

# Chapter 1



SHE WOKE IN THE DARK. She tried to move but something was holding her arms and legs. She tried to call out but something was blocking her throat. She couldn't see. She shook her head from side to side. Fear shot through her body. Then gradually her eyelids lifted. A dim grey light sifted in. It felt as if her eyelids were stuck together. She wanted to rub them but couldn't. When she shook her head, she grew dizzy. The world swam around her. A terrible pain in her back and arms cascaded into her waking mind.

And then a voice, cool, distant. "Are you awake? Just nod your head if you can hear me."

Such a relief. Someone who would help her. She nodded

her head. A hand on her wrist, her shoulder. Noise. Beeping. Where was she?

“Do you know where you are?”

She shook her head, but slowly. Her head didn’t want to move. Pain lanced through her forehead.

“You’re in the hospital. You can’t talk because there is a tube in your throat, helping you breathe. Do you remember anything?”

Her memory was blank. She shook her head again.

“That’s okay. That’s normal,” said the voice. “You’ve been sleeping for a couple of days. You were in a car accident. You hit your head and hurt your back and some other things. Now I am going to call the doctor and see if I can get permission to take the tube out of your throat so you can talk. Can you lie still until I get back?”

She nodded. She could hear footsteps moving away. No, don’t go, she wanted to say but couldn’t. She could hear other things now as well. Other machines, beeping. A fan, blowing air. Distant voices. She lay still until she could hear voices, coming closer. A man’s voice, a woman’s voice. The pain came and went in waves, but she couldn’t scream, couldn’t say anything or ask for help.

The pain came back and built in a wave. She started to shake and then a man’s voice said, “Well, well, how are we feeling? Better? No, don’t try to talk. We’ll get the tube out and call your parents to let them know you’re awake. Now just lie back and try to relax. Breathe normally.”

He put a hand on her shoulder, then leaned on her chest. He was choking her!

She hated this man. How could she breathe when he was leaning on her chest and choking her? Relax? Was he crazy? When she was in so much pain?

And then the tube slid out of her throat and she could breathe again and the pain slid away as well and the man was gone. Time was doing funny things.

“Now,” the woman said — was she a nurse? — a doctor? “I am going to put some drops in your eyes to help you open them.”

The drops helped to clear the grey fuzziness that had been hindering her sight and now, finally, she could see. Yes, a hospital room, a nurse in green scrubs. A tube sending fluids into her arm, one of the things that hurt. Windows. Outside the windows it was dark.

“What time is it?” she croaked.

“It’s three a.m., Tuesday morning. You had your accident on Saturday afternoon. So you’ve been asleep for a while. Now, dear, what is your name?”

Her name? Why would the nurse ask her such a stupid question? Didn’t they know her name? Come to think of it, what was her name? She tried to concentrate. Shouldn’t she know her own name? Finally, it filtered into her mind from a long, grey distance away.

“Willy,” she croaked. Even her voice didn’t work properly. “Willa Cameron. I live in Redfish, British Columbia. My parents are Elizabeth and Donald Cameron. I have a sister, and

her name is . . . Emily.” She felt quite triumphant after this and exhausted as well.

“Good,” said the nurse briskly. “Very well done. Now, I want you to try and rest. I am going to call your parents and let them know you are awake. It will take them a little while to get here. They’re in a hotel a few blocks away. Are you in pain? Just nod if you are and I’ll give you something for it.”

She nodded, hard. But she had to ask. “Where am I? What hospital is this?”

“You’re in Vancouver,” said the nurse. “In the Vancouver General intensive care. You’ve broken your back in a car accident and you might not be able to move for a bit. So just rest. Don’t try to move.”

And having dropped that bombshell, she left, leaving Willy furious, scared, and desperately trying to move something besides her head.