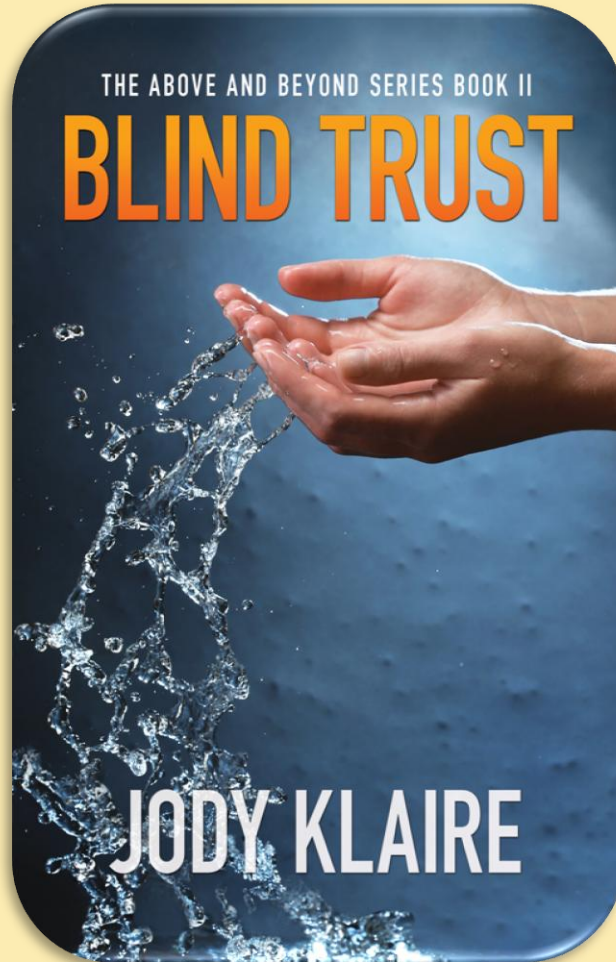


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TEASER



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Renee looked at Evan and signaled to him. He started to back up the ATV. The other members of our rescue crew carried on in the distance, digging around a car on its side. The snow underneath us shifted and I got a warning flash.

"Stop!"

Evan did as he was told and Renee lifted her eyebrows in question.

"I'll have to pull him from here, the whole thing is shifting."

Renee didn't argue but took Duke and moved him back.

"Aeron, can you pull him up?"

I nodded. I hoped it looked convincing.

"Then I'll bring a rope out to you too," she said.

"There's no time." My heart thudded, my skin clammy against the cold weather gear. I shivered and Renee frowned.

"Aeron, you don't look to great... maybe—"

"I can do this," I said. "Get everyone back." I turned to the edge. "Charlie, I'm gonna pull you up,"

"Hurry." His faint cry shot adrenaline through my veins. Renee met my eyes, all manner of thoughts flashing across her face.

"Hey," I offered her a smile. "I'll be okay... what's a little snow, right?"

She hesitated.

"Nan didn't get you saving my butt back in Oppidum to see me hurtle over a snowy edge." I met her eyes, trying to send

every bit of reassurance I could her way. "Trust me."

"I do," she said. It was such a strong statement that I swore it could have knocked me backwards with the force. Renee had always been kinda intense. I guessed that's what happened when you lived the life she did but there were times, like now, when I wondered how much of a toll it took on her.

"Good. Back up and let the snow expert do her thing," I said, my throat feeling like it had a snowball wedged in it.

Renee did as I asked and I turned back to face the edge. Another flash had warned me that I was sitting on the top of a huge slab of snow which was going to give way, soon.

All I had to do was haul up a fully grown man with a tow rope and not get me or him hurt.

No problem, I thought to myself as I gripped hold of the rope. No problem at all.