



The Mill River Redemption: A Novel

By Darcie Chan

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New York Times bestselling author Darcie Chan returns to the enchanting town of Mill River in a heartwarming novel of family, self-discovery, and forgiveness. Perfect for fans of Maeve Binchy.

Josie DiSanti is starting over. Recently widowed, she has fled her New York City home with her two young daughters—spirited Rose and shy Emily—in tow. She takes refuge in Mill River, Vermont, to live with her only remaining relative, Ivy Collard, the local bookstore owner and a woman Josie barely knows. There, the young mother and her girls build a new life for themselves—until a shocking tragedy tears the sisters apart.

Years later, Josie's still-estranged daughters return to the quiet town for the reading of their mother's will, which stipulates that they must work together to locate a hidden key to a safe-deposit box containing their inheritance. Even from the great beyond, it seems Josie will do anything to bring about her daughters' reconciliation. Having no choice but to go along with their mother's final wishes, Rose and Emily move back to Mill River for the summer to begin the search—discovering that, in the close-knit community known for magic and miracles, an even greater treasure awaits them.

Praise for *The Mill River Redemption*

“Delving into the complicated roles of siblings, parents, and neighbors, [Darcie] Chan gives each Mill River character a powerful role in refining and influencing these dynamics.”—*New York Journal of Books*

“Darcie Chan paints a vivid and loving portrait of the kind of small town we all wished we lived in. This layered tale of two estranged sisters brought together by a mother's love will make you laugh, cry, cheer, hug your loved ones a little tighter. An enchanting storyteller, Chan is one of those rare authors who make you feel more fully alive.”—**Elizabeth Letts, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *The Eighty-Dollar Champion***

“Readers looking for a feel-good book about small towns and family bonds won't be disappointed by Chan's latest.”—**Kirkus Reviews**

“An engrossing page-turner, reeling readers in further with each layer that’s revealed . . . a satisfying read with sympathetic and relatable characters that will be good for book group discussions and vacation reading.”—*Library Journal*

“Charming . . . compelling . . . Slow reveals and dramatic twists proliferate.”—*Booklist*

Look for special features inside. Join the Random House Reader’s Circle for author chats and more.

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Editorial Review

Review

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About the Author

Darcie Chan is the *New York Times* bestselling author of the eBook sensation *The Mill River Recluse* and the novel *The Mill River Redemption*. She has been featured in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. For fourteen years, Chan worked as an attorney drafting environmental and natural resource legislation for the U.S. Senate. She now writes fiction full-time and lives north of New York City with her husband and son.

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Chan / MILL RIVER REDEMPTION

Chapter 1

2013

On a Saturday afternoon in early May, Father Michael O’Brien knocked at the front door of the tidy house next to The Bookstop. It opened immediately, and he found himself face-to-face with Ruth Fitzgerald, the longtime owner of the bakery-café in town.

“Hello, Father,” she said, holding open the door. “Please come in.”

The elderly priest walked into the house and surveyed the scene. The place was quiet even though several people were gathered there. At the far end of the living room, Ivy Collard leaned on her cane and adjusted the position of a bronze urn on a small table. Surrounding the urn were several bouquets of flowers and some framed photographs of Josie DiSanti.

He watched as Ivy wiped her eyes and glanced around toward him, then at Rose and Emily, Josie's two adult daughters. They, too, were crying, though they stood apart from each other on opposite sides of the room. It had been a long time since he had seen Josie's children, and even longer since he'd seen them together. They were older and sadder, but other than that, not much different from how he remembered them.

Rose's appearance was impeccable. Her blonde hair curved just above her shoulders, and she wore a simple but elegant black dress. She wore quite a bit of eye makeup, but her tears did no appreciable damage to it.

Rose stood beside her husband, Sheldon, an older, balding ex-investment banker with a slightly bored but properly solemn expression. Their nine-year-old son, Alex, was dressed to match his father in a perfect black suit. The little boy neither fidgeted nor whined. He stood silently between his parents, rubbing away the occasional tear that shimmered behind his glasses, and took it all in. Rose kept her gaze focused on the urn and occasionally dabbed at her eyes with a tissue.

Emily stood alone, as far from Rose and her family as was possible in the small living room of Josie's house. She was as striking as Rose, but her appearance couldn't have been more different. Her natural beauty was only accentuated by a face devoid of makeup, a smattering of freckles high on her cheeks, and her soft red curls pulled back in a loose ponytail. Tears ran from her huge blue eyes—eyes exactly like her father's, as Josie had said so many times. Emily, too, was dressed in black—a simple skirt and top with a black cardigan two sizes too big. She stood with her arms wound tightly around her middle, as if to hold herself up.

"It's good to see you, Father," Ivy said quietly. "I guess we're all ready now. Everything's just as she wanted."

"Yes, thank you so much for coming, Father," Rose said, throwing her shoulders back and raising her chin. "You remember my husband, Sheldon Frye, and our son, Alex?"

"Of course." Father O'Brien shook hands with both of them. "It's good to see all of you again," he said with a glance over at Emily, "although I wish it were under different circumstances."

Rose eyed Emily before continuing in her elder-in-charge voice. "I know Mom thought the world of you, Father, and she was so grateful for your help over the years."

"Yes, she did, and she was," Emily said softly. "We appreciate your being here."

"Your mother was a wonderful person." He walked carefully to the table where the bronze urn and photos were displayed. He bowed his head, said a silent prayer, and made the sign of the cross before turning back to the group.

"I still wish we could've had some sort of viewing," Ruth said. "But Josie's instructions were clear. She always hated the idea of herself in a coffin, with everyone staring down at her. Never wanted that to be the last people saw of her." Ruth's voice broke, and she quietly excused herself to the kitchen.

"The poor thing." Ivy shook her head as she lowered herself onto the sofa. "She's right, though. And I expect we'll have quite a houseful today. Everyone in Mill River loved Josie. Lots of folks from Rutland knew her, too, since she sold so many houses over that way."

"I still can't believe she's gone," Rose said. "I talked to her just last week. She never mentioned anything about not feeling well or having any sort of heart problem."

Emily sniffed and glanced over at her sister but said nothing.

As an awkward silence filled the room, Father O'Brien saw Josie's daughters make brief eye contact with each other.

"With respect to the burial," he said gently after a moment, "I understand Josie wanted it to be a private family affair. Perhaps later on, after everyone has left, we could sit for a few minutes to decide on the timing and details? I don't have anything else scheduled today."

"We probably won't get to it today, Father," Ivy said before either daughter could respond. "I know it's unusual not to have a burial scheduled right after a wake, but that was Josie's doing. She wanted the girls to take care of something first." Ivy looked at him for a moment with raised eyebrows and a strange gleam in her eyes, as if there were more that she wanted to tell him.

Father O'Brien nodded, but he eyed her suspiciously. He knew Ivy well—in fact, he'd known her since sometime in the early seventies, when she'd first moved to Mill River with her fiancé, Thomas Dearborn. They'd finally decided to give up their hippie sort of lifestyle and put down roots, and the friendly Vermont town had seemed to them to be the perfect place.

Ivy and Thomas had bought a little house and opened The Bookstop in the front half of it. They appeared to be happy in the beginning, and certainly, their little bookstore filled a niche and thrived. For reasons unknown to Father O'Brien, though, Thomas broke their engagement and left her a few years later. Ivy stayed behind and became a loud, loving, quick-witted, slightly bawdy, big-hearted fixture in Mill River. She knew everything and everybody. It was difficult to keep a secret from her, and once she knew a secret . . . well, she found it almost impossible not to reveal it.

Looking at Ivy, Father O'Brien realized she was sitting on something—something having to do with Josie's girls—but he didn't have time to mull over what it might be. The townspeople had begun to arrive for Josie's wake, and before long he found himself moving through a crowded living room, visiting with those who stopped by.

Joe Fitzgerald, the police chief of Mill River, entered the house wearing his uniform. Fitz clapped him on the shoulder after he'd spoken to Josie's daughters.

"Hullo, Father," he said. "I guess everything is going well?"

"As well as these things can go," Father O'Brien replied. "Ruth's in the kitchen. She's having a rough time," he added.

"She's been upset ever since we got word. She and Josie were two peas in a pod, I tell you. Ruthie was almost as close to Josie as she was to her own sister." Fitz shook his head sadly and turned toward the kitchen. "I'll go spend a few minutes with her before I head back to the station."

A constant stream of visitors came through the front door. They made their way around the living room, signing the guest book, pausing to gaze at the urn and the pictures of Josie, stopping to shake hands and speak with Josie's daughters and Ivy. Kyle Hansen arrived with his daughter, Rowen, and Claudia Simon, an elementary-school teacher in Mill River whom he'd been dating for several months. Father O'Brien watched as Kyle and Claudia spoke with Emily, then Rose and her husband, and as Claudia knelt to speak to Alex.

The front door opened again, and another group of people filed into the house. He nodded to the Wykowski, Pearson, Burnham, and Lowell families as they passed him, but there were several people he didn't recognize. He was caught up in conversation when he felt a friendly tug on his elbow. He excused himself and looked down to see Daisy Delaine smiling up at him.

"Father, oh, am I ever glad you're here," she said in her familiar singsong voice. The little woman tossed her gray curls away from her face, revealing a large, port-wine birthmark that curled up onto her cheek. "You know, Josie was one of my best customers, and I feel so sad for her daughters. I made up a batch of my special grief potion for them. It's the same kind I made after Mrs. McAllister died. Do you remember?"

Daisy's words awoke a great sadness in his heart as he remembered the recent loss of his closest friend, but he did his best to smile and focus on the present situation. "Ah, yes, Daisy, that was quite a potent brew."

Daisy looked delighted. "Wasn't it, though? It helped me feel better, so I was thinking I'd give them each a big jar of it." She leaned closer to him and opened the top of her purse wide enough to reveal two large Mason jars full of a greenish liquid. Her voice dropped to a whisper. "I'm a little worried. I haven't seen either of them in a long time, you know. They might not remember me."

Father O'Brien smiled and patted Daisy's shoulder. "I'm sure they'll remember you," he said. "But, it's tough at a time like this, when Josie's daughters are sad and having to be good hostesses for all these people. Maybe you should wait to give them the potion until almost everyone else has gone home. That way, you'd have their full attention."

"That's a good idea, Father," Daisy said. "Thanks! I guess I'll go see what's in the kitchen while I wait. I heard Ruth brought some pies for refreshments."

He thought of Ruth Fitzgerald's fabulous tart cherry pie . . . and how he hadn't had any recently, since the bakery-café had been undergoing renovation. He turned to follow Daisy to the kitchen, but he found himself face-to-face with Ivy. She pulled him by the arm into the corner of the room, away from the clusters of mourners.

"Father, I didn't want to say anything earlier, in front of the girls," Ivy said in a low voice, "but I need to meet with them privately before this is over, and I was hoping you might sit in when I do. It's something their mother arranged, and it isn't gonna be pretty."

Sure enough, he thought, he'd been right about Ivy. "I'm happy to help however I can," he said. "If it's a personal family matter, though, shouldn't it just be between you and the girls? I wouldn't want to intrude."

"Well, you know how they are, Father. And what I've got to tell 'em, well, I know it'll go over like a frog in a punch bowl. Having you there will help them keep control of themselves and maybe even stay civil toward each other, because they're still as far apart as the sun and the moon."

"I gathered as much when I first came in," he said. "When and where will you have this meeting?"

"Rose and her family will be driving back to New York this afternoon, and Emily has an evening flight back to California, so I suspect they'll be itching to leave here as soon as they can. I thought I'd pull the girls aside once the crowd thins out."

Father O'Brien nodded. "Just let me know when."

Once most of the visitors had left Josie's house, he saw Ivy go first to Rose, then to Emily. The women looked perplexed, but they excused themselves from their conversations and made their way toward Josie's office, off the living room. Ivy looked up and caught Father O'Brien's eye from across the room. It was time.

He signaled his understanding with a small nod. As curious as he was about the reason for Ivy's meeting, he doubted very much that it would be a warm family chat. In fact, something in his gut told him that he was being sucked into a very uncomfortable situation.

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