

EYE OF THE STORM

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The overcast sky, with hints of the coming storm, sent dread through Abigail Delaney Massey. Thunderstorms frightened Abby. She lifted a cup to her lips. The scent of fragrant jasmine teased her nostrils.

Abby's husband, Robert, never feared storms. He would watch the lightning and clouds, getting caught in the excitement, while Abby cowered when the thunder crashed and the sky flashed. She wished Robert were here now. The last thing she'd anticipated was an early summer thunderstorm. Despite the heat, she shivered.

If the electricity went out, she had the oil lamps and candles to ensure she would not be left in darkness, but without Robert she felt vulnerable. The growing storm matched her deepening anxiety.

Electricity gathered in the air, promising to explode in a frightful array of light and sound. Her cup rattled against the saucer as she placed it on the table.

The lake, usually sparkling beneath the glowing sun, now roiled with a fathomless darkness that crept toward the shore. Trees whipped toward the water, then pulled back, a fight against the magnetic force of the burgeoning wind.

Abby retrieved candles and matches from the kitchen pantry and carried them to the dining room table. Her laptop hummed and the cursor blinked at the end of the last word she had typed. She moved the mouse to save the document, shut down the system. Distant thunder rumbled for endless seconds, entwining its message of danger around her nerve endings.

This house had been in the Delaney family for generations and now belonged to Abby. Abby inherited it when her mother passed away. For many years, the Delaney women had stood in this room and gazed through the bay window. The house radiated strength and comfort. It had weathered many storms, both from outside and inside forces.

Abby wandered through the rooms gathering the warmth of generations that resided in a part of every piece of furniture, every picture, every nook and cranny. The dark mahogany mantle over the living room fireplace glowed with a rich sheen. Above the mantle, hung a portrait of her great grandmother sitting beneath the large oak tree in the side yard, with the lake glimmering in the background. She had been a small woman, but her strength of character had been captured in the depths of her green eyes. Her auburn hair was pulled back in the fashion of her time. Abby's mother said Abby looked just like her great grandmother, Abigail Delaney, for whom she'd been named.

She supposed the cancer cells had been a gift handed down through the genes of one of her ancestors. The fear she'd lived with had caught up with her after having the mastectomy.

"It's not uncommon," Dr. Anderson had told them. "Lots of women have undergone the procedure. It won't make you less of a woman, Abby."

"In my heart, I know that. But I feel so helpless. There's something growing inside of me, and I have no control."

"We caught it in time, but we have to treat it aggressively. We'll beat it. What you need to do is think positive."

Robert had squeezed her hand in his. "That's right, honey. Have faith. God will see us through this."

So Abby had put on a brave front. She'd hidden her insecurities from the doctor and from her husband. And she'd hidden her doubting faith. Why had God allowed this

to happen to her? She had a blossoming career, a happy family, a loving husband. All she'd ever dreamed of. Now she stood to lose it all, and she didn't understand why.

After spending the past two weeks here alone, Abby accepted the mastectomy as a necessary tool to remove her cancer. She'd come to terms with the scars. But she didn't want Robert to see. He'd always loved her body. How could he love the ugly scars that once had been her mark of womanhood? Her babies had fed at her breasts. Now nothing remained except a bony scarred nothing.

Robert kept assuring her that he loved *her*, not her body. She wanted to believe, just as she wanted to believe that God hadn't sent this affliction. But her faith wasn't strong enough. She needed to blame somebody. If not, the anger would consume her.

According to the doctors, the operation had been successful. Through it all Robert had been at her side, bestowing love and support. She had closed herself off. Hadn't the cancer returned after the chemo two years prior? Life had no guarantees. She couldn't accept the pity in the eyes of her friends, her family. So she had left, promising to return when she had finished her latest manuscript. She remembered the hurt in Robert's eyes when she told him she needed time alone.

Then she'd driven away from her life. She hid herself in this house, looking for answers. But none were to be found. So she poured her heart into her writing. Night and day she labored over her project, escaping the reality of her life.

Another rumble of thunder, closer this time, brought her back into the present. She didn't want to be here alone. Not in a thunderstorm. Since she'd been a child, she'd cowered whenever lightning bolts shot toward earth, followed by loud crashes that shook the windows. But she'd shut herself away from everyone who cared.

She needed Robert. Since their marriage, he'd always been the one to calm her during any storms of their life. Robert and God. Yet, she'd run away from both. Now all

she wanted to do was tell Robert how sorry she was—tell him how much she loved him, needed him. She went to her knees and prayed for forgiveness, for healing, and for God's eternal loving mercy and grace.

A peace swept through her. Jesus was with her now just as He'd been through the surgery, through the cancer treatments. Just as He'd been in the hearts of all the Delaney women over the years.

Heart lighter, she hurried to the telephone. If she wasn't so frightened of the storm, she'd get in the car and drive back to the city.

She listened for a dial tone, but heard nothing but a heavy silence. The storm had knocked out the phone lines. Her cell phone was useless with no nearby towers. Her hands trembled. She would have to ride out the storm alone. No, not alone. Jesus was with her.

She ran up the stairs and retrieved her Bible from the nightstand. *God, please can you hear me? I'm so afraid.* Humidity dampened her forehead.

The master bedroom had a large four poster bed. It was there her mother had been born. She could crawl onto the mattress and cover her head until the storm passed. The room, like all the others, had sturdy walls that would withstand any storm. Just like her ancestors.

She had nothing to fear from the storm.

Trying to overcome her nervousness, she made another cup of tea and stepped onto the front porch. Beside the path, leading down to the lake, rows and rows of moss roses adorned the path. Purple clematis vines wound endlessly around the porch pillars. Their blossoms whipped back and forth in the growing wind, dropping to the ground like helpless butterflies.

Abby went to the swing, carrying her tea and Bible with her. She watched the clouds building. Not a single ray of sun stole through the dark clouds. Spiders crawled down her spine. She suppressed the urge to run back into the house.

She opened her Bible and began to read the twenty-third Psalm. The words comforted her. *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...* Thunder rumbled louder, closer, sending the vibrations through the ground beneath her feet.

God, I'm like David, walking through the dark valley. She continued reading, heart pounding in her chest.

A loud crack made her muscles tense. It sounded as if God's wrath reached out.

She breathed in the mucky air. An earthy scent drifted to her nostrils. Somewhere close by it was raining. Hard.

She ran her hand across the Bible, tracing the golden letters. And her heart began to open. Like a flood of tidewater, the rush of emotions rocked her. If God was trying to get her attention, He'd succeeded. She bowed her head and began to pray.

"Dear God, please be with me. I've doubted You. I've hurt people who love me. I didn't have faith. Lift me up, Lord. Hear my prayer. Forgive me."

Daughter, I am with You always.

The voice came on the wind. It resounded louder than the thunder. God heard her. God had answered her. God had removed her blinders. Opened her heart. Restored her faith.

She missed Robert. She missed her family. What a fool she was, shutting out her family when they needed each other more than ever. She stared at the house where the faith of three generations of women embraced her, giving her strength and focus.

A raindrop splattered the front of her shirt. More began to fall. Abby rose and went inside. After rinsing her cup and leaving it in the sink, she walked back to the dining room and looked again across the lake.

The old oak tree labored in the wind. Lightning flashed and Abby jumped, waiting for the crash of thunder.

"I hate this," she muttered moving away from the window. The lights flickered and went out, leaving the house in an eerie darkness. Clouds obscured the sky, making it appear to be nighttime rather than the middle of the afternoon. On shaky legs, Abby retrieved the matches and lit the oil lamp. She huddled on the sofa, curling the cushions, hiding her eyes to wait out the storm. She clutched the Bible close to her chest and prayed.

Thunder crashed, and the storm raged on.

Abby remained curled into a fetal position. Praying. Crying. Repenting.

An hour passed, but instead of subsiding, the storm continued to build.

She longed for Robert's arms, his comfort and shelter. He had been her rock two years ago when the cancer first threatened. He had held her close when she succumbed to sickness from the chemo. He had been at her bedside constantly as she struggled to recuperate from this latest operation. His words and actions told her she was still the same woman he fell in love with, the same woman he still loved with all his heart and soul. She couldn't imagine how much she must have hurt him when she left. She didn't want to be alone any longer. If the cancer should come back again, she wanted to spend every second with her family. She didn't want to be alone, not ever again.

"Dear God, please bring me safely through the storm. Let me see Robert again."

She listened to the anger of the storm. It had come to life, raging violently.

Suddenly the front door crashed open. Abby screamed, hiding her face deeper within the sofa cushions. Rain hammered in with torrential force, reaching for her.

Then strong hands grasped her shoulders and she heard the most wonderful sound in the world. She heard Robert's voice.

"Oh, Abby, honey, I came as quickly as I could. I knew you would be terrified. It's all right. I'm here now. Let me hold you."

She fell into his arms, into familiarity and safety. *Thank you, God.* He had brought Robert to her. He'd brought them together again, and she'd never again leave. "Robert, I'm sorry. I love you."

"Shh. I know. I love you, too. Everything will be all right. Together we can get through the roughest storms. Remember what it says in the Bible. If He brings you to it, He will bring you through it." He wiped the tears from her cheeks. "He will bring us through this."

She knew the truth of his words. The mastectomy hadn't changed her. It hadn't changed the most important things in her life. She had her children, her grandchildren, and Robert. And she had hope. And faith.

Robert and Abby closed the door on the storm.

Inside the oil lamp glowed and the warmth of four generations of Delaney women surrounded them with love.