

Sample ch Snowmelt

Chapter 1

Annette Bergquist fought tears, as she said, "She was my best friend. I'd have given my life to save hers." She stepped out of the truck, her eyes irresistibly drawn to the turbulent Selden River and the bridge across it. She carried her possessions in an oversized canvas tote slung high on her shoulder and thanked the driver, her mother's cousin, for the ride to Selden from the bus depot.

"I hope you can make peace with her," Ingrid said, her clear, northern Minnesota dialect as crisp as fresh celery.

"So do I." Ann smiled at the woman, masking the trepidation that gnawed away inside her. She shut the truck door and watched the vehicle drive away, barely able to stifle the urge to run after it, to escape.

Instead, she strode to the edge of the deck on the wooden bridge and stared at the roiling river. Swollen from the spring snowmelt, it was ready to spill over its banks onto the low fields surrounding it. A flash of vertigo rushed over her, and she grabbed the rough, weathered railing, clutching it until the

dizziness passed. Still grasping it, she leaned forward for a better view. The railing and balusters lurched toward the water, and Ann leaped backward, horrified at how close she'd come to tumbling into the icy water.

She tore her eyes from the churning water, squared her shoulders, and snugged the hood of her parka against the chilly breeze. Composing herself, she turned and tramped up the long driveway that led to the home of Gina Thorbert, her childhood friend. In spite of all that had happened, she didn't hate her. Instead she loathed herself for being such of a sucker, for again opening herself to more potential pain. Her emotions were in as much turmoil as the river. Was she compelled to see her again because they'd become blood sisters in that silly rite in second grade? Ann didn't think so, but nonetheless, the pull to return here had been irresistible.

Mostly though, she ached to come to terms with the past because it blocked her ability to give Kent more than the cautious love of which she was capable at present.

She was determined to find out the truth about Shelly, the girl who'd moved to the neighborhood when Ann was ten, and whose wicked actions had severed the friendship between her and Gina. Even after all these years, it was difficult to believe that Shelly had been capable of such evil; it was even more difficult

to believe that Gina had willingly gone along with her to the point where they'd nearly destroyed Ann's life.