

UNCOMMON  
JUSTICE  
BOOK 3

***DON'T KEEP  
SILENT***

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Elizabeth Goddard, *Don't Keep Silent*

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To Jonathan—

I adore how much you love the Lord, your devotion to him, and the way you answer his call to spread the good news, never fearing what others might think as you kneel to pray in the middle of a busy hospital or, when at the grocery store, ask a complete stranger if you can pray for him. You were born to do what others fear doing. Stand firm. God is with you.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,  
for the rights of all who are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly;  
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:8–9



Where there is much light, the shadows are deepest.  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

# PROLOGUE

ROCKY MOUNTAINS  
NORTHWEST WYOMING

*Had we never met, you and I, then you never would have loved me. I never would have returned your love.*

*And now look at us. I've caused you trouble. Brought you pain. All I wanted to do was protect you. Please forgive me.*

*Please know that I love you.*

*Loved you.*

Her identification stripped, she signed her full name and added her address for good measure. She tucked the note into her jeans, her last words—if it came to that—meant to give him closure.

Her abductor thought that by hiding her here in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by this frozen world, she would be trapped.

For the average person, that was true.

With no internet or communication devices, she couldn't cause more trouble. In this rustic getaway cabin meant for the privileged, she'd been left with only what was required to sustain her life until

he arrived. He knew from experience her capabilities and vowed he wouldn't underestimate her again.

But all the same, he'd miscalculated.

Glancing through the small window, she took in the deep snow surrounding her and made her own calculations. He didn't understand that she would rather face certain death—woman versus nature, as it were—than face *him*. She wouldn't come out of that meeting alive, so her chances were better out there on the frozen lake surrounded by millions of acres of pristine, snow-blanketed mountain wilderness.

Considering how the cabin had been richly furnished, she was surprised that more work from local artists didn't grace the walls. The only art was the immaculate carving in the cedar logs—a surprisingly accurate depiction of a popular geothermal pool titled *Morning Glory Pool*—but she couldn't use that in her escape or for a weapon. Maybe the décor had been removed for her stay. Still, some things remained or had been overlooked—like the vintage snowshoes used as sconces—and that had given her hope.

*All I need is an ounce.*

After removing the snowshoes from the wall, she layered old newspapers underneath her clothes for added warmth. Then she grabbed some wool blankets from the closet and a Nordic-style comforter from the bed. Travel would be cumbersome and slow. The longer she could last out there, the better. Nonetheless, she would probably die from exposure.

But at least her death would be on her own terms.

She clenched her jaw. She couldn't—*wouldn't*—let him win.

Blowing out a long breath, she forced the tension from her muscles. Unfortunately, she'd had to wait until the two men who'd been tasked with guarding her had left on the snowmobiles—the only way to get in or out of this winter getaway. That meant darkness would drop on her world within the hour.

Her watchers had not considered her a “flight risk,” as they

called it. After all, without adequate protection, who would trek into the frozen mountain wilderness during the day, much less at night?

That had been the minions' first mistake. All she'd needed was one.

She drew in a quick breath and opened the door. Bitter cold whipped around her, sending snow into the small dwelling and stinging her cheeks.

Her throat constricted.

For a moment, she reconsidered her decision. But she had no real options. She repositioned the wool blanket to cover her face, all except for her eyes, and pulled the comforter tighter around the other blankets. The layers would keep her warm but slow her down.

The men had shoveled the snow away from the door so they could venture to their snowmobiles to fetch the man behind her abduction. Now she would use the cleared path for her escape, though no snowmobile waited to carry her away to safety. She'd have to depend on her own two legs.

She took a step. Then another. And another. The snowshoes held and, leaving the shoveled path, she hopped on top of the white crust and kept walking. The tears streaming from her eyes could be tears of joy or pure fear, she wasn't sure.

The wind pushed against her forward movement as if telling her to go back, whispering certain death in her ear.

Was she making a mistake?

No. Death waited for her at the cabin if she didn't leave. She eyed the frozen lake topped with many layers of white frosting. It was much quicker to cross here than to go all the way around. Nothing but mountain ranges were at her back. She wasn't going over those.

She wouldn't make it around the lake before dark, maybe not even across it. If she made it across at all, then she would face miles of wilderness.

The thought almost paralyzed her. Maybe she should go back. She glanced over her shoulder at the cabin.

No—her only hope was out there. Another dwelling. A hunter. A snowmobiler. A forest ranger. Even a forest road. Someone else was out there. Earlier in the day, she'd heard rifle fire. A snowmobile. *Another ounce of hope.*

Her kidnapper didn't realize her drive to live.

She took one step after another, willing herself to keep moving. Willing herself to survive. Unfortunately, with the deep snow she couldn't be sure what she was stepping on. March could warm the ice beneath the snow cover, creating treacherous breaks.

She plodded on, gasping for breath with each lumbering step. A half hour. An hour. Her movements kept her warm. If she stopped, she would die. She had to keep moving until she found shelter or help. The temperature dropped as night fell, but at least the moon lit her path so she could see the far shore that stretched before her.

*There is still hope . . .*

A crack resounded, and she stopped, feeling it to her bones.

The white powder covering the sheet of ice beneath her shifted.

And she knew how this would end a split second before the surface beneath her fell away.

# *CHAPTER ONE*

TWO DAYS EARLIER  
TUESDAY, 8:43 A.M.  
DENVER, COLORADO

Dread warred with hope as Rae Burke shivered in the cold outside on the porch. The curtains remained drawn at the quaint home that her brother, Alan, shared with his wife, Zoey, and their adorable four-year-old daughter, Callie.

Rae knocked again, and a moment later the door cracked open enough for her to slip inside the dark house. Her brother remained in the shadows. She flipped on lights without asking permission. Better. Now the home had become warm and cozy. Nothing seemed amiss except for her brother, the consummate professional. She'd rarely seen him in sweats.

Rae dropped her purse on the foyer table and shrugged out of her coat. She paused to take a long look at him. Bloodshot eyes stared at her from an unshaven face.

"You couldn't sleep."

Pursing his lips, he shook his head. "Of course not. How could I?"

"Oh, Alan." She hugged him like only a sister could.

Keeping a hold on his arms, she took a step back. "I'm assuming you called the police."

He shook her off and rubbed his neck. "Yes, I called them. Of course, they wanted to know if we'd had an argument or if this was unusual behavior for her." He gave Rae a knowing look. Zoey had disappeared in the past, but that was before she had married Alan.

"How long has she been gone?" Maybe Zoey had needed respite. Caring for a child with special needs could be draining.

He glanced at his watch. "Long enough. Callie is Zoey's world. Callie is our world."

Rae nodded. "Zoey never would have left her. She never would have left *you*, Alan. Tell me what happened."

"Zoey dropped Callie off at behavioral therapy at nine in the morning. Her therapist called me at one. I brought Callie home, thinking I would find Zoey had fallen asleep. That she'd been taking a nap and slept through her alarm. I called her cell and texted, but she didn't respond." Alan paced the open living area. Shelves filled with early readers and books on raising children with autism lined the walls. "Her car wasn't here."

Deep frown lines carved into his ragged face. "Her last known cell location was here at home. But clearly, she's not here. So her battery died or she turned her cell off. I don't know. But I waited for her to come home or contact me. I hoped that she would return with a reasonable explanation. I called her friends. I called you. Finally, I called the police. I explained everything to them so they would understand that Zoey would never leave her daughter, but I had still given her time to get home."

Why hadn't Alan called Rae sooner? Hurt skated across her heart, but she shook it off. She could easily guess. Alan had hoped Zoey would return and Rae would never need to know—she'd warned him, after all. Zoey's disappearance could elicit an "I told you so."

"The only good news is that the police are taking me seriously

now since she didn't come home last night. I wanted to call you before you saw something on the news."

"And you asked the neighbors what they saw?"

"Of course! What do you think?"

She hadn't meant to upset him. He was on edge, so she wouldn't react. Rae moved to the kitchen to make coffee. She doubted Alan had eaten. She looked in the refrigerator and found eggs. Bread for toast. Some jam. No bacon.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm cooking breakfast. You need to keep up your strength. Besides, Callie will be hungry when she—" Rae glanced around the house. "Is she at therapy or school?"

His face darkened. "I kept her home."

"Won't that mess with her routine?"

"I'll keep her routine the same as much as possible. This is why I can't do anything to find Zoey!" Alan whispered the emotion-filled words. Frustration and fear poured from him. "I can't drive around town looking for her. Callie needs me. She wants her mother. She asked for her constantly last night. Zoey was the one to read to her. I took up that honor, but Callie wasn't happy and tossed and turned all night."

Rae stirred together the eggs she'd cracked into a bowl. Zoey was a vegan—the eggs were for Alan—so Rae hadn't found milk to stir into the eggs. Not even soy or almond milk. The refrigerator should have been loaded with fruits and vegetables but was oddly sparse. Zoey had been distracted before she disappeared.

Alan continued to pace and vent and maybe even unravel completely. "She wants her mother, and I can't give her that."

A fist squeezed Rae's heart. "And you want your wife."

At some point, if Zoey didn't return or they didn't find her, or maybe even if they *did* find her—depending on *how* they found her—the police would look at Alan. They would suspect he was responsible for whatever happened to his wife.

That news story ran somewhere in this country just about every day of the week. Husband kills wife. Hides the truth. Rae kept that to herself. Alan didn't need one more thing to worry about.

She glanced at her still-pacing brother. He wasn't a killer.

Zoey wasn't dead.

She had to be alive. Rae wouldn't accept any other outcome—for her brother's sake. For Callie's sake.

The first seventy-two hours were critical in finding a missing person, the first forty-eight key before the clues and evidence started to go cold.

After putting the bread in the toaster, Rae scrambled the eggs. “Look, I know this is grasping at straws, but it's worth a try. Maybe she went home to see her mother. I know the police asked you if you two had argued and you told them no. But it's just me here. Did you fight?”

“No. We didn't fight.” But the way Alan said the words, the slight nuance that edged his tone, gave her pause.

As an investigative journalist who interviewed those who often tried to hide the truth, she'd trained herself to watch for such distinctions. Still, Alan wasn't a liar. He wouldn't hurt Zoey even in a moment of anger. He was gentle. Those characteristics had drawn Zoey to him in the first place. If he was hiding something from Rae now, it had to be because any disagreement he'd had with his wife was a private matter.

“Okay, well, did you call her mom?” she asked.

“No.”

Rae had never learned why Zoey didn't speak to her mom. But had Zoey shared her secrets with Alan?

Rae wasn't sure what to say next, so she busied herself with plating the eggs. Alan would have eventually cooked breakfast for Callie. He wouldn't forget to care for his daughter in the midst of this crisis, would he? She set a slice of toast on each plate along with the jam, then looked down the hallway.

Though Rae wasn't hungry, Alan might feel compelled to join her if she ate too. "Breakfast is ready. Should we wake Callie to eat?"

He glanced at the clock and quickly shook his head. "She ate earlier. Cheerios and the last of the almond milk. Then I put her in her room to play, but she fell asleep, so I put her in bed. I don't know if this will mess with her schedule too much, but since she didn't sleep well last night, she needs the rest. And I need the break. Callie has certain things she eats in certain ways." He eyed the eggs, then he glanced at Rae but said nothing more.

Had she made them wrong? Rae sagged. "I only meant to help. But you and I can eat. How about that?"

"How can I eat?"

"You have to stay strong for Callie, if not for Zoey." Rae slid into a chair at the table, hoping Alan would join her.

Frowning, he nodded. He approached the table and slowly sat, staring at the plate as if he looked right through it.

Rae played with the eggs on her plate and felt utterly ridiculous for thinking that either of them would eat. "Do you want me to stay here and help with Callie? I can do that." It wasn't like she had an actual paying job at the moment. Even if she did, she would drop everything to help her brother.

And Zoey. Her friend. *Oh, God, please . . .* There were no words to speak, even from her heart.

"No. Callie needs me if she can't have Zoey. At least for now. I want to make everything as normal for her as possible. I'm trying to keep up the pretense that her mother is gone to visit a friend."

"Do you think Callie knows something is wrong?"

"I'll keep her occupied so she doesn't have time to sense how seriously wrong things are. But that won't last. I don't know how she'll react. Kids like Callie are—"

"It's okay, Alan. You don't have to explain. This news would be hard on *any* child." Fear hollowed her out. "I want to help. What can I do? Anything. Name it."

Alan scooped eggs up with his fork. Like her, he pretended to eat, moving food around on his plate without ever actually taking a bite.

When he finally spoke, he choked on his words. “You warned me that she had secrets. That’s what you said about the time she went missing for days when you were her roommate. Maybe her sudden disappearance now has something to do with then. I can’t help but hope it does and that she’ll come back to me. Come back to us.”

That he’d connected the two incidents revealed Alan’s desperation. When he lifted his eyes to her, Rae thought she could read his mind.

“You want *me* . . . You want me to search for her?”

“You investigate for a living. I know investigative reporting is different than, say, if you were a detective, but in some ways it’s the same. You’re like Dad was.”

“Nothing like Dad.” Their father had been an award-winning journalist, a foreign affairs correspondent. He’d stood up for the voiceless, exposing the evils of the world until those evils finally killed him, silencing his voice. She tried to follow in his steps—except for the dying part. Instead, she let everyone down.

“Yes. Yes, you are. The war zones, the battles you’ve faced are different, sure, but you find people, Rae. You find their stories.”

Not anymore. She’d spent years writing exposés, only to be tossed aside after the “debacle,” as her boss had called it. Well, that debacle might have produced a story that could have won her awards if things had taken a different turn. She focused back on the moment. “Did you tell the police about the time she disappeared before?”

“I’ve told them everything. I have nothing to hide.”

Rae tapped the table.

“Rae, you never told me details about that time she disappeared in college.”

“That’s because I don’t know anything.” At least anything that

would have made any difference then—or make any difference now. Rae forced herself to chew the eggs that had become cold and rubbery, and Alan followed suit. Good. At least her efforts to get him eating weren't for nothing.

And maybe she *could* investigate like he requested, and those efforts would make a difference too. “Mom. Does she know about this?”

“I’ve dreaded telling her.”

“Call her. She’ll come up and help with Callie.” Mom lived in Texas now, working as a secretary for an oil and gas executive.

Rae glanced at the TV. Alan had the sound turned down. The news captioned a story about remains being identified. He normally enjoyed watching nature and science shows but was probably watching the news because of Zoey’s disappearance. Rae knew one thing—if Zoey didn’t come home soon, reporters would start to line the street. Detectives would be in Alan and Zoey’s home asking questions and searching. His and Callie’s lives would be turned upside down even more.

What was this going to do to Callie’s regimen? Her gut churned.

“And Rae . . .”

She looked at Alan.

“Remember.”

She’d never heard Alan sound so defeated. She forced confidence into her tone for his sake. “Remember what?”

“If you do this, remember that this isn’t a story. This isn’t for a Pulitzer Prize. This is our family. It’s my wife—whatever secrets she has.”

Regret squeezed her lungs. Rae understood. “No, it’s not a story, Alan. I hope you know me better than that.”

“I hope so too.”

Rae also hoped Zoey would return on her own like she had the last time she’d disappeared. Zoey had survived an unspeakable trauma, and then she met Alan on the heels of that.

Rae suspected that Zoey had been the victim of abuse or a stalker before. Zoey never wanted to talk about her childhood home or her family, stating she would never go back. And now, though Rae tried to believe the best about Zoey's current disappearance, she feared the worst. Zoey was suffering, or she was already gone.

Alan pushed away his plate. "I think you should start by going to Jackson Hole and talking to her mother. Find her. She could have moved, for all I know. Zoey's father died a long time ago. That's all she shared about her life before. It's like she wanted to forget about her past. Hide from it. And after what she'd been through, I never questioned her about why she moved to Colorado. We put all our hopes in the present and future and put the past behind us. We even eloped so there was no pressure to invite the people from her past. And now, looking back, I realize that was a mistake. I should have pressed her for more information. Pressed her to include them."

"You can't think that you made a mistake when you married her. You can't."

"I love her. Love covers a multitude of sins, right? I didn't make a mistake. Callie isn't a mistake. I could have done things differently. So now, I'm going to do something. I think starting with her mother is a good place to begin. It's all I can think to do."

Rae's throat tightened. She should avoid being within a thousand miles of Jackson Hole. That valley was the current residence of the reason for her financial, emotional, and psychological woes. The source of the daily pain in her chest.

Alan watched her as if he sensed her hesitation and waited for confirmation. Was she willing to do this? The police would do everything in their power to find her sister-in-law, but Rae knew from experience that their efforts couldn't save the day every time. There was simply too much ground to cover. Too many criminals.

Rae closed her eyes and exhaled.

*What should I do? What should I do? Am I the right person to take on such an enormous task? What if she let Alan down? Callie? Zoey.*

“Why don’t *you* call her mom, then?” Rae asked.

“And say what? This is your son-in-law? Your daughter is missing?”

“I see your point.” Zoey’s mom wouldn’t know him from Adam. “Still, I think you should make that call.”

Alan scraped his hands through his hair, then cracked a sob. Finally, he lifted his face, his eyes meeting hers. “I don’t know how to reach her. Even if I did, I can’t talk coherently at the moment. Rae, if you don’t help me, who else will? I mean, besides the police. Besides the media that will eventually blast her face everywhere. I feel so helpless. I want to be out there looking, searching, but the truth is, that never was my thing. I’m not good at that even if I’m desperately looking for my wife. But it’s *your* thing. You *are* good. If you don’t do this—”

“All right. All right.”

Rae stood and gathered their dishes to place in the sink.

“Just . . . let me think.”

Alan approached. “It can’t hurt to have one more person digging into things. In fact, if you need me to help you research, I’ll do what I can. But remember, my time will be limited since I’m caring for Callie.”

“You would have made Dad proud, Alan.” She offered a tenuous smile. “You might not be an investigative journalist, but you do *think* like one.”

“I’m no journalist. You got those genes. I’m a nerd. A computer geek. You know that.”

Rae opened her mouth—

“Save it. I already searched her personal laptop. I know how to look, Rae. There’s nothing there except research about autism and everything she can do to help her little girl grow up and live

a happy life. On her work computer, I confirmed nothing more than the part-time work she does for the cyber-security software company. I searched before I even called the police.” He held Rae’s gaze. “Not that I didn’t trust her, but I had to look first.”

Of course Alan had looked. Rae had often suspected one of the big reasons Zoey and Alan had hit it off so well was that they were both computer geeks.

“The police will want to look too. They’ll look at all the calls she’s made. Any digital trails she’s left.”

As much as Rae hoped that Zoey would walk through the front door any moment now, a sixth sense told her it wouldn’t happen any time soon—if it *ever* did.

“There’s one more thing you need to know before you search for her mother.” Alan slid back into the chair at the kitchen table.

“What’s that?”

“I’ve learned something about her past. The police told me there’s no record of a Zoey Dumont who moved to Colorado from Wyoming. No Zoey Dumont who fits her description lived in Jackson Hole. Zoey Dumont isn’t her birth name.”

“Then who *is* your wife?”

He blew out a long breath. “I wish I knew.”