



The Resilience of Red Thread

Catherine Marshall-Smith

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A man works to justify his misdeeds, even as his new partner falls into unhealthy patterns, in The Resilience of Red Thread, an insightful domestic novel.

Domestic violence features into Catherine Marshall-Smith's foreboding novel *The Resilience of Red Thread*, about a woman who becomes involved with a stranger.

Emily is the young mother of a toddler, Jenna. After taking out a restraining order on Lee, her ex-husband, she tries to rebuild their lives. With her mother's financial help, she moves into a duplex and begins running a daycare. When Jake, an exterminator, comes to remove a hornet's nest, he ends up rescuing her from Lee.

Alternating between Emily's and Jake's forthright narrations, the novel proceeds at the pace of a thriller. Ominous hints plant doubt about Jake's intentions. His sensitivity and inflated pride about his work, for instance, suggest that he is prickly. However, Emily's personal challenges keep her from being alarmed, and she views him as a source of refuge.

As Jake discloses more about himself, including that he protected his sisters from childhood abuse, questions swirl around whether he is guided by noble instincts or darker intentions. The plot's explosive turns contribute to this tension: Jake commits a crime that Emily doesn't witness; he keeps it a secret. Apprehension regarding whether his victim will resurface mixes with his delight over having found a new family in Emily and Jenna.

Indeed, Jake's inner contradictions generate gripping plot turns. Meanwhile, Emily's traumas, alcoholism, and vulnerability are attended to in more concise terms. She compares Jake to Lee, impressed by their seeming differences; she flinches over tough memories, too. Her relationship with Jake zigzags among gratitude, bids for romance, and wariness.

Set within Silicon Valley and the Santa Cruz mountains, the story explores the area's less affluent corners to background Jake and Emily's precarious situations. As they move between Jake's sparse apartment, a motel, and other locales, the pair's lack of stability becomes apparent. A long section set within a luxury cabin borrowed from Jake's boss highlights Jake's panic to solidify their relationship, as well as Emily's increasing dependence upon him.

At times, though, loose incidents underscoring Jake's hidden temper are drawn out, in particular since this trait is clear without them. And one character's change in fortune feels too abrupt. And while Emily's romanticization of Jake gives way to reality in time, this maturation happens, in great part, because of the intercessions of others.

In the sobering domestic novel *The Resilience of Red Thread*, a woman grows from psychological captivity toward hope for a fresh start.

KAREN RIGBY (April 14, 2026)

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