

MISSING  
IN ALASKA

# SHADOWS AT DUSK

ELIZABETH GODDARD

## Praise for *Cold Light of Day*

“Goddard weaves a gripping mystery.”

*Publishers Weekly*

“The first book in Goddard’s Missing in Alaska series will keep readers glued to their seats as the tension escalates.”

*Booklist*

“A must-read for every romantic suspense reader. Goddard’s novels keep getting better and better.”

DiAnn Mills, author of *Concrete Evidence*

“Elizabeth Goddard’s *Cold Light of Day* is an exhilarating, page-turning race to the finish! Highly recommended.”

Carrie Stuart Parks, bestselling author of *Relative Silence*

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“This nonstop thrilling, romantic suspense kept up the pace until the very last page.”

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### MISSING IN ALASKA

*Cold Light of Day*

*Shadows at Dusk*

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# SHADOWS AT DUSK

ELIZABETH GODDARD



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To Tina,  
you're filled with so much wisdom, faith, and strength,  
and you have always been an incredible inspiration to me.  
I thank God for you!

I couldn't write a story about a bush pilot in Alaska  
without taking my readers on a wild and crazy ride,  
so I invite you to strap in and hold on tight.

—Elizabeth

When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire,  
you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 43:2

# PROLOGUE

## AIRSPACE OVER ZHUGANDIA, EAST AFRICA

**T**he old cargo plane vibrated as the pilot descended into the airdrop zone, the turbulence shuddering through Carrie James. She braced herself on a bench a few feet from the secured freight—emergency supplies that could mean the difference between life and death in a food-starved, war-torn country.

Battle-scarred was exactly how her heart felt, especially with Darius Aster sitting so close. She struggled to comprehend his betrayal.

*My heart is splitting in two.*

Good thing Bongani and his brother Tariq piloted today instead of her.

Darius released the safety harness and stood over her, his dark eyes flashing as he steadied himself against the fuselage. Plowing his free hand through black hair, he worked his stubbled jaw.

How would he explain himself?

“Choose me.” Desperation flooded his voice. “Choose us.”

Carrie didn’t miss the warning that surfaced behind the anguish in his eyes.

“You’re the one who’s throwing everything away!” Her voice shook. How had he snuck the contraband worth millions onto the plane without her noticing? “You’re a good man. I don’t believe . . . I can’t believe you would do this.”

“Believe it.” His expression shifted. She’d never seen that look in his eyes before.

*Who are you?*

Unshed tears burned her eyes. She stared at this man who had been her world.

Her everything.

“This isn’t what we do. What we’re about.” She loved this job. Loved flying in the much-needed supplies to isolated African villages. Aiding people in a way she never could in her military career. Reminding them they were important too and weren’t forgotten. “We’re supposed to help people, not steal from them.”

“Don’t you see?” Darius huffed. “This is our ticket to freedom.”

Nausea churned in her stomach. She stood up so that he couldn’t hover over and intimidate her. And Darius moved to manually open the door specifically designed to eject supplies.

*God, help me to make him understand, please.* She had to shout her next words to be heard over the wind.

“Stealing precious resources won’t give you freedom. It means living a lie, always looking over your shoulder.”

He took an unsteady step closer. “Nobody knows. Nobody cares what we do in this war-torn country.”

The tears surged forward now, and no manner of trying to close herself off to this outrage could hold them back.

*I wish I had a way off.*

A way out.

Did Darius assume she would go along with his theft? He’d already committed the crime, only admitting his actions after she spotted the uncut gems nestled inside the crate and questioned him.

*God, help me. What do I do? What do I do?*

Her breaths came too hard. Too fast.

His gaze softened, and he took a step back. “Just relax, will you? I’ll handle everything.”

He was probably hoping he could persuade her, but he was wrong. “Why didn’t you ask me before you made this decision for us? You should’ve known I would never agree.”

“That’s exactly why I didn’t ask. I figured I’d tell you, eventually. You shouldn’t have been nosing around.”

“Well, I was. So, now what?” She glared, trying to challenge him, threaten him, and will him to choose the path of love all in one look.

Raw pain flickered in his eyes and pinged through her heart. *There—he’s still there. Please come back to me.*

Pulling her against his chest, he crushed her lips with a desperate kiss that bruised body and soul. Did he think this was love? She shoved him off, freeing herself.

“Get away from me.” She loved him, but he’d ripped her heart from her chest. “I can’t be part of this. Please, choose us. Choose me.”

“I have a buyer, and I’ve already been paid. Now I must deliver. And for the record, I am choosing us. I’m choosing to *save* us.”

How could she have been so wrong about him? Such a fool?

“Count me out. I can’t be part of it.”

He stared at her, long and hard, then his gaze turned dark. Cold.

Empty.

A chill shivered through her. Before she could dart out of his reach, he seized her arm and dragged her to the open door of the cargo plane.

Wind rushed at her from behind. Roared in her ears. Fear paralyzed her.

He wouldn’t. He couldn’t.

Heart in her throat, she took in the man before her, now a stranger. “Please! Don’t do this. You don’t have to do this.”

But his eyes held a cruelty she’d never seen before. She couldn’t have dreamed or imagined he could harbor so much darkness.

Evil.

“I’m sorry. We could have been good together. But I can’t . . . I can’t trust you now!”

The man she loved shoved her chest, punching the breath from her, knocking her out of the airplane.



# ONE

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TEN YEARS LATER

ALASKA PANHANDLE

**D**etective Trevor West wrestled with the foregone truth. When someone went missing, the first forty-eight hours were vital.

For loved ones, those excruciating hours turned into prayerful days, then agonizing weeks and hopeless months.

And now it was July, over a year later.

*Am I a fool to hold on to hope?*

But even the state of Montana would only declare a missing person presumed dead if they had not been seen or heard from for at least five years. Who was Trevor to argue with that?

Early this morning, he took an Alaska Airlines flight from Bozeman, Montana, to the Alaska Panhandle, connecting through both Seattle and Ketchikan. He'd never been a fan of flying, and in one day he'd seen more than enough from thirty thousand feet to last him a lifetime. With travel time and layovers, getting here took eleven hours. He tried to shake off the grogginess as he stepped off the boat that had brought him from the state capital of Juneau via the Alaska Marine Highway to Shadow Gap. This place was endless snowcapped

mountains surrounded by a temperate rainforest, and miles of ocean waterways flowing around a thousand islands, coves, and bays. Literally. He knew because he read the pamphlet on his way here.

Standing on the dock, he inhaled the crispest, cleanest mountain air he'd ever breathed, and that was saying something since he lived in Montana. But he wouldn't expect anything less in Shadow Gap, the small town hidden in a pristine fjord.

Tugging his jacket tighter, he disembarked with a few other adventurous souls who'd been on the ferry with him, and clomped along the planks toward the end of the dock in search of one familiar face in particular.

Chief Autumn Long waited for him at the end of the pier, a tenuous smile cracking a face framed by curly dark hair. He couldn't see her oddly colored eyes until he closed the distance.

She shook his hand with a good, strong grip. "Detective West. It's good to see you again."

Trevor had taken leave and traveled to Southeast Alaska last fall after the Alaska Bureau of Investigation's failure to locate Jennifer. So, given the circumstances, he couldn't really say the same, although the information she gave him two days ago had ignited hope.

And *that* scared him to death.

His gaze snagged on the engagement ring on her left hand. A lot could happen in a year. "You're engaged. Congratulations."

With a big smile, she held up her hand and flashed the ring. "Yes. Thank you."

"Who's the lucky man?"

"His name is Grier Young."

"When's the wedding?" *Why am I asking so many personal questions?* Probably procrastinating.

"We're looking at October." Her smile slowly faded.

Right. Time to get to the business at hand. He walked with her to her Ford Interceptor.

“I got here as fast as I could,” he said.

Which was not fast at all when it came to traveling from the lower forty-eight to Alaska. He fisted his hands in his pockets. Stopping at her vehicle, he opened the passenger door. Before he stepped inside, he glanced up at the impossibly blue skies.

*Thank God it's summer.*

Chief Long had agreed to meet him and give him a ride, but if he ended up staying for more than a day, he would need to secure his own transportation.

Inside the vehicle, Chief Long got settled, buckling in. “Is there anything you want to go over first?”

“Not before. Probably after.”

“Fair enough.” She steered the vehicle onto the street.

Trevor peered out the window, getting once again familiar with the small town as she drove slowly down the main strip, passing between the quaint old structures on both sides, including on the left, the Lively Moose and the Rabid Raccoon, and to the right, the smallest police department he'd ever seen, squeezed in between a thrift store and a pharmacy.

“They live up in the mountains about four miles,” she said. “But it'll take fifteen minutes, give or take, to get there.”

His gut churned at the reminder of their destination and the purpose for his trip. “Do they know I'm coming?”

“When they made the discovery, they were informed that I might have more questions. I told them I would be coming by today to talk.”

“But they don't know *I'm* joining you.” He wanted to clarify so he understood what he was walking into.

“You know how it is—it's better to see their reaction than to have them mentally prepared. I think seeing you in person might trigger more.”

“Agreed.”

He stared out the window and took in the lofty snowcapped mountains that disappeared from view when she took a turn

and steered deep into a lush rainforest, which stunned him with even more beauty.

If only he'd come to bask in the scenery.

*Why, God? Why couldn't we have found this lead sooner?*

Because Trevor was lost in his thoughts, the drive went by faster than expected, and he squeezed the handgrip as Chief Long steered up a steep and narrow path to a cabin. He ignored the queasiness. Even though he lived in Montana now, he hadn't gotten used to heights. But he always enjoyed the view. A person could see so much more when standing above it all. *Lord, I need a big-picture view to know where to go and what to do next.*

He needed a new perspective if he was going to find answers.

As he climbed out of the vehicle, his body protested the long flight from Montana. He hiked up the incline, following Chief Long to the front door, the movement setting off a wind chime that hung from the porch awning.

The door opened promptly and a fiftyish couple met the chief with somber smiles. The two noticed Trevor standing behind her. While Mr. Nobel's eyes widened, his wife's narrowed. Chief Long shifted toward Trevor. "This is Detective West from Montana. Detective West, this is Joyce and Walter Nobel, Monica's parents."

"Good to meet you." Under the circumstances, he realized *good* was the wrong word.

Mr. Nobel stood two heads taller than his wife and wore silver-rimmed glasses. His hair was graying, and his brown eyes crinkled at the corners with a smile he didn't mean. "Come on in. I don't know what more we can tell you, but we'll do our best."

Trevor followed Chief Long into the sizable log cabin with rustic furnishings. He had noticed a shop and log chipper near the cabin. He'd bet that Nobel had made his own furniture, after he built the cabin.

"Make yourself comfortable." Mrs. Nobel's gray-streaked

black hair was frizzy and barely contained, her face etched with lines of grief. She gestured toward a floral sofa with a log frame and similar-style taupe chairs near large windows that opened to a stunning view of the fjord and inlet.

Trevor remained standing. But Chief Long gestured subtly that he should sit too. She knew her people, so he'd comply. She eased onto the edge of the sofa opposite them, and he slid wholly into an old, well-worn chair.

"Mr. and Mrs. Nobel, Chief Long tells me that your daughter knew Jennifer Warner."

They both nodded. Mrs. Nobel sat forward. "Monica went missing in May of last year." Tears prevented her from continuing.

Mr. Nobel cleared his throat. "Her body wasn't discovered until that August." He paused, frowning, pushing past his own grief. "The things she had on her person were returned to us. They've been in her room in a box. It wasn't until this week that we . . ." He took his wife's hand and squeezed. "We just couldn't bring ourselves to look at her stuff. Not yet. It's hard to accept that she's gone."

The process of learning the details could be painfully slow, and Trevor's jaw clenched tighter even as he tried to remain patient. Inside he was screaming. Shouting.

He put on a compassionate expression. "Go on."

Mrs. Nobel's chin quivered. "A ziplock bag contained her watch and a few items that were found in her pockets."

Elbows on thighs, Trevor leaned forward and clasped his hands. "Tell me about what more you found." The reason Chief Long had called him.

Mrs. Nobel shared another look with her husband. "We found the message Jennifer left with Monica. She was supposed to pass it on to Jennifer's brother."

He'd already been informed of the message.

*"If something happens to me, give this to my brother."*

“Do you have the message?”

“I do.” Chief Long stood to retrieve a small manila envelope from her jacket pocket.

He took the envelope and, inside, found a small key and a folded slip of paper. A pang sliced through him afresh. “When was the last time Monica saw Jennifer?”

“We think Monica met with her a few days before she disappeared.”

“Before *who* disappeared?”

“Monica. Our daughter. Sorry, Chief Long told us that Jennifer has disappeared too.”

Chief Long cleared her throat and looked at Trevor. “A connection was never made between the two women during the ABI’s previous investigation, as you now know. When the Nobels contacted me with the news that they’d discovered the envelope, I learned about Monica and Jennifer’s connection and then informed them of Jennifer’s disappearance.”

Trevor thought she might include an apology, but it hadn’t been her investigation. The ABI had missed key information. Trevor had missed it too.

“You came all the way from Montana to investigate. You must think this is a lead. We’re sorry we didn’t find it sooner. We assume you can find her brother to pass it on to.”

“Yes. We’ll pass it on.” Chief Long apparently wouldn’t give out information Trevor wasn’t willing to share. Or maybe she didn’t want the Nobels to know the truth yet.

“Did Monica tell you anything about Jennifer?” Trevor asked. “Where she was going? What she was involved in?”

“We know she was a photographer, but that’s all. So many photographers—amateur and professional—flock to Alaska. Monica said she had a geoscience degree.”

“Yes.” Geology. Interesting she would have shared that much. “How long was Monica friends with Jennifer?”

“We don’t know, exactly. Monica told us they met through

an online photography group. They talked about going on a photo trek together.”

That all tracked with what he already knew.

“What else can you tell me? Did Monica say anything else about Jennifer?”

*Slow down. One question at a time.* His personal stakes in this boiled over and would overwhelm them.

“I’m assuming since you came here from Montana, that you know her brother. That’s why you’re here. I’m surprised he didn’t come too.”

*Oh, he came.* He lifted his head and held the woman’s gaze. “Jennifer is my sister.”

*Is . . .* He couldn’t bring himself to even think “was.”

Because, yes, he admitted that he was a fool to hold on to hope.