



Believe

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High upon Redemption Mountain, the snow fell harder. Strong gusts of wind drove the flakes in first one direction and then another. The fierceness of the storm made it impossible to see or hear a single thing beyond its raging. Trees shivered against the cold wind, branches trembled. Then a silence like none other descended upon the mountain. Every living creature stood in silent reverence for the moment that followed.

A small compact car skidded on the frozen two-lane mountain road. Its driver hit the breaks, sending the car spinning further out of control. Once. Twice. Then it left the road and plunged headfirst down the steep side of mountain.

Stunned, the driver could do little more than glance at the woman by his side as the end became apparent.

A small grove of aspen trees, halfway down the mountainside kept the tiny car from finishing its downward slide into eternity.

The sound of angel's winds could be heard in the deafening silence that followed.

As the young man regained consciousness, his eyes searched the smoke-filled darkness for the girl at his side. His wife. She didn't move and he couldn't reach her. He could no longer feel his body.

Don't be afraid. Everything will be okay. She will be okay without you.

Those comforting words came to him from somewhere close by. As he

struggled to remain conscious, a faint shimmering image floated nearby, taking the form of a human being. Suddenly, he felt had no fear at all. Only the peaceful comfort of the angel close to him, sent there to bring him home.

She will be okay without you. You no longer have to worry about her. Someone is coming to be with her. It's okay to let go of this life.

The young man felt tears, hot and damp against his cheeks, but his fear was gone. The voice continued to bring him comfort, reassuring him that even though he must say goodbye to Chloe for the moment, she would be all right. He could leave knowing that the woman he loved and would be leaving behind would survive.

A shadow of a smile touched his lips. The brilliance of the angel grew before him, filling him with a warmth like nothing he'd ever experienced.

The radiance of the angel literally filled the mountainside with the blinding light of its presence. With arms outstretched, the angel beckoned him gently to let go of his hold on this world. He would be with his Father soon and Chloe would be okay.

The headlights of a single approaching vehicle caught the smoke and dust the car left in its wake. A single soul sent there for a specific purpose. To believe in miracles.

* * *

Devon McCallister watched the snow with a wary eye as he reached the top of Redemption Mountain. A fitting end to what had to be the worst possible day of his life.

Easter or not, it didn't seem to matter. Every single time that he and

his father spent more than a few minutes in each other's company the inevitable argument would ensue.

Adam McCallister expected more from his only son. How many times had his old man told Devon that he had failed to live up to his expectations?

His father believed success came with a heavy price. You had to push yourself to get ahead. Adam McCallister had been pushing Devon for as long as he could remember to buckle down, concentrate on the future and stop screwing up.

When his father had wanted to retire early, Devon had come back to Redemption to take over the controls of McCallister Lumber. But he'd come home for all the wrong reasons. Sure, some small part of him really wanted to make his father happy, but mostly he just wanted to prove to Adam how irresponsible he could be.

Devon had a brilliant mind for business. McCallister Lumber was far more successful under his leadership than it ever had been under Adam's, but Devon's relationship with his father was a mess and his personal life bordered on disaster most of the time.

So, in that sense he'd accomplished exactly what he'd set out to do. He'd proven his father right about that much. But it hadn't made him happy.

Devon continued to float through life, filling his world with meaningless relationships that he had no real interest in committing to.

You'd think Devon's old man would have given on his only son ever living up to his lofty expectations a long time ago. After all, Devon was thirty-five. But his father still thought if he pushed his son hard enough,

Devon would come around to his way of thinking. But Devon could be just as stubborn as his old man, and he enjoyed pushing his father's buttons.

Devon could almost understand why his mother had left all those years ago. She'd never quite lived up to the McCallister name either. She'd been a screw up just like her son, just as his father seemed happy to remind him of each and every time they got into the same old tired argument.

This had been the case today. They'd argued and Devon had left. In spite of his father's apologies and the weatherman's prediction that this Easter could possibly see the worst snowstorm in years.

At this altitude, the conditions had continued to deteriorate with every single mile that the Hummer climbed the steep side of Redemption Mountain. Devon forced the vehicle's speed down to a crawl while trying to keep it from sliding over the edge. So much for this being a shortcut.

A fitting end to a miserable day.

He rarely came this way. The backside of the mountain would be far too dangerous on nights like tonight. It had one advantage normally. It got him home faster. Devon only wanted crawl into bed and put this miserable day behind him. With any luck, he'd sleep through what was left of Easter entirely.

Something that looked like smoke came from just up the road, but he reasoned it was far too early in the season for wildfires for that to be the cause of the smoke.

The low beam of the lights found a break in the snow-covered road made by a set of tire tracks. They started some twenty feet in front of the

SUV and went straight over the edge of the mountain. They looked fresh.

Devon slammed on the Hummer's breaks and felt the SUV shudder, but somehow managed to hold the road. When the vehicle came to a stop, Devon hit the SUV's flashers, reached for his cell phone and got out.

Through the driving snow, it became almost impossible to see much further than a few feet in front of him. Somehow, Devon managed to make out a small car, its front end crushed beyond recognition, wedged in a groove of trees. Smoke billowed up from its wasted engine, but as far as he could see, it hadn't caught fire...yet.

After several attempts to get a signal on the phone, Devon reached a 911 operator. He told the woman what had happened and asked that EMS services be sent as quickly as possible.

Devon stumbled over the frozen terrain as he made his way slowly down the mountainside. At fourteen thousand feet it took months of warm days for this much accumulation to melt away.

He managed to keep from sliding the rest of the way down to the car by staying in the deep plowed ruts the vehicle had made.

When Devon reached the driver's side, he knew in an instant that it looked bad. The young driver lay smashed and bleeding against the steering wheel. The airbag hadn't inflated and the kid hadn't been wearing a seatbelt.

The badly crushed door wouldn't budge when Devon tried to pry it open. The side window had been shattered by the impact. Just a few jagged pieces of glass still held in place.

He felt for a pulse at the base of the young man's throat, almost certain the kid would be dead or close to it. How could anyone survive that type of an impact unprotected?

Devon couldn't find a single sign of life in the boy. When he would have turned his attention to the passenger, a young woman, something caught his attention. The young man struggled to breathe.

Devon leaned still closer, his head almost touching the boy's lips in his effort to hear the faint words of the dying boy. The kid sounded as if he were speaking through water. "Hang on son, there's help on the way. Just hang on a little while longer."

The boy tried to turn his head, but he couldn't move. His neck had probably snapped when he'd hit the wheel. God only knew how many other injuries the young man had suffered.

Devon leaned still closer, his head almost touching the boy's lips in his effort to hear faint words the dying boy.

"Take care of her for me. Don't let her die up here." "Don't worry about the girl. I'll make sure she's okay. Just stay still. Don't try to talk. Help is on the way."

"I'm not going to make it." The boy's said very clearly before his words ended in a flurry of coughing that seemed to leave him even weaker. "Promise me that you'll look after my wife. Please mister, promise me you'll take care of Chloe for me. Tell her that I love her."

Devon almost didn't catch the last of the boy's words. The dying

young man made one more gasping attempt to draw air and then he went still. Even before Devon tried to find a pulse, this time he knew there wouldn't be one.

"I promise kid, I promise. Don't worry, I won't let you down." Devon gave the only answer he could to that sad final request. A little too late to bring the boy any comfort.

As he stood looking down at the young man, tears gathered in his eyes. He could almost feel the presence of something else there with them. He hadn't been aware of this strange silence surrounding them until this moment. He'd been too concerned for the boy. Now the silence became deafening. The wind had gone still. Not a single sound could be heard in the night.

Something Devon couldn't even attempt to define became a quiet witness the young man's death. Moments after the kid took his final breath, the eerie stillness left the mountainside. But something equally strange replaced it. Suddenly the worst storm of the season ended without any warning. The clouds broke away and the stars reappeared again. The moon had never glowed so brightly. Almost as if, the ending of the storm somehow signaled an end to the horrors of the night's events. But Devon knew that could not be the case. For him and the girl it would only be beginning. He alone would be responsible for saving the girl's life.

At that moment, Devon turned his full attention to the passenger. The young girl tried to free herself from her restraints. She made a pitiful sound that reminded Devon of her husband's struggles and forced him to remember

his promise to the young man. Devon picked his way slowly around the back of the car to her.

On this side of the vehicle, the damage appeared to be less severe. The door opened easily enough in his hands. In just a single glance, Devon knew that the girl's injuries were not as life threatening as her husband's had been.

With some effort, she opened her eyes.

Devon noticed her left arm hung at an awkward angle and had begun to swell at a rapid rate. The girl wrestled with the seatbelt, trying to free herself so that she could reach her husband's side.

"It's okay, don't try to move. I think your arm may be broken. Help is on the way, but you need to stay calm." Devon tried to reassure her while keeping her still. He wanted to keep her attention away from the driver's fatal injuries. "We don't know what other injuries you may have, so try not to move. Everything is going to be okay."

Slowly she turned her head toward Devon. Her uninjured hand clutching his tightly. "Kyle? How's Kyle? He isn't moving?"

Devon couldn't be the one tell her the truth. "Don't try to talk, kiddo. Just stay still. We'll have you out of here in no time." In a distance, he heard Ned Stewart's siren blaring. Ned, the only marshal in Redemption, would be the first to respond to the accident.

"We lost our way in the storm. We didn't know where we were. I've never seen so much snow before. It hit so suddenly that we couldn't find our

bearing.” Devon heard the girl say through her tears. “We thought we were okay, that we were back on the right road but,” Her voice faded away, her eyes closed once more and he feared the worst.

What had the boy called her? Chloe? Somehow, that sounded correct. “Chloe, stay with me...don’t fall asleep. Everything is going to be okay but you need to stay awake.” Her green eyes opened for a moment, searching his again. They were filled with so much lost hope, pleading with him to make her assurances that he just couldn’t give.

“Where are you and your husband heading?” Devon asked, hoping to keep her occupied. He couldn’t tell her about her husband. He had no idea how to deal with this type of tragedy. Someone else would have to do it.

“We were on our way to California. Kyle has a job there you see. Somehow, we got lost in the storm. We weren’t expecting there to be so much snow.”

High above them, Ned’s red and blue flashing lights strobed the darkness. Devon listened to the marshal’s stumbling footsteps as he followed the same plowed earth down to the car.

Devon tried to untangle the girl’s hand from his. She’d been holding onto him as if her life depended on it since she’d become aware of him. She didn’t let go now.

“Don’t go! Please don’t leave me alone! I’m afraid that...”

Devon knelt close to the weeping girl. “I’m not going anywhere kiddo, but you need to stay still, okay? Everything is going to be all right. Nothing is going to happen to you. I promise.”

"Devon, if you're okay here, I'm going back up to wait for the ambulance." Ned said after searching for a pulse in the young man to no avail.

Devon nodded. "I'm fine. They'll need your help." He turned his attention once more to the girl. Her eyes were so trusting and what had he done? He'd lied to her. He'd told her everything would be okay. For Chloe, nothing would ever be okay again.

In the unbearable silence that followed, Devon searched for something to tell her that might comfort her. He was saved from having to offer her any more false hope when a flurry of emergency personnel descended on the car and the girl, forcing Devon out of the way.

"I've called the coroner out from Bedford for the boy. I'll have Pearson's garage come get the car and take it into town once they're finished with it here." Ned stood next to Devon, shaking his head.

"This is bad stuff, Devon. It's been years since we've had a wreck like this up here. Most folks know to avoid Redemption Mountain altogether when the forecasters are calling for a storm like tonight's. What were those two doing up here alone on a night like tonight anyway? I guess they were just lucky that you didn't listen to the weatherman's forecast either." The expression in Ned's eyes told Devon how odd the marshal found his behavior.

Devon couldn't tell him why he'd ignored the warnings and put his life in danger by taking the mountain road tonight. But then again if he hadn't, Chloe would not have survived the night.

Devon's focus went back to the girl. He could hear her crying and

asking about her husband. Somehow, through the crowd of people, her eyes found his again and reluctantly Devon went to her side.

"My husband, what's happening with Kyle? Why is no one working on him?" Chloe whispered as she reached for Devon's hand once more.

"You need to worry about yourself right now, kiddo. Let these people help you..."

"Please, don't leave me. Please..." Her eyes pleaded with him once more, as the EMTs lifted the gurney, ready to leave.

Devon stood silently searching her frightened expression before turning to tell the worker closest to him, "I'm coming with you."

The ride to the hospital in Bedford took only a short amount of time, but it seemed like an eternity in the sterile, tragic atmosphere of the ambulance. While the EMTs worked on Chloe, she held his hand and cried silent tears. He believed that she knew the truth about her husband. When they reached the hospital, the EMTs took her away, forcing Devon to let go of her hand. As the sliding glass doors of the ER closed behind her, Devon's eyes met Chloe's once more. He would never forget the frightened expression written so clearly there. He couldn't. It would be branded on his heart, ready to haunt him for the rest of his life.

As he considered her husband's final words, Devon knew that he couldn't leave her. Not like this. Even though he believed he had done all that was physically and emotionally capable of doing for her. Still he couldn't just walk away from her. Not until he knew, she would be okay. He owed that much to her husband didn't he. He had promised Kyle as much. He

couldn't walk away from Chloe.

Hours passed before someone finally came to speak with him. The young man who introduced himself as Doctor Seth Martin didn't look old enough to be a doctor. But clearly, he knew about Chloe.

"I'm the doctor who treated Chloe Strickland. Are you a family member, mister?" The doctor looked as if he'd had a long night already. No doubt, the last thing he wanted to do right now would be answer more questions.

"McCallister, Devon McCallister. No, I'm not family, Doctor. I was the first on the scene of the accident. I want to make sure that Chloe is going to be okay." He couldn't tell the man that he'd promised her dying husband he'd take care of her.

"She'll be fine. She's been stabilized. She has relatively minor injuries except for a fractured arm. She's a very lucky woman. She had her seatbelt on. We told her that her husband didn't make it. I've given her something to help with the pain and to help her sleep, and I've admitted her. I'd like to keep a close eye on her for a few days, since she's pregnant."

"She's pregnant?" Devon's words slipped out in shock before he could stop them. Chloe hadn't looked pregnant. Nothing else the doctor said beyond those words registered in Devon's mind.

"Yes. Would you like to see her?"

He wouldn't, would he? How could he face her again after hearing the truth about her pregnancy? Again, Devon considered simply walking away from her and her problems, but something wouldn't let him. The words that

her husband had said to him before he'd died reminded Devon he had promised to take care of her. How could he let Kyle's last words be in vain? He couldn't leave Chloe. She needed him.

"Yes I would Doctor, thank you."

Doctor Martin left him at her door where he stood outside for a long time before pushing it open. When Devon walked into the semi-darkness of the room, he could hear her sobbing.

"Chloe, do you remember me?" he asked gently as he stood beside her bed looking down at her. "I'm so sorry for your loss, Chloe. So sorry."

She turned her head away from him so that he couldn't see her expression. "I don't think I want to live anymore. Not without Kyle. I don't think that I can."

Devon closed his eyes and tried to think of one thing he could say to her right now that would bring her any hope. The old familiar argument he'd had earlier that day came back to remind him of his own life's failures. What did he know about helping someone who'd just lived through the worst tragedy of her life?

He was a failure. A disappointment to his father. A screw up. He had to be at least ten years older than this girl was and he hadn't had one single relationship that had lasted. He was lousy at relationships and even lousier at responsibilities. It was ridiculous to think that by witnessing someone's death he could change any of that. Life didn't work like that. He didn't know what to say in a situation as tragic and as hopeless as this one.

He sat down on her bed and carefully took her in his arms. At that

human contact between them, Chloe began to sob harder, her body shaking from grief.

Devon held her close until there were no more tears left for her to cry. When the medicine achieved its purpose, Chloe found peace for the moment.

But still he didn't leave her. The promise he'd made to a dying young man kept him by her bedside. While he held her close, Devon couldn't help but wonder what lay ahead for her. Did she have any family to turn to? Or could it be possible that Chloe truly had no one else left in her life?

"Dear God, please, don't let that be the case." Devon found himself praying. He hadn't prayed in years. He had long ago convinced himself that he didn't believe in God's existence. But at the thought of this innocent woman in his arms being forced to rely on him for help, Devon knew he needed help. He needed God. He continued praying, searching for the right words to ask God for guidance.

"I don't know how to help her, God. Why did you bring her to me for help? How can someone like me, someone who has wasted so much of his life on selfish things, be expected to help her survive the death of her husband? I can't help her, God. I can't help her find the courage to move forward. I can't help her with the baby. I can't fulfill the promise I made to her husband."

As Devon prayed those words, something changed inside of him. A peace like nothing he'd ever experienced before came over him. He still didn't know how to help her, but for the first time since making that promise to her husband, Devon had hope.

Could it be possible that the presence that he'd felt up there tonight on Redemption Mountain hadn't been there for Kyle Strickland at all? Had God sent his angel to strengthen Devon for what lay ahead of him? For this moment? For Chloe?

Maybe the old Devon McAllister had died up there on the mountain tonight, along with Kyle. Maybe this woman who needed him so much now would be the one chance in his life left to prove that he could accomplish something important. He could be more than just a screw up.

Maybe that would be the true Easter miracle of tonight after all. Maybe Chloe Strickland would help him find his way back home to God.

About the Author

Mary Eason grew up in a small Texas town famous for, well not much of anything really. Being the baby of the family and quite a bit younger than her brothers and sister, Mary had plenty of time to entertain herself. Making up stories seem to come natural to her.

As a pre-teen, Mary discovered romance novels and knew instinctively that was what she wanted to do with her over-active imagination.

She wrote her first novel as a teen, (it's tucked away somewhere never to see the light of day), but never really pursued her writing career seriously until a few years later, when she wrote her first romantic comedy and was hooked.

Today, Mary still lives in Texas, and still writes about romance. In fact, she can't think of anything else she'd rather do.

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