

A large, ornate decorative flourish in a light gray color, featuring symmetrical scrollwork and a central knot-like element. The title "FULL STEAM AHEAD" is centered within this flourish in a black, serif font.

# FULL STEAM AHEAD

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KAREN WITEMEYER



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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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To Bethany  
My own beautiful female mathematician.  
This heroine's for you!

There is therefore now no condemnation  
to them which are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:1



## PROLOGUE

NEW ORLEANS  
NOVEMBER 15, 1849

Passengers jockeyed for position along the steamboat *Louisiana*'s railings, waving and calling merry farewells to the crowd lining the levee. Darius Thornton stalked determinedly across the deck in the opposite direction. He'd done all the smiling he cared to during the previous half hour while Captain Cannon gave him, and a handful of other investors, a tour of the vessel.

His brother, David, should have been the one mixing with the Caribbean coffee barons and southern cotton tycoons, not him. David was the diplomat of the family. Mingling with wealthy plantation owners and charming their wives came as naturally to him as adding a column of numbers came to Darius. But David's wife was expecting their first child and insisted her husband remain by her side in case the babe chose to come early. Early? Darius snorted. The birth was months away. The little tyke wasn't scheduled to arrive until January.

Darius rested his forearms against the river-facing rails and

stared into the dark water off the starboard side of the bow. New mothers. Always so jittery and anxious about everything. Tying their men to their apron strings and making their brothers-in-law suffer through torturous affairs when they could be at home in their office poring over ledgers and schematics—objects that didn't expect wit or charisma. Solid, dependable things that required a man's brain, not an ability to titter and chat about the weather. Stuff and nonsense, all of it.

But sharing the familial load was what brothers were for. David had stepped in for Darius on more than one occasion. It was only right that he return the favor. Too bad he had to be so formal while he did it. He much preferred working in his shirt sleeves behind closed doors to prancing around in a tightly tailored coat and beaver hat with a bunch of dandies who considered a man's fashion an accurate measure of his importance.

With a groan, he dug a finger beneath his collar, wishing he could rip the thing from his neck and fling it into the river's murky depths. The ridiculous starched points had been jabbing the underside of his jaw all afternoon.

"I thought King Star Shipping specialized in ocean vessels, Thornton. What's your interest in riverboats?"

Darius bit back an inhospitable retort as he turned to face one of the investors from the tour. *Drat*. What was the fellow's name? Something starting with a R. Or maybe an N? David would have remembered. He would have known the man's wife's name, the names of each of their twelve kids, and probably the monikers of the horses in his stable back home. All Darius could recall were the numbers. The man owned four Mississippi steamboats, each capable of hauling two hundred fifty passengers and five thousand bales of cotton.

"We're not against expansion," Darius drawled, hoping

the man wouldn't notice his lack of proper address. "With the rate the Port of New Orleans is growing, one would be a fool not to consider investing in the steamboat trade."

The man nodded, his pea-green waistcoat not quite containing the rounded girth of his belly. "True. But riverboats are an entirely different animal from your ocean liners. Temperamental things, you know. One cannot just assume he is fit to add one to his collection without first gaining a proper respect for the vessel."

The smug expression on the fellow's face combined with his superior tone snapped the last thread of Darius's tattered hold on civility. Straightening to his full height, he glowered down at the man. "King Star Shipping does not *collect* vessels, sir. We live and breathe them. Not one of our transatlantic liners has failed to reach its destination, and I daresay the same cannot be said of your riverboats. One has only to read the papers to learn how often they run aground on sandbars, get snared in debris, or catch fire due to negligent captains. Not to mention the boiler explosions that sink ships and take lives when greedy pilots push their engines to reckless speeds in order to race.

"If King Star does decide to expand into river transport, you can bet we will be enforcing higher standards than any who have come before. Respect the vessel, sir? You don't know the meaning of the word."

The mottled purple hue staining the man's face was the first clue he'd gone too far. The slap of the man's glove across Darius's face was the second.

"You high-and-mighty Thorntons think you're above the rest of us, don't you? Well, one of these days disaster will knock on *your* door, and then we'll see just how far your lofty opinions take you." With an audible *humph*, the man pivoted and stormed off in the direction of the waving masses.

Darius sighed and turned back to the railing, searching the dark water below. Lofty opinions, indeed. He never should have opened his mouth. He should have just smiled at the little peacock and walked away. But no. He'd let his temper get the best of him and spouted off like a bullheaded idiot. The green-vested fellow could be a stellar boatman for all he knew. He had no right to accuse him of not respecting his vessels or his crew. This was why David handled the people and Darius handled the accounts. The minute one of them switched assignments, a mess was sure to follow.

If God were merciful, he'd eliminate any need for polite conversation for the length of the voyage.

Another steamboat came abreast of the *Louisiana*. The bright red lettering on the side declared it to be the *Bostona*, and its decks were equally full of passengers and goods. Darius frowned. Must the boats pack together so closely while in port? It was bad enough that the *Storm* anchored nearby having just returned from upriver, but now the *Bostona* was crowding in. Once the *Louisiana*'s captain shoved off, they'd have to do some fine maneuvering to get to open water.

Darius pulled his watch from his vest pocket and flipped open the brass case. Nearly five o'clock. Good. Time to depart.

He replaced his watch as the chimes rang the hour from the cathedral bell in Jackson Square. Then the *Louisiana*'s whistle blew its piercing call, and the steamboat eased away from the wharf.

All at once a deafening roar crashed over Darius. The deck shuddered and splintered as if besieged by cannon fire. Debris shot through the air. A metal object collided with Darius's head, sending him reeling. He grasped the railing and barely kept himself from toppling over the side.

Vision blurred and head throbbing, Darius closed his eyes

against the chaos, trying to calm his rioting senses and decipher what was happening. Screams assailed his ears. The smells of scalded flesh, blood, and burning wood churned his stomach.

*The boilers.* A moan tore from Darius's throat as his eyes flew open in comprehension. The boilers must have exploded.

How? They were in port for pity's sake, not racing at top speed up the river. This wasn't supposed to happen. Not with a capable captain at the helm.

But the *whys* didn't matter. Not when people were dying all around him.

The deck shifted, collapsing inward. Darius linked his arm around the railing. Heaven help them. The ship was going down!

Blinking away the blood dripping in his eyes, Darius peered out over the river. They were only a hundred yards or so from the wharf, thank God. Swimming to shore would be easily managed—for those who knew how to swim, at least. Having grown up in a shipping family, Darius was as at home in the water as on land, so he had no concerns for himself. But he needed to help the others. The masses trapped on the upper decks or in the boat's midsection would perish if they couldn't reach the rails before the sinking vessel dragged them under.

Recalling the ships around them, he jerked his head up. Surely the crews of the *Storm* and *Bostona* would aid in the rescue. However, the sight that met his eyes punctured his hopes. The *Storm* had been laid waste by the explosion, splintered and crumbling from side wheel to the stern. The *Bostona* hadn't fared much better. Her upper works were a mess, her pilothouse had been knocked off, and her wheelhouse was badly crushed.

Bodies littered the river between the three boats, some moving, others not. Bile rose in Darius's throat.

Then something hardened in the pit of his stomach. His fingernails dug into the railing. The ship was going down. No time for weeping over what couldn't be saved. Turning away from the watery scene, he braced his legs wide beneath him and catalogued what *could* be done.

Setting his jaw, he strode forward. Directly into the path of the man with the pea-green vest. The fellow lay crumpled on the deck, gripping his head, seemingly unaware that a deep gash in his arm bled profusely.

The fellow's name suddenly came to him. "Monroe!" Darius knelt at his side and yanked the wide silk tie free from his own collar as Monroe's sluggish gaze found Darius's face.

"Thornton?" he rasped.

Wrapping the impromptu bandage around the man's arm, Darius nodded. "Can you stand?" he asked brusquely.

"I-I think so." Monroe started to push himself up.

Darius grabbed the man's good arm and assisted. "Good. The boat's going down. We need to evacuate the passengers."

Monroe's eyes rounded as Darius's meaning sank in. "But the only way off is into the river."

"I know. The women will need something to keep them afloat, so their skirts don't drag them under." Darius scanned the deck for anything that might be suitable. "Wood," he declared, pointing to the debris scattered about them. "They can grab on to planks and kick their way to shore."

Monroe nodded, his shoulders straightening like a soldier receiving orders, no sign of lingering animosity. "I'll gather some men and see to the ladies' safety."

"Good. I'll see if I can reach the passengers on the upper deck." Darius pushed his way through the staggering masses,

encouraging everyone to make their way to the railing. Yet the farther inside he went, the more grim the scene. Dead and dying passengers covered the floor, their skin scalded from the violent expulsion of steam, bodies fatally pierced by metal projectiles launched by the explosive force of the ruptured boilers.

The stench of blood and burned flesh clung to him as he picked his way through the horror. A woman lay to his right, moaning, her clothing shredded from the blast. He ripped his coat from his shoulders and draped it over her torso, knowing even as he did so that she'd never survive her injuries. Moving on, he tunneled his vision to a narrow space directly in front of him and let his mind go numb. The people here were too far gone. He had to get to the upper deck. Had to find a way to get the passengers there to safety. But when he reached the staircase, fallen timbers barred his path. He grabbed the one closest to him and strained against the weight. It didn't budge.

"No!" Darius slammed his palm against the wedged beam. He hung his head—and noticed water seeping over his boots. Time was running out.

Darius rushed back outside and headed for the railing. There was more than one way to the upper deck. Ignoring the unsteady lurching of the boat as the river sucked it down, Darius scrambled on top of the railing, using one of the connecting pillars as a support. He reached over his head and managed to grab hold of the bottom rung of the upper-deck balustrade. Now he just had to haul himself up.

Loud splashes echoed around him. Dark forms dove through his periphery as men and women alike started leaping from the upper deck. Darius hesitated. Should he continue?

Then a woman's voice cut through the panicked mass of screams. "Please, sir!" she cried. "Take my child. He can't swim."

Darius barely registered the woman hanging over the rail directly above him before a pair of child-sized shoes knocked against his nose. Without thought to his perilous position, Darius released his hold on the support pillar and clutched the lad's waist. In an instant he had the boy on the lower deck.

Catching sight of a pea-green waistcoat, he yelled, "Monroe! Take the child!"

Monroe turned and immediately scurried forward.

"Here!" the woman above Darius called again. And before he knew what had happened, a steady trail of children were dangled over the side into his waiting arms.

Sweat beaded his brow. The little ones were easy enough to handle despite their wailing, but the larger children kicked and screamed their terror, nearly sending both themselves and him over the side on more than one occasion.

Thanking God for his height and strength, Darius wrestled them to relative safety, though they'd still have to manage their way ashore. He prayed there'd be smaller boats on hand before the *Louisiana* submerged.

Darius reached for the next child, but instead he saw a girl holding fast to the outside of the rails, no adult in sight. She must have been twelve or thirteen, her eyes round, pleading with him to save her.

But she was too far down the railing for him to reach. "Easy, now." He held a hand out to her. "Let me come to you."

Taking hold of the pillar again, Darius carefully swung one leg around the post, then the other. "I'm coming. Just be still." Her legs batted the air so wildly, he feared she'd jar herself loose before he could get into position. Darius moved his hold to the upper railing and eased a step closer to her. "I won't let you fall."

He widened his stance on the railing and braced his legs

to take her weight even as he reached up to grab hold of her waist. At the same moment, something below gave out a mighty groan and the *Louisiana* pitched violently.

The girl's hold broke. Darius lunged for her, but she slipped through his arm. Her scream rang in his ears as she plummeted past him into the dark water.

Darius leaned over the side, scanning the water for the girl. How could he have let her fall? He'd promised.

She sputtered to the surface, arms flailing in the panicked motions of one who'd never been taught to swim. Without hesitation, Darius dove in after her.

He kicked quickly to the surface, the water too dark for him to see anything below. Yet there was no sign of her above, either. He swiveled his neck from side to side, desperate. Where was she? She should have been right there.

Then a tiny splash to his left drew his attention. A limp hand was disappearing into the river a couple yards downstream, a hand edged with a pink sleeve.

Darius sucked in a lungful of air and dove underwater, kicking with powerful strokes to the place she should have been. But the currents were strong, and the girl wasn't. Darius slashed his arms through the water, hoping to collide with her torso and be able to drag her to him. He hit what seemed to be the wilted length of her arm and fumbled for a hold, but the currents tugged her out of his reach.

Darius swam after her, but the darkness hid her from him. Deeper and deeper he went. Searching. Praying. His lungs burned, but he refused to stop. He had to find her. He'd promised he wouldn't let her fall.

He swept his arms out again, and his right arm hit something solid. He circled his arm around the girl's chest and kicked for the surface. They broke through. *Thank God!*

Darius gasped for breath yet never stopped swimming. Angling the girl so her head remained above water, he made for the shore.

His legs finally found purchase on land, and Darius lifted the girl into his arms. Utterly depleted, he stumbled under her slight weight. Clenching his jaw, he righted himself and managed to get her to dry ground. Her body hung lifelessly from his arms. He dropped to one knee and rolled her over until she was draped across his thigh. Then he pounded her back with all the strength he had left.

“Please, sweetheart,” he begged. “Please breathe.”

Water pumped out of her mouth, but she remained limp. Lifeless.

Darius cradled her body and tenderly laid it out upon the sand. He bent his ear to her mouth, longing to hear the rasp of breath even as he knew it wouldn’t be there.

“I’m sorry.” Reality slammed into him, tearing a sob from his throat. The girl was gone. He’d failed her. He’d let her fall.

Darius pounded his fist into the sand and shouted his grief to the heavens.

A decorative flourish consisting of symmetrical, swirling lines that frame the chapter title.

## CHAPTER 1

GALVESTON, TEXAS  
APRIL 1851

Nicole Renard gripped her mother's letter in her gloved hand as the carriage rattled down Bath Street, away from the docks. *Come at once*, her mother had written. *Your father is very ill. He might not survive to the end of your term.*

Nicole had packed her belongings the day the letter arrived and left Miss Rochester's Academy for Young Ladies the following morning.

The voyage that had seemed so swift and exhilarating last fall dragged out interminably on the return trip. Her stomach had been so knotted with worry that she rarely left her stateroom for anything other than meals. This behavior from the girl who used to cry inconsolably if her sea-captain father made her go belowdecks, where she couldn't feel the ocean spray against her face and smell the salty tang of the sea air. The briny air and windy spray on this journey, however, only intensified her distress as memories of the strong, vital man

she remembered from childhood wilted beneath her mother's description of the decimation brought on by his illness.

"Dear Lord," she whispered for the hundredth time since leaving Boston. "Don't take him from us. Please. Strengthen him. Heal him. Give me back my papa."

Her hand trembled, crinkling the letter. She pressed both against her stomach and blinked back the tears that threatened to escape her lashes. Nicole bit down on the edge of her tongue. There'd be no crying today. Her papa hated tears, said they were a weakness, a woman's affliction. A man wouldn't cry. A man would set about fixing things. So that's what she'd do. Fix things.

She'd spell Mother in nursing him. She'd oversee the accounts and check in at the Renard Shipping offices every day to keep him apprised of his business interests. She'd prove herself as valuable to him as the son he'd always lamented not having.

The carriage turned a corner. Nicole braced her arm against the upholstered seat to aid her balance. Five more blocks and she'd be home. She looked out the window at the familiar landscape, her heart stirring as the marshy environ welcomed her.

Then she saw it—Renard House. Its white columns stood tall and proud, exactly as she remembered. Her gaze flicked to the second-story window on the far side, her bedroom. The light glowing within brought a smile to Nicole's face. All those times that she and Tommy Ackerman had stayed out too late at the bayou, fishing or playing pirate, her mother would light a lamp and set it on the table near her window so Nicole would have a beacon to guide her home when darkness began to fall. Now, years later, as dusk settled over the island again, that same lamp beckoned.

When the driver pulled the team to a halt, Nicole didn't wait for him to assist her. She unlatched the door and bounded out, grabbing a handful of her full skirts to ensure she didn't stumble. Heart pounding with a mixture of dread and longing, she dashed up the front walk. Before she reached the covered porch, her mother had both the door and her arms open wide.

"Maman!" Nicole raced up the steps and threw her arms around her mother's neck. In that instant, all the questions and concerns plaguing her flew out of her mind. She was home. Her *maman* was holding her. Everything would be all right.

Together they swayed gently from side to side, her mother rubbing her back and humming softly, just as she used to do when Nicole had been small enough to curl up in her lap.

"It is so good to have you home, *ma petite*." Her mother eased back, taking Nicole by the arms and studying her face as if afraid she had forgotten what her daughter looked like. "But what is all this dashing about?" A sparkle lit her lovely brown eyes as she lifted a well-manicured brow. "Your father and I paid good money for that finishing school, and here you are still running about the place, as much the hoyden as ever. Really, Nicole, John looked quite exasperated when you threw that carriage door open without waiting for him. The poor fellow was probably looking forward to welcoming you home with a gallant flourish, and you stole all his fun."

Following her mother's gaze, Nicole turned her head to see the coachman standing a few feet away, her steamer trunk balanced on his shoulder. The man's expression was as bland and bored as always. John had no fun to steal. Not that she hadn't tried over the years. It was a game she had played since childhood, trying to coax a smile out of the old curmudgeon.

She'd yet to see one, but she believed they were there. The man was just too accomplished an adversary to let one slip free.

Trying to look contrite, Nicole dipped her chin in his direction. "I apologize for ruining your fun, John. I can only imagine what I missed by rushing out on my own. How grand was this flourish supposed to be?"

The coachman strode forward as if to move past her into the house without reply, then stopped when he reached her side. "I believe there were to be rose petals flung upon the ground, a trumpet anthem, and dancing horses, miss." His impassive voice recited the fanciful list as if he were ordering groceries at the mercantile.

Nicole choked on a giggle. "Dancing horses?"

The man's bored expression never wavered. "Been training the beasts for weeks. And all for naught." He gave a sad shake of his head and continued into the house.

Nicole met her mother's disbelieving glance, and the two immediately dissolved into laughter.

Her mother wiped at the moisture leaking from her eyes and smiled. "Oh, it feels good to laugh. There's been too little reason for merriment of late."

Nicole sobered. "How is Father? Has there been any improvement since your last letter?"

Her mother wrapped an arm around her shoulders and ushered her inside. "The doctors are offering little hope for recovery. They've discovered a . . . growth . . . in his abdomen."

Nicole gripped her mother's hand when she would have turned away to close the door. "What does that mean?"

"It's hard to know. He isn't in a lot of pain yet—thank the Lord—but he barely eats, has no energy, and is just . . . wasting away."

She sighed. And for the first time Nicole noticed the lines

of fatigue marring her mother's usually flawless skin. "The doctor is loathe to operate. Says it would be too dangerous. But if the tumor continues to grow, there's a chance your father's condition will worsen and eventually end his life."

Nicole tightened her grip on her mother's hand. "But there's also a chance it won't grow. Right?"

Her mother cupped Nicole's cheek in her hand, a sad smile curving her lips. "Yes, there is a chance, *ma petite*. We will continue to pray and hope that God will give us the answer we desire. But we must also prepare to say good-bye. For your father's sake as well as our own. Your papa, he's just stubborn enough to refuse to die if he thinks his girls will not be all right without him. And I won't have him suffering pain needlessly."

A fierce light sparked in her eyes. Her *maman* could be just as stubborn as her father. "We will love him, we will nurse him, and we will give him peace so that he may leave when the Lord calls him home. Are we agreed?"

The challenge resonated in Nicole's breast. The child in her wanted to cling to her papa, to hold him fast and never let him go. Yet her woman's heart recognized the wisdom in her mother's words, the love that drove the sacrifice of letting go.

"Agreed."

Her mother squeezed her hand, smiled, and turned back to close the door.

"Pauline?" A deep voice rasped from behind them. "Thought I heard the carriage. Is our Nicki home?"

Nicole spun around, eager to greet her father, but as her beloved papa shuffled into the hall, a cry lodged in her throat. The man who had always been larger than life in her eyes emerged from the parlor a man so thin his clothes hung from his frame as if his shoulders were nothing more substantial than a pair of hooks in a wardrobe.

Determined to hide her distress, she pasted on a bright grin and strode forward. “I’m home, Papa. I’m home.” Embracing him with a gentleness that broke her heart for its necessity, she kissed his cheek and then stepped back.

“Missed you, my girl. The place isn’t the same without you.” He patted the wall as he spoke, then left his hand braced there. Nicole didn’t miss the way his body sagged as he let the house take on a portion of his weight. What little there was of it. “Your mother told me you took another first in mathematics last term.”

His eyes sparkled, and Nicole relaxed. He was still there, inside that emaciated body. Her papa was still the same proud, stubborn, loving man she’d always adored.

“My mathematics instructor, Miss Brownstead, even managed to acquire a copy of the examination they administered at Harvard last year and let me take it after hours. She said my score would have placed me in the top quarter of the first-year gentlemen.”

“Ha!” her father boomed, a hint of what she’d always thought of as his captain’s voice returning. “That’s my girl. Always knew you had it in you. The crewmen down at the docks still talk about how they could throw cargo numbers at you from the manifest and your totals would match the accounting every time.”

Nicole chuckled over the memory of the game she and the men had played when her father took her down to his office with him. “Except for that time when I came up with a different tonnage, and the men insisted Mr. Bailey check his figures.”

Papa nodded, his rich laugh filling the hall. “I remember. Gerald was in such a state. He insisted his numbers were correct and refused to recalculate, so I took the books from

him and did it myself. When my answer matched yours, he was livid—until he checked the work himself and found his error. The men badgered him for weeks after that. Wouldn't let him hear the end of it." He shook his head. "He's double-checked his numbers every shipment since, though, and we've never had another discrepancy."

"You know I'll always do whatever I can to help Renard Shipping, Papa." Nicole smiled as she delivered the light-hearted statement, but the truth of it ran deep. Renard Shipping was in her blood. Now that her father was ailing, it was up to her to keep things running, and she aimed to do just that.

"Let's get you back to your chair, Anton," her mother said, coming forward to take his arm. "Nicole has had a long journey. I'm sure she would like time to rest a bit and change before dinner. Wouldn't you, dear?"

A denial rose to Nicole's lips. She wanted to stay with her father. To visit and reconnect after months away. But when she met her mother's gaze, she bit back the words. Papa was the one who needed the rest. He tried to hide it, yet on closer inspection, Nicole realized her mother supported much of his weight as he stepped away from the wall.

"Yes." Nicole let her shoulders slump a little. "I *am* weary. A short rest before dinner would be just the thing. Then I can tell you all about the coastal steamer I rode down from Boston. It had one of those new iron screw propeller systems, Papa."

His eyes lit with interest, and his posture straightened. "The screw propeller, huh? Did it have a paddle wheel, too, or—"

"At dinner, Anton," his wife scolded gently. "She'll tell you all about it at dinner." She pressed him into motion back toward the parlor. "Let the girl catch her breath. They'll be plenty of time to quiz her later."

And, of course, her mother was right. In fact, once she

was closeted alone in her room, Nicole found that she truly *was* weary. The constant worry of the past weeks followed by the sad evidence of her father's deteriorated condition had left her exhausted.

She put on a bright face again for dinner and eagerly regaled her papa with what knowledge she'd managed to glean from Captain Sanders during her time aboard the *Starlight*. When Cook brought out dessert, however, Nicole failed to contain the yawn that stretched her jaw downward into a thoroughly unladylike position.

"Darling, go on up to bed." Her mother's smile said so much more than her words. *I love you. Take care of yourself. Don't worry about what you can't control.* All of those sentiments communicated silently through the tender curve of lips and the radiating warmth of a pair of brown eyes.

Nicole returned the smile, hoping her *maman* would recognize her own messages in return. *I love you, too. I'm here to help. Thank you for taking care of all of us.* Then she rose from the table, kissed her mother's cheek, and turned to face her father.

"Good night, Papa." His skin felt paper-thin beneath her lips as she softly bussed his cheek.

"Good night, scamp. It's good to have you home."

Nicole made her way upstairs and readied for bed, her yawns coming with increased frequency. When she finally stretched out upon her bed, sleep claimed her quickly.

Sometime later, a muffled crash belowstairs woke her. Disoriented at first, it took a moment to recognize her room as the one at home instead of her accommodations at the academy. Sitting up, she probed the silence for clues.

Another sound echoed from downstairs. A thud. *Papa!* Had he fallen?

Throwing back the blankets, Nicole rolled to her feet and grabbed her dressing gown from the end of her bed. Pushing her arms through the sleeves, she crossed the floor in urgent strides. She opened the door and sped down the hall to the stairway, her bare feet silent upon the floorboards.

Reverberations of angry voices stopped her descent. Male voices. Voices she didn't recognize.

Someone had broken into her house.