

*God has moved mountains to get me here. He's given me people in my life to push and encourage me, a church family that supports me and the right contacts to make this dream a reality.*

*To God be the glory!*



# RAINSTORM

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All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either fictional or historical, is purely coincidental.

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## PROLOGUE



A jolt of blinding pain woke her.  
“Laurel?”

That voice ... it was familiar.

“Come on. Open those eyes.”

Taking a deep breath, she squinted, Uncle Walter’s face finally cleared through the blurriness.

“What happened?” she whispered, the pain in her jaw made her moan.

“Now, take it easy. I was going to ask you the same thing.”

“Mom ... mom was ...” she closed her eyes, trying to find the memory from the blurred moments of last night.

“Where’s your mom?”

Her body ached, her head spun.

“Laurel?”

“I don’t remember what happened. Where’s my mom?” Her mind eased as darkness sank in once more.







15 Years Later

Rain trailed off the brim of Laurel Ashburn's hat as she pushed the release on the jack.

She shook out her freezing hands and shivered at the cool, autumn air hitting her soaked fingers. The breeze shifted, driving the rain onto her skin like icy darts. "The one day I don't pack a rain jacket."

Laurel took in a deep breath, the chilly air stung her throat. Fall had come to Cave Springs, Arkansas, and with it, rain showers and cool evenings.

Lights engulfed her. She heard the sound of a car pulling up from behind and frowned.

"Of course, after I get the tire changed, someone wants to stop and help," she muttered, yanking the jack from under the car.

With a sigh, she stood and turned, raising her hand with a wave. "I'm fine, thanks. Already changed the flat." She motioned to the figure stepping from the car.

Popping the trunk, she dropped the jack inside and slammed the lid down. As she turned, an imposing figure stood only a few

feet behind her. She jumped. His face was barely visible in the night and the shadow of headlights.

“Oh, um, like I said, I’m good.” She turned to walk away when his hand gripped her left elbow.

She spun, fisting her right hand and yanking her elbow away. Her instincts went on high alert as she pulled the keys from her pocket. Something didn’t feel right, and her gut told her to get ready to fight.

“You should come home with me.” The ragged voice echoed, the man angled into the light.

Taller than her 5’5” frame by a good six inches, the man was skinny but broad-shouldered. His large, wide-brimmed hat collected rainwater falling in sheets. It rolled off the side as he tilted his head. Dark eyes and a narrow nose disappeared, replaced by a brooding smirk.

“No. I’m going home.” She narrowed her gaze, threading the keys between her fingers.

A chuckle echoed over the sound of the rain, then he lunged. Stepping back and out of the way, she jabbed the keys into his arm, then punched his side as she rushed past him.

He straightened, turning with a grunt.

“You’re surprising.” His murmur barely sounded over the wind.

The man produced a knife from his pocket, and she frowned. It had been years since her training, and after moving back home, she hadn’t needed it.

Laurel steadied her breaths and waited for him to attack. Blocking his first punch with the knife, she landed a hit to his chest with the keys. But they fell from her grip as she side-stepped another thrust at her body.

A kick to his leg as she deflected the knife put him on his knees. The glimmer of her keys on the ground took her focus for a second. As she sprinted to pick them up, she heard his breath behind her. Suddenly, heat and pain surged through her back.

With a scream, she turned, landing a punch to his chest. He

reacted with another slice of his knife, catching the back of her arm. Yelling again, she gripped his hand with her right and twisted his wrist until the blade fell.

He yelled, then threw a wild punch. She dodged, pulled his arm behind him, dislocated his elbow, and then his shoulder. A hit to his back, then a sweep of her leg put him to the ground.

Trembling, she hobbled to the front of her car. Using it as a brace, she slid around the side and away from the headlights that lit the road.