amy’s shoulders. Their eyes met.

*Amber. Like mine.*

“Dizzy. Nauseous. And my side hurts. My vision’s blurry. But only when I move my head.”

“You likely have a concussion.” Orenda pinned her long, single braid into a bun, fastening it with an oval, multi-colored beaded barrette. Then she passed her hands above Amy’s head, neck, and shoulders in a waving motion and slowly moved downward along Amy’s body — as if checking the temperature of the air above her. When she reached Amy’s ribcage, she stopped. “Does it hurt to breathe?”

“A bit.” Amy shifted and a knife-like pain cut through her side. She inhaled sharply, then yelped. “Ow.”

Orenda continued palpating the air past Amy’s abdomen and legs. When she reached the feet, she grunted. “No serious damage. I’ll get some ice to help with the bruising. But you should see a doctor in the morning. Are you thirsty?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll be back in a few minutes.” Orenda padded away to the lit space behind the fireplace.

Amy wriggled into the soft couch cushions and pulled the comforter around her shoulders. Icy pinpricks traveled up and down her arms and the draft chilled her face. Even though she was only a few feet from the fire, she couldn’t get warm. “Jack, why didn’t you turn around when the roads got so slippery?”

“I thought I could handle it.” Jack said defensively. “I didn’t expect to be in an accident.”

“Obviously. You’re such an arrogant ass, Jack. We could’ve died out there.” Amy clenched her fists. Tears welled in her eyes. “You didn’t care about me.”

“That’s not true, Red. I went to save us both. Don’t be mad now. We’re alive.” Jack flinched as he sipped his coffee. “And we’ll be fine.”

Amy noticed the painful note in Jack's tone as he shifted his legs on the leather hassock and adjusted the patchwork quilt covering them. "Are you hurt?"

Jack shrugged. "It's just an ankle sprain. I'll be fine."

"Is that from the accident? Or from the hike?"

"I dunno. I don't remember."

"You don't?"

Orenda returned with a tray containing a plastic bag filled with ice, a vintage tin coffeepot, and a plate of sugar cookies. She set it down on the tree stump coffee table and wrapped the bag of ice in a tea-towel. "Hold this against your sore rib. It will help with the pain."

Amy scowled but obediently applied the frozen compress to her ribs. "More ice. As if I'm not cold enough! I already feel like one giant ice cube. I'm shivering constantly. I can't get warm."

Orenda poured the steaming beverage into a mug. "I have something for that, too."

"I don't drink coffee at night." Amy protested.

"It's almost morning." Orenda's doe eyes crinkled at the edges. "This is from my special collection. It will help you relax and ease your pain."

"Trust me. It helps." Jack quipped.

"Fine." Amy pushed herself upright slowly but paused when another wave of dizziness and nausea washed over her. When it passed, she accepted the cup and politely sipped under Orenda's watchful eye.

"Drink it all," Orenda ordered, pointing first to the pot, and then to the loft. "I'm getting some rest. Call me if you need anything. I'm a light sleeper." She padded to the stairs and picked up the gray cat

with the yellow eyes before disappearing into the darkness of the loft.

Amy raised her eyebrows and whispered, "She's very trusting."  
"It's not like we can go anywhere," Jack replied.

## CHAPTER 6



### DRINKING COFFEE

*A*my sniffed at the beverage before sipping it again. “What is this? It almost tastes like coffee, but it’s nutty and herbily.”

“I dunno. But I’m feeling very fine. My leg barely hurts anymore.” Jack’s face lit up with a grin. “Whatever it is, it’s working.”

“Is she feeding us drugs? Good grief, Jack. We don’t know this woman. What if she’s a psychopath? Maybe she’s planning to kill us.” As she stared at her reflection in the drink’s flickering surface, a swirling foamy bead bubbled in the center and the heady aroma filled her nostrils. She wanted to stop drinking, but as the warm liquid filled her mouth, her chill eased. She sipped again. “You’re right, Jack. This is delicious. But I’m scared. What if...?”

“Relax, Red. If she was planning to kill us, she would’ve let us freeze to death. She wouldn’t have rescued us.”

“I suppose you’re right, Jack. But she’s much too nice. And far too trusting of us. She doesn’t know us, either.”

“Perhaps you’re the one with the trust issues, Red. You imagine trouble when it doesn’t exist.”

“Huh. Like the icy roads? Maybe you’re the psychopath who wants to get rid of me. You risked our lives by driving through a

blizzard.”

“Why would I deliberately risk my life if I wanted to get rid of you? You’re not making any sense, Red.”

“For the insurance money.”

“What?” Jack coughed. “You’re nuts!”

“We upped my insurance a few months ago. I’m worth more dead than alive.” The dark thought rose from somewhere deep inside her soul. She’d never dare to utter it out loud. But it had crossed her mind when she signed the papers. Her heart thumped loudly in her head. What if the accident wasn’t really an accident?

She set aside her suspicion about the coffee’s intoxicating effect and studied the flickering flames in the fireplace. They’d been arguing a lot recently, and she’d caught Jack in several white lies. Then, there were those late nights with Christine after the bar closed and the increasingly frequent times when he didn’t answer her texts. How well did she know her husband?

“Amy, look at me.” Jack’s voice softened. “Do you honestly think I’m capable of that? Do you think that little of me?”

Amy turned to look him in the eye. “I don’t know, Jack. There’s been some weird stuff going on lately. And I don’t know what to believe anymore.”

“Such as?”

“Why don’t you want me working at the restaurant in the evenings?” She swallowed the last of the strange coffee, then leaned forward to grab a refill from the pot. Another wave of dizziness washed over her, and the mug dropped from her hands and clattered onto the tray. “Jack, I don’t feel so good.”

“Lie down, Red. You need to rest. We’ll go to the hospital in the morning.”

Amy was lucid enough to notice that Jack avoided her question about Christine. But before she could confront him again, her vision blurred, and the room swam. She collapsed backwards onto the couch, shivering uncontrollably. As she pulled the comforter up to her neck and sank into the soft pillow, a warm heat passed over her and she stopped shaking. "Mmm. That feels so good." She murmured. "You're right, Jack. There's something in the coffee."

As she dozed, her mind returned to the crash.

Suddenly, she was floating above the car, seeing the accident scene from outside her body — Jack crumpled behind the wheel, and she splayed in the back seat under a collapsed roof. A timber pinned the passenger door and crushed the car's hood and side. Electrical wires floated in the air above, their fiery sparks threatening both the vehicle and the evergreens. It wasn't a tree that pierced the window, as she'd first thought. They'd hit a utility pole. It had rolled down the hill and landed on top of them after they crashed to the bottom.

Amy turned and glided up the embankment to where flashing lights lit up a sign saying, 'road closed ahead.' When they'd hit the pole, a transformer burst into flames, dropped onto the hood, and a wall of blue electrical fire encircled them. Somehow, they'd skyrocketed into the trees.

But how had they missed the sign?

Amy inhaled sharply. "Jack, we took the wrong road. We were supposed to turn around."

Floating from somewhere beside her in the dream, Jack answered, "It was storming. I couldn't see."

Suddenly, Amy found herself in their restaurant bar watching Jack and Christine drinking beer while paging through a sheaf of legal documents. Jack wrapped an arm around his coworker's shoulders and kissed her forehead. Christine leaned into him. For Amy,

the affectionate exchange felt like a punch in the gut. What was going on between those two? Then she remembered. Just before the crash, she'd been thinking about them.

*The accident! Are we dead?* Amy trembled and pulled the blanket over her head. The wind was bitterly cold.

"What will Christine do without you?" She asked, knowing the answer. The woman couldn't run the restaurant without Jack.

"No!" Jack's voice echoed through her dream. "Don't give up, Red. We'll be ok."

"But it's not, is it?" Her voice sounded as if she was inside a tin can and her thoughts jumbled. Nothing made sense. Was she dead or alive? Conscious or dreaming? She couldn't tell. "What's going on between you and Christine, Jack? We're starting a family. This isn't right."

"It's not like that, Red. You're wrong. There's nothing between us."

"Then what is it? Tell me the truth, Jack. I need to know. I can't live ... like this."

Before she could hear Jack's answer, Amy's vision faded to black.

## CHAPTER 7



### RESCUE

The clamor of buzzing saws and clanging chains roused Amy from her delirium. She tried to turn away from the icy breeze, but something hard pushed down on her face and blocked her head. Her chest ached with a stabbing pain. She coughed but the dagger-like pain shot into her neck and skull. Then she tried to speak, but her voice only produced a garbled groan. She touched her face and recognized the shape of an oxygen mask.

“All clear,” a male voice shouted. “Stabilizing the vehicle,” yelled another.

“I’ve got her,” a female voice called out. “She’s breathing.”

A searing pain flooded Amy’s body and she cried out and opened her eyes. Someone squeezed her hand.

“Hi there. You’re going to be fine. Lie still. I’m putting a collar around your neck. We’re going to slide a board under you and pull you out of the car. Just listen to my voice and don’t move. We’ll do all the work. Do you understand?” The paramedic snapped the cervical collar around Amy’s neck. “Can you tell me your name?”

“Amy.” Had Orenda forgotten her already? Her eyes darted around her surroundings. Why had they left the cozy cabin and come back here?

"Hi Amy. I'll stay with you until you're safe. Don't worry about a thing." The woman Amy recognized as Orenda tucked the mylar emergency blanket around Amy's body.

"Jack?" Amy's heart raced. Was he dead?

"Your husband's in the ambulance. He's going to be fine." The woman's amber eyes crinkled at the corners. "You're lucky you were in the back seat. It saved your life. What made you decide to sit here?" She switched the mask for a nasal cannula to make it easier for her patient to speak.

"I was tired. Jack was hungry." Amy pointed to where the cooler had been. Now broken water bottles and packages of foodstuffs littered the interior. She wanted to sit up and look, but the paramedic held her fast, shielding Amy from the view around them.

The sawing stopped, and the roof of the car disappeared. Warm golden sunlight filtered through the snow-laden trees. *It's broad daylight. Have I been here all night?* Amy wracked her brain. Was it all a dream?

The front passenger seat disappeared, and firefighters passed in and out of Amy's peripheral vision.

"What time is it?" Amy croaked.

"Almost noon. Are you hungry?" Orenda's round, tan face lit up with a comforting smile as she touched Amy's forehead and cheeks. Her palms glowed with a rosy warmth.

"Noon? Saturday?" They had left home at five on Friday.

"Sunday." Orenda's brown eyebrows wrinkled together as she studied Amy's face. "Do you remember what happened?"

"Friday. You were there." Amy's body shivered uncontrollably. "At the log cabin."

"Friday? Sorry, I don't understand. What log cabin?" Orenda turned to the workers outside the car. "Can we speed it up here?"

Where's that backboard?"

"Right here." A male voice answered.

The paramedics slipped the spinal board under Amy and secured the straps around her body.

"Ok, Amy. We're ready to carry you out of here and up the cliff. It's a steep climb, but don't worry. You're tightly strapped. You won't slide off." Orenda adjusted the straps on her gloves and flexed her fingers. "How do you feel?"

"Like a swaddled baby." Amy groaned.

"Good. Please let me know if your pain gets worse when we're moving. First, we're lifting you up and out of the car. Then we'll stop and secure the guide ropes before ascending the cliff. I'll be with you the whole time. You don't have to do a thing. Just hold tight. Do you understand?"

Amy nodded. But as the crew hoisted the stretcher, the icy wind slapped Amy's face and she sucked in her breath and shrieked.

"Are you ok, Amy?"

"Yes. Breathing hurts."

"Take smaller breaths for now. And hang on tight. We're about to head straight uphill."

As the stretcher tilted upright, the crash site came into view. It was exactly as she'd seen in her dream, except the power lines and transmission pole had been moved away from the car. In the distance, across the lake, she could just make out the outline of an old log cabin.

## CHAPTER 8



### A BIG SURPRISE

*A*fter the doctor left Amy's hospital room, a nurse walked in, pushing Jack on a wheelchair. "I heard you two are walking miracles. Is it true you were in the bush for thirty-seven hours in the middle of the storm?"

"Apparently!" A crooked smile lit up Jack's blistered face.

"Unbelievable." The nurse shook her head. "Let me know when you want to go back to your room, Jack. I'm just around the corner."

After she left the room, Amy grunted, "You okay?"

Jack pointed to the cast on his foot. "Just a bad sprain, dislocated shoulder, frostbite, whiplash, cuts and bruises. It could've been much worse. They're keeping me overnight."

"Your face looks as sore as mine feels," Amy said sympathetically. "I've got broken ribs. Concussion. Pneumonia. Bruises and frostbite too. But they're running more tests. I'm throwing up a lot."

"I'm sorry you're hurt so bad, Red. Look, I know I should have turned around when the storm got bad. I honestly thought we'd get out of it in a few miles. This is all my fault. I'm just glad nothing worse happened to you. I don't know what I would do if ...."

"Stop apologizing, Jack. Feeling guilty won't help. What's done is done. How will we get home? The car's totaled."

Jack nodded. "I've called Jerry. They waited at the cottage all weekend, worried sick when we didn't answer the phones. They're relieved we're okay. He'll drive us home when we're ready. But I'm getting a hotel room. I want to stay nearby until you're released."

"Don't do that, Jack. It's too expensive. What if I'm here for a week or longer? Under the circumstances, neither of us will work for a while." Amy fretted over the financial implications of their dilemma. Jack's attempt to placate her feelings wouldn't help. If anything, his proposal only made the financial stress worse. "Go home, please. Come back when they release me."

"And do what? Worry about you? No, Amy. You're my wife. I want to be with you." Jack's blistered lips stretched into a swollen white line. He pulled at the bed's railing with his good arm to maneuver the wheelchair closer to her. "Don't worry about the money, honey. We'll figure it out after you get home. The insurance will help. I'll call them tomorrow."

"What about Christine and the restaurant?"

"I've already called her. She'll handle things until we get back."

*Of course, you did.* "Jack, is something going on between you two?" Amy's heart raced. She wanted to know, but at the same time, she didn't. "Please tell me the truth."

"The truth?" Blood oozed from Jack's lips as he rubbed them together. He sucked on them and looked down at the floor. "I don't think it matters anymore."

"What does that mean?"

"You're right, Red. I was keeping something from you."

Amy inhaled sharply, then immediately winced from the pain. Was Jack about to confess to an affair? She clenched the sheet between her fists.

“Christine is giving up her job as manager and going back to serving,” Jack explained.

“What? Why?” Amy frowned. “Is she pregnant?”

Jack chuckled. “No, nothing like that. Her mom’s not well and she needs time to get her disabled sister settled into independent living. She can’t handle the sixteen-hour days right now.”

“Huh,” Amy reflected on the revelation. “So, how does that affect us?”

“Well, I guess the cat’s out of the bag. I wanted to surprise you, but ...” Jack shrugged.

“Surprise me? How?” She wanted to throttle him. He was taking much too long to explain.

“Well, they offered me the general manager position. And you — the new dining room manager. If you want the job.”

“If I what? Of course, I do!” Amy couldn’t believe her ears. “So ... does this mean we’re both getting raises?”

“Yeah, sweetie. That’s why I wasn’t worried about the extra house expenses. Although, first, we have to recover. Obviously. But Christine said she can wait a few more weeks.”

“Jack, I want to kiss you right now. But I can’t get up and I can’t breathe.” Amy pinched herself. She could hardly believe the good news. There was no affair, Jack hadn’t been disloyal, and her financial fears had just evaporated. Her heart beat with happiness.

Jack pulled himself out of the wheelchair and limped to her side. Then, he bent down and kissed her. “Can I order that hotel room now?”

“Yes, you have my permission.”

## CHAPTER 9



### ORENDA

The door opened, and Orenda breezed in carrying a paper bag and a cardboard tray. “I brought quality coffee for the town’s newest celebrities,” she said. “The hospital’s brand is notorious.”

“But you know I don’t drink coffee this late in the day!” Amy exclaimed, grinning.

The paramedic chuckled as she set the tray on the bedside table and dispersed the coffee and donuts. “Now how would I know that? But don’t worry. It’s decaf.” Orenda wound her long single braid into a bun and clasped it to the back of her head with a large, beaded barrette.

“I think you know a lot more than that.” Amy said.

Jack nodded, and his eyes narrowed. “My face may be frostbitten, but one thing I know for certain. There’s no way anyone could survive in that bitter cold for thirty-seven hours. Even if we did, this frostbite would be gangrenous by now.”

A playful grin toyed at the corners of Orenda’s mouth. “I guess my secret’s out.”

“How did you do it?” Amy probed.

“I volunteer on the snowmobile trail. We check the trails every day for stranded sledders, or in case someone had an unfortunate

accident with a widow-maker.”

“A widow-maker?” Amy asked, alarmed at the term.

“Yeah. Fallen trees or low-hanging branches that pose a danger to sledders. I also check the trail shelters for transients or those hiking back to civilization after their sleds break down. That’s where I found Jack. In the lean-to along the trail.”

“But we had the accident Friday,” Amy protested. “How did we get to the log cabin and back to the car?”

Orenda brown eyebrows knit together and she shook her head. “Log cabin? The storm raged all night Friday and Saturday. I found you both on Saturday night. I wrapped Jack in an emergency blanket and gave him a thermos of coffee. He kept calling your name, so I left him to search for you. When I found you, I called for help, but the crews had to wait for the power company to clear the lines and poles first. They couldn’t access the site until daylight.”

Jack interrupted. “Orenda, I remember the log cabin, too. You were there, giving us coffee in front of a huge fire.”

“Jack, I started a fire at the trail shelter. You were there the whole time. I went back and forth until help arrived. I didn’t move you.”

Amy met Jack’s eyes, and they both raised their eyebrows simultaneously.

“Well, that’s really weird.” Amy said as she sipped her coffee. “Both of us having the same dream.” She stared at the shiny surface of the black liquid and the mesmerizing creamy swirl in the center.

“Hallucinations are common with hypothermia.” Orenda gulped the rest of her coffee and tossed the paper cup in the trash. “I’m glad we found you in time.”

“And we’re thankful you were there to save us.” Amy still wasn’t convinced that the coffee wasn’t a magical potion. Or that Orenda was being entirely truthful.

“I must get back to work. Can I give you both a hug?” Without waiting for an answer, the mysterious woman shuffled alongside the bed and made a slow waving motion over Amy’s body. Then, she clasped Amy’s face in her hands and kissed her cheeks.

A tingling warmth radiated through Amy’s torso and her blurred vision cleared.

Orenda turned and embraced Jack similarly. After she kissed him on both cheeks, he leaned back and closed his eyes.

Amy was sure she saw a rosy glow flowing from Orenda’s palms.

“Goodbye, you two. All the best.” She said as she turned to leave. “And don’t worry about the baby, Amy. She’s going to be just fine.”

Jack’s eyes met hers. “Baby?”

Amy gasped. “Jack! My nausea!”

## CHAPTER 10



### EIGHT MONTHS LATER

Amy strapped the baby in the carrier before answering the female server. “She’s six weeks. Her name’s Orenda.”

“Orenda?” the server repeated as she poured the coffee. “That’s an Iroquois word. Are you Indigenous?”

“Huh?” Amy startled. Discussing her genetics and foster care history with a stranger was a tad too intimate in her opinion. She sidestepped the question. “Actually, I named her after a paramedic who saved our lives in a storm last year.”

“Really?” The woman’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Do you know what the word means?”

Amy shook her head. “No, what?”

“The Iroquois describe Orenda as a supernatural life force that embodies inanimate objects. It comes alive during storms.”

“Whoa! That’s weirdly coincidental.” An icy finger traveled down Amy’s spine.

“I’m guessing you’re not from here,” the server said, cooing at the fussing infant. “What brings you by? It’s not exactly tourist season.”

Amy sipped the coffee. “I’m trying to track down the paramedic, Orenda. I want to introduce the baby to her namesake, but I’m hav-

ing trouble finding her. No one at the ambulance station or fire department know of her. But she must live nearby. Our accident was along the old snowmobile trail — a couple of miles from here.”

The server shook her head. “I’ve lived here my whole life. But I don’t know anyone named Orenda. What does she look like?”

“Tall. Stocky build. Salt and pepper hair. Indigenous. Around fifty.”

“Huh.” The server shrugged. “That describes a lot of local women, but nobody I know. Did you get a last name?”

“Nope.” Amy set down the mug and added an extra spoonful of sugar. The coffee was much too strong and the search for the mysterious Orenda much too strange. “Is there a log cabin with a massive stone fireplace nearby? Near the old trail?”

“Listen, love. You’re in the middle of the wilderness on First Nations lands. Almost every little lake has a log cabin. But one on the defunct trail? Let me think ...” She tapped her finger on her chin. “There’s the Robinson place on Silver Lake. But it was partly destroyed by fire in the seventies. The owner didn’t have any insurance and couldn’t afford to rebuild. Or possibly he was afraid to because a volunteer firefighter died there. Anyway, there’s not much left of the house. The kids use it as a party place now. They say it’s haunted.” She pointed to a wall decorated with legacy photos. “The firefighter’s picture’s over there.”

Amy scraped her chair back. “Can you show me?”

The server set down the coffee pot and led Amy to the photo. “Here.” She tapped on the frame, then studied the news article underneath it. “Well, how about that? Her name was Orenda. The article says she never married or had children. She dedicated her life to saving others.”

“It can’t be.” Amy studied the photo. The familiarity to the paramedic was much too striking. Chills ran up and down her back. “Where’s that log cabin?”

The server jerked her thumb. “Next road, turn right. Drive to the dead end. You’ll see the stone chimney from the road. Watch out for wildlife. And broken glass.”



Ten minutes later, Amy parked on the crest of a hill where a majestic stone structure towered above the forested canopy of golden oaks and red maples and touched the azure sky.

She tucked her sleeping daughter into the infant sling and crept through the brambles and warty underbrush until they reached the dirt trail leading to the roofless, scribed log house and its granite smokestack. Amy’s heart thumped wildly as she approached the dilapidated building. Shattered glass littered the stone foundation. “Kids having parties,” she said, recalling the server’s comments.

She stepped through the blackened portal and gasped. The fireplace was just as she remembered it. A talking circle composed of toppled logs surrounded the double-sided hearth. Falling leaves floated onto a weather-beaten antique rocking chair perched against the remains of a scorched hewn staircase.

Brushing her fingers along the fragments of rotting gray pitch chinking between the charred logs, she nervously ambled towards the chair. A knot in the wood caught her attention. She toyed with it and wiggled the object loose. Then, she inspected it closely and gasped. The multi-colored beaded hair clip looked exactly like the one Orenda had worn.

A gust of wind blew across her face. As she looked up, she spotted the inscription on the log. "Listen to the wind." It was signed "Wind Talker." It was her grandfather's native name. Amy hugged her baby to her chest and wept. "We're home, Orenda. Grandfather found us and brought us home."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MJ Krause-Chivers is a multi-genre Canadian author and PTSD survivor. She once lived in a haunted log house in the Georgian Bay Biosphere in northern Ontario but now resides near Niagara Falls, Canada.

The author writes about trauma, faith, and complicated relationships. Her Christian non-fiction work is signed as Miranda J. Chivers.

Her latest work in progress is a historical fiction family saga inspired by her grandparents' experiences during the Russian civil war in Ukraine. *Russian Mennonite Chronicles* is a coming-of-age series that portrays the ethnic cleansing of the German Mennonites from southern Ukraine.

If you enjoyed this short story, please check out her other work on Amazon, GoodReads, and Linktree.

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