

# 2



Campbell jerked awake to an annoying buzz from her cell phone. She fumbled for it, staring at the digital clock. It read 2:40. She swiped the phone's screen and put it to her ear.

"Tornado warning in your area. Take shelter immediately. This warning will be in effect until 3:05 a.m. Repeat ..."

Her father's knock was louder than the one he'd used earlier.

"Campbell! Get up, kiddo. Tornado warning."

"I'm up, Dad. I'll be right there." She switched on her lamp, stuck her feet into her slippers and reached for her robe. At the last minute, she'd shoved a complete clean outfit into the tote bag she used for these times, so she wouldn't have to worry about getting dressed or being without shoes if the worst happened.

Wind buffeted the tree outside her window, so loud it sounded as if a big truck was passing. She stuck her phone in her robe's side pocket, grabbed the tote and her laptop case, and opened the door. Her dad was standing just outside with an olive green knapsack and his laptop in his hands.

“Let’s go.” He strode to the stairway and glanced back at her.

“I’m right behind you.” Campbell hurried down the steps and followed him through the kitchen to the cellar door.

Bill flipped on the lights in the basement and went more slowly down the narrow staircase. The kitchen windows rattled. Campbell trailed her father, shutting the door at the top of the stairs, but leaving the lights on behind her. They had put a couple of armchairs left from the previous owner’s furnishings down there. Tonight was the first time they’d felt the need to shelter in the basement, and Campbell was glad they’d had the foresight to prepare.

“Just like being in the bunker.” Bill laid down his burdens and sank into an ugly, mustard-colored chair.

Campbell winced at the reminder of her father’s time in forced solitude. Though the memory was painful for both of them, it had prompted Bill to stock their own cellar with bottled water, non-perishable food, a battery-operated weather radio, a few books and games, and enough furniture to keep them somewhat comfortable.

They’d stashed food and bedding for three, in case a warning came in daylight hours and Nick was with them. Campbell was glad he wasn’t. She couldn’t imagine being confined for very long with Nick.

“So,” Bill said.

She smiled. “Yeah. Here we are.”

“I guess we could read e-books.”

“Or play cards.”

“You want to?”

She hesitated. “I’d rather just talk for a while.”

“Okay.”

After another ten seconds of silence, Campbell turned to

see his face in the glare of the bare bulbs overhead. “Dad, I’m worried about the test.”

“You’ll ace it.”

“What if I don’t?”

He shrugged. “Study some more and take it again?”

“Maybe.”

“Having second thoughts?”

She let out a sigh. “Not really. I love working with you, and it seems we’re getting enough business for you to pay two employees.”

“We sure are. I’ve never been so busy. I think it’s the publicity we got from the last couple of high-profile cases.”

“You mean, the psychic?”

He pursed his lips, nodding. “And the writer.”

“You’re probably right. A lot of people still ask about Katherine.”

“You’re good, Soup. You’ve got a real knack for this.”

She studied his face. “Do you really think so, Dad? I mean, I thought I had a knack for teaching. But now I think I just loved literature. More than I did the students, maybe, and that’s not good. I mean, I’m supposed to love people and—and show God’s love to them.”

“You can do that as an investigator. I think you have.”

“Not much.”

“Some, then. You can’t come on full blast at people you’re working for. But if the client’s situation is difficult, which it usually is in our profession, then sometimes you can ease into a discussion about God and how He’s in control.”

“Yeah.” She sat for a moment pondering that. Was she too reticent to broach spiritual topics with other people? Was she scared of breaching ethical guidelines? Or was she just afraid people wouldn’t like her if she did that?

The light bulbs flickered and went out. Neither of them spoke for a moment.

Campbell swallowed hard. “Dad, what if I can’t pass the test, do you really want me to stay on?”

“Of course.”

“As what? A receptionist?”

His hand found hers in the darkness. “Campbell, you’re always welcome here. I love you, and I’m happy you chose to live with me. Even if you went back to teaching, or if you had a different job, I’d still be pleased to have you here. But you are not going to fail that test.”

“That’s easy to say.”

After a pause, he said, “You were always a little timid. Even as a child, you were afraid of failing. But I can remember very few times when you did.”

“I didn’t make the basketball team.”

“Okay, there was that.”

“Or get the part I wanted in the senior play.”

“What part did you want?”

“Cinderella, of course.”

“But you got to be in the play.”

She sighed. “As an extra, to dance at the ball. And I had to have private dancing lessons to do that right.”

“You dance beautifully now.”

“How do you know?” She turned toward him, although she couldn’t see him. “You haven’t seen me dance since that play.”

“I remember.”

“Well, I haven’t done it in years. I’ve probably forgotten how.”

“I think it’s like riding a bike.”

Meaning, she supposed, that you never forgot. When you went back to it, the technique returned to you. Fairy godmother magic? Muscle memory, more likely.

“Dad?”

“Yeah?”

“If I wasn’t here, would you have asked Nick to move in with you when you bought this house?”

“No way.”

His instant response brought her some relief.

“He’d drive me crazy,” Bill added.

Campbell smiled and turned on her flashlight. “Should we turn on the lantern?”

“If you want. Talking in the dark isn’t so bad, is it?”

No, it wasn’t. In fact, she’d found it easier to voice her fears knowing her father’s sharp gaze couldn’t find her face.

Campbell turned her flashlight off. She wrinkled her nose at the pervasive scent of the earth floor.

Her father shifted in his chair. “I intend to give you a raise after you pass the test, you know.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“You should get the same pay I’m giving Nick. You do at least as much work as him, and you’re nearly as good. In fact, I predict you’ll be better than he is within a few months.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You’re a quick learner. That girl they picked for Cinderella—”

“Audra Pagels?”

“Whoever. She stumbled over her lines.”

“Yeah, I guess she did a few times.”

“You wouldn’t have.”

Campbell smiled in the darkness.

Above them, a roar burst through the air. The house shook, and the joists creaked. Her heart thudded.

Her dad’s flashlight came on. Flecks of dust floated in its beam. “I don’t like the sound of that. Let’s move.”

She jumped up, grabbed a foam mattress, and ran to

crouch beneath the stairs, next to the wall of the old coal bin they didn't use. Her dad plopped in beside her and held his foam pad over their heads.

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Half an hour after the noise stopped, Campbell and her father emerged from their nest. In the beams of their flashlights, the basement looked the same.

"Let me take a look topside." Bill headed for the stairs.

"I'm coming too."

He didn't protest, so Campbell followed him up the steps. At the top, he opened the kitchen door and paused, flicking his light around the room.

"Looks okay in here."

As she emerged from the cellarway, the pattering of rain against the windows greeted Campbell, along with the lingering scent of coffee. Her dad was right, everything in the kitchen looked fine. They ventured into the hall and checked the dining room and the big office. Bill opened his office door, looked around, then closed it.

"Upstairs?" Campbell asked.

"Yeah. I think it may have missed us, but we'd better make sure. There could be a broken window or something."

She let her father lead the way, and they separated on the landing, checking their bedrooms, the sitting room, bathroom, and guest room.

"Okay here," she told him when they met again in the hall.

"Just let me take a look at the attic."

Campbell flipped the light switch in her bedroom while he was gone, hoping but not believing the power had been restored. Nope, still dark. She went to the window, shut off her flashlight, and looked out. The trees tossed eerily, and she

could hear a constant moaning of wind. The sky was still black, and rain drummed on the porch roof below, but it wasn't a deluge.

Willow Street was out there, but she couldn't see it. No streetlights. No comforting glow from the Hills' house across the street.

Her father came to the doorway. "The attic looks okay. I don't think there's any damage to the roof, but I want to rig up and scout around outside, just in case."

She smiled. "I can't make coffee, but I'll rustle up something for a snack."

"Don't open the refrigerator."

"Right." That would put a serious cramp in her efforts.

Down in the kitchen, she rifled the cupboards and came up with small bottles of root beer—not cold, but they'd have to rough it—a few no-bake cookies, and the remains of Nick's morning doughnut run.

She lit a candle and placed it in the middle of the small pine kitchen table. She thought of setting their places as if for a formal occasion but decided not to. No telling when they'd be able to run the dishwasher again. She settled for a couple of paper plates and two glasses.

Bill came in through the garage door, took off his rain jacket, and hung it on a hook. "Looks like a limb from that big oak came down on the garage."

"Is it leaking in there?"

He shook his head. "I don't think so, but we'll know by morning. I'll have to cut up the limb and get rid of it."

"Fireplace wood?" Campbell looked forward to chilly evenings in the fall when they'd have an excuse to use the fireplace. They'd never had one in their previous homes.

"Yeah, maybe. It won't be dry, but I can stack it in the garage." He surveyed the table as he spoke then nodded and

sat in one of the chairs. “If the roof needs work, I’ll call someone in the morning. But that’s not the worst thing.”

“Oh?” Campbell picked up her root beer. “What else?”

“You know that tree in Tatton’s yard?”

“The big willow?”

“Yeah, the one the cat liked.”

“What about it?”

He grimaced. “A big chunk of it fell on the house. I couldn’t see very well, but I’m thinking there’s a lot of damage.”

Campbell sucked in a breath. “We should call Nell and tell her.”

“Yeah. And thank God no one was in the house.”

Campbell’s phone rang, and she pulled it from her pocket.

“Hey, Keith.”

“Are you okay?” he asked without greeting her.

“We’re fine. I guess you are?”

“I’m all right, but I’m worried about my folks. Word is, there’s a lot of damage here in town and on up toward Aurora and the lake. I haven’t been able to get through to them. I don’t have details yet, but I’m heading up there with a squad. We’ll be going door to door.”

“Wow. Can we do anything?”

“Not until daylight, I’d think, but all the firefighters, EMTs and officers who aren’t essential to the station are going. Stay in and stay safe tonight.”

“Okay. Keep us posted.”

She relayed what he’d said to her father, who had just come down the stairs with his own cell phone.

“The land line’s out,” he said.

Campbell frowned. “Usually we have it even when the power goes out.”

“I know. This is bad, Campbell. They’re saying on the radio that some businesses on the west side of Murray were hit, and



several dozen homes. It ripped over to the Land Between the Lakes. They don't know how bad it is yet. It could have done some damage in LBL, or even on the other side of Lake Barkley."

"Well, Keith says a lot of rescue workers are out there."

"We're supposed to shelter in place, but I think we should check on the neighbors."

"Yes, especially the elderly ones. Miss Louanne must be terrified. Do you think her house was hit?" The sweet, older woman lived just beyond the vacant Tatton property.

"I don't think the twister got that tree. I think it was the strong winds. But, yeah, we should check on Miss Louanne. You want to go there, and I'll go over to the Hills' place?"

"Sure. I'll run upstairs and get her key." Louanne Vane had given Campbell a key to her house after a mishap that gave them all a scare. She dashed up the stairs and back down again. Her dad was just about to go out the front door.

"I've got my phone," he said with a wave. "I'll call you if anything's amiss."

"Ditto." She put on her rain jacket, tucked her hair up under a baseball cap, and pulled up the vinyl hood of her jacket. Without electricity, resetting the security alarm was pointless. She wasn't sure whether Bill had taken his keys. With some misgiving, she left the door unlocked and scuttled out to the sidewalk.

The wind buffeted her as she hurried toward Miss Louanne's house. She pulled the side of her hood around to better shield her face from the rain. Willow Street in complete darkness felt like an alien world. As she slowed her steps and dodged around a fallen branch, she caught a glimmer of light on the other side, farther down the street. Someone was lighting candles in one of the homes down there.

As she passed the vacant house, she swept her flashlight's

beam over it. She couldn't see very well, and only a bit at a time, but her dad was right. The tree had definitely breached the roof on the kitchen end of the house. She looked ahead. Miss Louanne's gray house beyond was engulfed in darkness.

Campbell hurried up the driveway, fighting the wind. She splashed through a puddle and winced as the water penetrated her sneakers. When she gained the front porch, she pounded on the door with the side of her fist. She'd have to make noise if she wanted to be heard over the wind and rain.

"Miss Louanne!" She rapped again, hard. "Miss Louanne, it's me, Campbell." She paused and listened. When she received no response, she resumed her knocking. After a minute, she stood back, panting. Maybe it would be better to go around back, to the kitchen door. She knocked again, so hard her knuckles hurt.

A noise behind her caught her attention. She turned and swept her flashlight beam over the front yard.

"Hey!" Her father was running up the driveway, his light bobbing. He detoured around a fallen branch and hurried up onto the porch. "She's over at Fred and Vera's."

"Miss Louanne?" Campbell stared at him.

"Yes."

She let out a big breath. "What about Blue Boy?"

"She's got him over there in a carrier."

"Okay. Well, it looks like her house is all right." Deflated, Campbell walked with him out from under the shelter of the porch roof, down the steps, and around the fallen branch of Miss Louanne's oak tree.

When they reached the street, she was about to speak when lights appeared at the end of the block.

"Squad car," Bill said, as the headlights topped by a flashing blue beacon approached.

They stopped on the sidewalk, halfway between Miss

Louanne's and the empty house. An officer rolled down the window nearest them and ran his flashlight beam over them.

"That you, Mr. McBride?"

"It's me, Officer Ferris. Just checking on the neighbors."

Bill and Campbell both stooped to peer into the car. Officer Denise Mills was in the passenger seat.

"Hey, Denise," Campbell called.

"Hi. Anything we should know?"

"Miss Vane is holed up over yonder with the Hills." Bill pointed toward Vera and Fred's house. "A tree came down on this house behind us, but it's vacant. I thought I'd call the real estate agent and tell her."

"Good idea. We're looking for lights—candles, lanterns. If we don't see any, we check on things," Mel Ferris said.

"Well, if there's anything we can do, call my cell phone," Bill said. "Our land line's out."

"Everybody's is," Denise said, leaning across Mel. "It could be a few days before we get the power back. You're on city water, right?"

"Yeah. We don't have a generator, I hate to say. We have some bottled water, but we'll probably go through that fast."

"They'll set something up tomorrow," Mel said.

"Any really bad damage?" Campbell asked.

"We don't know the extent of it yet, but we're patrolling street by street. Reports are starting to come in, and they're telling us by radio. They sent a couple of cars over toward Aurora. There's more damage on the west side of town, but I think a funnel cloud touched down near the lake."

"Everything okay at the hospital?" Campbell asked.

"We just came from there," Mel replied. "They're coping."

"Give us your cell phone number," Denise said.

Bill complied, and the officers rolled on down the street. Campbell watched them and was glad to see that more lantern

lights and flickering candles were appearing in her neighbors' windows.

"If the power's still out in the morning, I'll go find us some water," her dad said.

Campbell swiped her phone's screen. "I can't believe it's only four o'clock."

"I'll give Nick a call, and then what do you say we hit the hay?"

"Sounds good." She trudged up their driveway with her father, thankful for the solid house. Their basic needs were met, but how many people out there needed help?