

One Icy Night:  
A Rook Thriller

by

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Part One:

Flurries

The National Weather Service defines flurries as an intermittent light snowfall of short duration (generally light snow showers) with no measurable accumulation (trace category).

Caution level: low.

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## Chapter One

Ax

NOW

Through heavy, concrete-filled eyes, I study this madman that is trying to kill me.

*Whether or not it is intentional remains to be seen*, I think, as my brain buzzes along with the ringing in my ears.

"Snow don't act like this," says my whacked-out driver, Riley, who has consumed enough beer, tequila, and scripts to make Keith Richards balk.

The sleet hitting the windshield reminds me of *Star Wars'* Millennium Falcon going into hyperspace. Except *this* sleet is sticking like it is mixed with glue. The passenger windshield wiper sticks to the windshield before it snaps in two.

"It's like this weather has a mind of its own," he says, "and that mind is set on destroying everything it touches." He giggles at that. "It's God-like. I like it."

The wind smacks the side of the car, shoving us into the wrong lane of traffic. Riley overcompensates and yanks the wheel right and pain floods my head as the right side of my head bounces against the side window. Twice. At this point I'm so drunk, I either need to vomit, pass out, or keep drinking.

Instead, I try to speak.

"Shit!" I think I say that, but it could've been a thought. I try again.

"Look, I know you southern boys were raised on *The Dukes of Hazzard* and all," I slur in a jumble of nonsense, "but stop driving like you're being chased."

"You think?" Riley takes his eyes off the road and leans across the seat to look out the back window. "I bet you're right. They're always after me, always watching me."

"Who's they?" The words fall out of my dry mouth. Every word I utter tastes like cotton balls, sucking up all the saliva they can.

"They."

Well, *they* aren't going ninety-five miles per hour through this storm on a one-lane dirt road.

"Do you ever realize that every time you get behind the wheel of a car, you are a God?" Riley cackles. "You control the fate of each and every car, of each person, you pass."

"I'm sure that's exactly how they word it on the DMV exam."

Something between a laugh and growl creeps out of his throat.

"The trick is, each time, choose which type of God you are. Are you merciful..." He rocks the car side to side with quick little pulls on the steering wheel, sending me bouncing around in my seat. "Or are you vengeful?"

"Cut it out."

"Cut off the lights, you say?" He lets out a howl. "I like the way you think, girl!"

As darkness envelops our car's path, I punch him in the shoulder with everything I have.

"Ow! Quit that shit!" He flips back on the headlights and swerves around something I can't see. "See? We're fine. I'm just playing."

I would try to reason with him, but he's twice as drunk as I am, not to mention all the shit he's snorted in the last couple of hours.

A water bottle rolls across the floor and the itchy dryness in my throat burns. I grab for it, desperate for any relief.

"Don't drink that!"

Too late. I puke up my new companion's urine, adding to the smell of the world's worst tequila and beer to my ruined shoes.

And, of course, the smell and stains of the still-wet blood on them.

When I think about how the blood got there, it is enough to make me throw up again. I gag and dry heave for a minute before I shake the cobwebs from my head. I run my tongue along my sleeve like a cat grooming herself. My shirt isn't much cleaner, but I have to do something. If only my right eye would open, maybe it would help my unfocused and blurry left one. I want to put my head against the frozen-over window, just to feel the cold.

This asshole has his shitty vehicle's heat going full blast, so the windows are entirely fogged, and, despite his attempt to wipe a hole in the fog, I doubt he can see much through it.

I lean to the side, looking for something—anything—else to drink, but something holds me down. I fight the seatbelt. I yank and yank and yank, but I'm stuck.

No, I'm not stuck.

I'm tied down.

That's when I glance down and see the handcuffs holding the full-body seatbelt in.

Then I remember: those are the Sheriff's, who probably has just now figured out what I did to him.

*If he ever sees me again, I'll go to jail for the rest of my life.*

The roar of the defroster sounds like a pissed-off alley cat—more whirrs and screeches than warm and dry air.

The piece-of-shit car skids from side to side. With dirty fingernails, I pry open my right eye and the flash of an oncoming car's high-beamed headlights sear into my soul before I duck back down and cover both eyes.

"Shit! Ow!"

*This-isn't-happening-this-isn't-happening. I'm-not-trapped-I'm-not-trapped-I'm-not-trapped.*

*Not again.*

I claw at the release at the top of the oversized seatbelt. The latch and cuffs hold me tight.

"They designed the seatbelts for racing." Riley says this through chattering teeth. He's not cold. He's just on that many uppers.

"What are you racing in, Riley?" I snap. "The Pinewood Derby?"

He doesn't respond. Something through the small, defrosted hole in the windshield holds his attention.

"Whoa, shit! Hold on!" He yanks the wheel, and we spin on the icy road. Once. Twice. Three times. Hell, after a fourth-or-so circle I lose count. Then, like nothing happened, Riley keeps driving.

"These roads are no joke!"

I want to say that this car is a joke, or that his driving is. However, if it weren't for Riley, I might be in the local jail right now.

*I've traded in detainment for possible death.*

The world phases in and out. I blame the six—no, eight—shots of tequila and five beers I downed in the last, what, six hours? I'm more sober than I have any right to be; staring down the barrel of a gun sobers you up mighty quickly.

"You're kinda cute when you're not throwing up."

*Prince Charming, everybody.* Riley's still trying to get in my pants. Well, Mr. Driver, there's something in my front pocket, and you're not gonna like it if I have to use it.

He winks. The blood on his neck and shirt appears black in the limited moonlight. At least some of the blood is actually his.

The vehicle's defroster finally blasts air. Apparently, it only needed five minutes to warm up. As the oval-sized visibility hole melts away to give some view, I freeze. Through the sleet, in the distance, I barely make out something that shouldn't be in the middle of the road during a storm.

It's a man.

In what appears to be an orange jumpsuit, maybe prison issued.

Holding an ax.

And he's not getting out of the way.

(To Be Continued in the pages of *One Icy Night*).