

# 3



Campbell was amazed to see so many people outside the church on a Wednesday morning. Her father found a parking spot on the far end of the lot, and they both got out. Campbell stood looking around. She saw a few people she knew from the congregation, but most were strangers, and the two large box trucks sitting on the pavement were definitely not the usual sight in that place.

“There’s Pastor Flynn.” Her dad pointed, and Campbell spotted the lanky man. He was dressed casually, in khakis and a short-sleeved maroon shirt.

He looked up as they approached, peering at them through his dark-framed glasses. “Bill, Campbell. Thanks for coming. Everything all right over your way?”

“We’re fine,” Bill said. “We spent yesterday cleaning up and sorting things out.”

“Was your house damaged?”

“No, just the edge of the garage roof, but it’s not serious. With so many people needing more help, I went ahead and did

the repairs myself. The house next door got smacked by a tree, but it's vacant right now. Otherwise everything's good."

"Glad to hear it."

Her father was downplaying their difficulties, but Campbell didn't blame him. With so many people hurt or homeless now, the inconvenience of the power outage and a bit of minor damage to the garage seemed insignificant. They'd checked on all their clients by cell phone and assured them they'd continue to work on their cases. The attorneys and insurance companies from which her dad often accepted jobs were all closed for the time being.

"We heard on the radio that people were coming here to help distribute water and food," Campbell said.

"That's right. Nancy's organizing things." He nodded to the side, where his wife was seated behind a folding table with another woman. Clipboards and papers covered the surface before them.

"Is the church all right?" She couldn't see along the side of the building.

"A couple of broken windows from flying debris. We're thankful it wasn't worse." The pastor smiled. "Our house was spared too. We're trying to help those who fared worse."

"How bad is it?" Bill asked.

"Real bad over Aurora way and along the western lake shore. They've got a lot of rescue workers over there. We're trying to provide bottled water and bag lunches for all the crews and families who really need it. Of course, the power's out all over, but some people have lost their homes. They've got nothing."

"Wow. Do you know how many houses were hit?" Campbell asked.

"Not yet, but I'm told thirty at a minimum were destroyed. That includes half a dozen on the west side of town, but it

seems it's worse near the lake. And a lot more have severe damage. Maybe hundreds of structures."

Bill frowned. "How can we help?"

"Well, the city's lining up places for people to stay—hotel rooms, apartments, campers—anything as a temporary lodging. The church is providing water and a little food, along with information on where they can find shelter and clothes—the basic needs. You can help with the distribution."

"We'd be happy to," Campbell said. "Do you know if anyone was hurt in the storm?"

Pastor Flynn nodded soberly. "They haven't confirmed it officially, but I heard there are at least three dead, and quite a few who were taken to hospitals. I'm heading to Murray-Calloway myself. Those with more serious injuries are being taken to Paducah or Nashville."

Bill patted his shoulder. "You get going, Waldo. We'll check with Nancy and see where we can help out."

"Thanks." Pastor Flynn nodded and walked away.

"I didn't think it was so bad," Campbell said. "I guess the fact that it didn't rip through the middle of town was deceptive. A few trees down, some roof damage ..."

"Yeah. Let's see if we can make a difference here." Her father led the way toward Nancy Flynn's table, and they got in line behind two other people.

"Hello," Nancy said with a smile when it was their turn.

"We're here to help," Bill said.

"Wonderful." She looked down at her clipboard. "Can you drive over to Kentucky Lake?"

"Sure."

"Good. There are several crews working over there, checking on people and searching damaged houses for casualties. We're sending them bottled water and food, for the

volunteers, mostly, but of course you can give some to anyone out there who needs it.”

“Do you need food donations?” Campbell asked. “Or people to cook?”

“Oh, no. We may hold a supper here later for the volunteers, but we’ve got several restaurants donating bag lunches—the Barn Owl, Dumplins, Papa John’s, Panera Bread—quite a few, actually.” Nancy looked up as a young woman slipped a sheet of paper onto the table in front of her. “Thanks, Gina.”

Campbell recognized the volunteer as a church member and exchanged smiles with her before Gina hurried away.

“If you could take some of the donated food out there, it would help, and we’re sending cases of bottled water for the crews to distribute.”

“We can take a dozen or more cases,” Bill said.

“Great.”

“Where are you getting the bottled water?” Campbell asked. Her father had scouted stores in the area the previous day but hadn’t found any open for customers because of the power outage.

“Several men from the church drove to Paducah yesterday. We got a great response on donations.” Nancy stood and pointed toward one of the trucks, where the back doors were open and men were unloading flats. “I’ll give you authorization, and you can take it over there, to the fellow in the green shirt. He’ll show you where to pull your vehicle up so they can load for you.”

While her dad moved his car closer to the truck of donated water, Campbell went to collect two dozen bag lunches from a van marked *Applebee’s*. A woman gave her a carton with the first dozen.

“Take these and I’ll hold the second batch until you come back.”

“Thanks.” Campbell edged between people, carrying the box toward her dad’s car. He had the trunk open, and two young men were filling space with cases of water. Her father stood beside the car, talking to a dark-haired woman whose back was to Campbell.

“Excuse me, Dad. Where do you want these?”

Bill jumped forward to take the carton from her. “I’ll put them in the back seat. Oh, Jackie, I don’t think you’ve met my daughter.”

The woman turned toward her with a broad smile. Campbell grinned back as she handed over the lunches to her dad.

“Oh, you’re the one who was looking at Ben Tatton’s house yesterday.”

“Yes, I did view the house. Your father was just telling me it was damaged in the storm.”

Campbell winced and took the woman’s extended hand. “It was. I hope you weren’t planning to buy it and move right in.”

“No, I’d crossed that one off my list, but I’m sorry to hear about the damage.”

Her dad was back, and he looked expectantly between the two of them. “Campbell, this is an old friend of your mother’s—Jackie Fleming. Jackie, my daughter Campbell.”

*Jackie.* Campbell studied her face intently. Friend of her mom’s. Yes, it was her. The girl in the photo with her mom and their dates. She should say something, but her lips wouldn’t seem to operate.

She cleared her throat. “I hope you find the house you’re looking for soon.”

“Thanks,” Jackie said. “I went out to look at a place on the

lake a few days ago, and it was a great location, but it was too pricey. I hope to find something here in town.”

Bill nodded. “If we hear of anything, we’ll let you know.”

From that, Campbell assumed her dad had Jackie’s phone number. Of course, he was a private investigator—it probably wouldn’t take him two minutes to find it if she hadn’t already given it to him.

“Well, I’d better let you get going,” Jackie said as one of the young men shut the trunk. “Bill, it was great to reconnect with you. Maybe we’ll meet again.” She hurried off.

Campbell turned to her dad, still a bit shell shocked.

“All set?” he asked.

“Oh! No, there’s another box of lunch bags. Hold on.” She turned and dashed back to the restaurant van.

“There you are,” said the woman who’d helped her earlier. “I almost gave your box away.” She lifted another cardboard carton and placed it in Campbell’s hands. “Good luck, and keep safe.”

“Thanks.” Campbell plodded back to the car.

Her dad was waiting with the back door open. “I’ll take it.” He eased the carton from her arms and slid it in beside the other.

Campbell went around to the passenger side and got in, still trying to process the new information. “So,” she said as he started the engine. “Jackie. Did you say her last name is Fleming?”

“Yeah. Used to be Lowe, I think.”

“Oh, so she married some guy named Fleming.”

“That’s right.”

“Do you know his first name?”

“I don’t think she mentioned it. Why?”

“Nothing. I just—I didn’t see any Mr. Fleming with her when Nell showed her the house.”

“No, I don’t think he’s in the picture now. She told me she was thinking of moving over here to be closer to her daughter’s family.”

Already, Campbell was planning to do some research when they got home. Was Mr. Fleming’s first name Shawn? That was the name of the boy standing next to Jackie in the photo. Interesting. If she did have another encounter with Jackie, maybe she’d ask about the high school foursome.

They rode in silence for several minutes, up Route 80 to Aurora, then up 68. It seemed like trees were down everywhere, and they passed two crews dragging limbs and other debris off the road. Several houses and businesses looked unscathed, and then they’d roll past one with severe damage. One garage’s roof had apparently peeled off during the storm.

When her dad turned off onto a gravel road toward Kentucky Lake, she took notice.

“This is the road Keith’s folks live on.”

“Yeah.”

She looked over at him, suddenly fearful. “Keith would have called us if their house was hit, wouldn’t he?”

“You tell me.” Her dad drove onward without looking her way. “If he was too busy, maybe not.”

“Oh, Dad.”

“You’ve been praying for the people who are affected by this, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, keep praying. We’ll know soon if the Fullers were hit.”

Keith had checked on them by phone the previous morning, but he’d been in a hurry and had said nothing about his parents.

A half mile from the lake, they passed less expensive dwellings than those on lots with shorefront. Several modest

summer cottages stood uninhabited and a bit forlorn looking. As they rounded a bend, Campbell caught her breath. She was sure a small house had stood there, but now it was gone. Scattered fragments lay here and there, but the site of the dwelling now consisted of foundation blocks and part of one wall jutting upward. Beyond it, trees were uprooted and tossed to the ground like a child's building blocks.

"It passed through here," her father said grimly.

A short distance ahead, flashing lights put them on the alert. Bill slowed the car to a crawl and pulled up behind a patrol car.

"Stay here." He got out and walked to the place where a gaping foundation showed where another cottage had stood.

Much of the scattered debris was so broken and battered that Campbell couldn't identify it, though she did see a large piece of metal roofing leaning upright against a tree, the top half of which had been snapped off. Chunks of siding and sheetrock lay here and there, mingled with bits of clothing or furniture. Something metal—a tray, perhaps—was wrapped tightly around the trunk of a scarred oak tree.

Bill had found a county sheriff's deputy and was deep in conversation with him. Campbell rolled down her window but couldn't hear what they were saying.

After a couple of minutes, the deputy walked with her father to the car.

"We'll leave half a dozen lunches here, and a case of water," her dad said and went to open the trunk.

She got out and took six lunch bags from the back seat and handed them to a second uniformed man who'd come to help.

"Just pull around us and keep on," the deputy said. "I'm sure you'll find him. And thanks!"

As soon as her dad was back in the car, Campbell said. "Find who?"



“Keith.”

“He’s out here? It’s not his jurisdiction.”

“Anybody who can help is out here,” Bill said.

“We’re nearly to his parents’ place. Did the deputy say anything about Nathan and Angela?”

“Not much. But you can be sure Keith’s with them, unless someone else needs him more urgently.” He edged his Camry around the patrol car and eased on down the dirt road.

The closer they got to the lake, the fewer trees remained standing. Campbell’s stomach roiled as she saw evidence of several demolished dwellings.

Then she spotted him. Keith, in jeans and a sweatshirt, stood with his parents at the end of their short driveway. Beyond them she glimpsed the roofline of the Fuller’s year-round house with a gaping hole on the end nearest them. The lake below, which was actually a widened section of the Tennessee River, didn’t hold its usual shimmer. Today, the turgid water looked muddy and broody, and certainly less inviting than usual.

“I wonder what this did to the fish.”

“Who knows?” Bill pulled in behind Keith’s SUV.

As soon as their car stopped moving, Campbell leaped out and ran to them.

“Are you okay?”

“Well, hi there,” Nathan said with a tempered smile. “We’re fine, little lady.”

Campbell grabbed Angela’s hand. “Were you out here Monday night?”

“We were. The basement is sturdy, and we were safe.” She looked sadly toward their house. “We’ll have some major repairs to do, but thank God we lived through it. Our house is still standing. Some of our neighbors weren’t so fortunate.”

Campbell glanced around. From where she stood, she could see evidence of at least two demolished houses.

Bill explained their errand, but Keith's father shook his head. "We drew water when we heard the storm was coming, and we've got several barrels full. We've got plenty of food, too, but thanks. Take it to someone who's worse off than we are."

Keith leaned close to Campbell. "I was going to call you, but I came out here to check on the folks, and then I couldn't get cell service. I was on duty all day yesterday, but I managed to touch base with them, so I knew they were basically okay. I'm off today, and I came out to help Dad get started on closing in the end of the house."

"Our phones worked in town," Campbell said. "Do you think the cell towers are down?"

"Some of them, for sure. Dad and I have set up his generator, and we're trying to figure out which circuit breakers to turn off for the wrecked part of the house."

Bill shook his head. "I knew I should have bought a generator."

"There'll be a big run on them this week," Nathan said bleakly. "You probably won't be able to find one by the time you get back to town."

"No, but when this is over, a lot of people will sell them," Angela said.

Nathan sighed. "Probably true. Some folks think lightning never strikes the same place twice, but we know better." He looked off along the shore. "Keith and I are heading next door. Those poor folks got it a lot worse than we did. We went over yesterday to check if anyone was in there when the storm hit, but the fire department crew is checking under all the mess to make sure. Care to join us, Bill?"

"We'd better stay on our round. But maybe the crew over there can use some refreshments and water." He turned to

Campbell. “Grab a few of those lunches, Soup, and I’ll get some water bottles. We can have a looksee.”

Angela walked with her to Bill’s car, while the three men headed for the destroyed cottage.

“I’m glad your house is still standing.” Campbell smiled and opened the rear door.

“Oh, yes, we’re so thankful!” Angela accepted two of the lunch bags, and Campbell pulled out four more. “That cottage next door was for sale, you know.”

Campbell shook her head.

“That’s why we’re pretty sure nobody was in there when the tornado hit.” Angela walked slowly toward what had been her neighbors’ house. “The owners only came out here twice this summer. They told us in June they were thinking of selling, and the next thing we knew, it was on the market. We figured it would sell fast, but ...” She looked bleakly ahead to the rubble.

“That’s sad,” Campbell said. “I suppose the insurance company will reimburse them, but still ...”

“A woman was out here Saturday, looking at it. Nell Calhoun has shown it at least a dozen times in the last week.”

“I know Nell. Who was the other woman? A local buyer?”

“I’d never met her. She said she was from over Bowling Green way. Jackie something.”

Campbell stopped walking. “Jackie Fleming?”

“That sounds right.”

“I know her too.”

Angela frowned. “That’s right, you folks used to live in Bowling Green.”

“Dad said Ms. Fleming was a friend of my mother’s. I met her this morning at the church, when we went to volunteer. I don’t think I’d ever met her before—or if I did, I was too young to remember.”

“Small world,” Angela said.

“Very.” They started walking again. “So, you talked to her?”

“I was outside when they came, and Nell introduced us.”

“Nell’s good that way.” Campbell stopped twenty feet from the heap of rubble.

One of the volunteer firemen left the work crew and came to meet them.

“This is terrific. Thanks!” He took the water bottles and lunch bags and distributed them among his crew of four.

Angela went on toward what was left of the vacant cottage, and Campbell followed.

Nathan stood at the edge of the rubble with his hands on his hips. “They’re pretty sure nobody was in there, just as we thought.”

“Good. I was surprised nobody had made an offer on it yet.” Angela glanced at her husband.

“Maybe they priced it too high.” He shrugged.

“Oh, look at that next cottage.” Angela stared toward a spot beyond the men, closer to the lake.

“I didn’t notice how bad that one was earlier,” Keith admitted, frowning. “I guess I thought what little is there was bits that blew over from this lot.”

“There used to be a whole cottage there,” Nathan said.

Angela shielded her eyes. “It’s just gone.”

“I remember, now that you say that,” Keith said. “That was a rental, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, they have it on Airbnb,” Angela said.

“Do you know if they’d rented it out this week?”

“No idea.”

Nathan shook his head. “I don’t either. I don’t recall seeing anyone over there Monday, but I was more concerned with making sure our place was battened down.”

“Let’s go take a look,” Keith said.

Bill and the Fuller men walked toward the spot. Campbell wasn't sure what to do. She looked back at where she'd given the food to the firefighters.

"The crew's leaving." She could barely see the men walking toward their truck on the camp road.

"I wonder if they realized there was another cottage down here." Angela started across the ground strewn with pine needles, dodging a ruined window frame and some broken tree limbs.

Campbell gazed up into the ravaged trees, wondering if the squirrels and other animals had escaped.

They headed toward the next lot, surveying the storm damage. In a swath about twenty yards wide, every tree was uprooted or snapped off a few feet above the ground.

"It's awful here," Campbell said.

"Yes, Keith said at least twenty houses were destroyed in Marshall County alone. There's a lot of debris in the lake."

Campbell looked back toward the Fullers' house. "After seeing all this, I can hardly believe your house was almost spared."

"Me either. And the firemen said that around the point, everything looks almost normal. A few trees and limbs down, but nothing like this devastation."

Ahead of them, her father, Keith, and Nathan were in the middle of what had been a foundation, throwing pieces of debris out on the far side. Campbell wondered if the owners would rebuild the vacation cottage. It had been a source of income for them, not their primary residence like Nathan and Angela's.

Bill gave a sharp cry, and the others hurried to where he stood by a pile of broken building components. Keith and Nathan started throwing off the chunks of debris. Their air of

urgency sent a surge of adrenalin through Campbell. She walked a little faster.

“Nathan,” Angela called, and her husband paused with a piece of a broken plank in his hands. “What’s going on?”

“We think there may be somebody here.”

“No!” Angela quickened her steps, and Campbell hurried with her to the spot.