

Storm Surge

Chapter 1

'An Ill Wind'

The day in question, just like the one two days earlier, was still and blue. Far out in the bay, beyond the reef, a pelican stood, stupidly preening itself, while a gentle surf moved in and out beating one of nature's slow rhythms.

My old man liked to say, 'Son, just got to remember, nature abhors a vacuum'. He was sure right about the storm that had just passed through and was now wreaking havoc somewhere to the north-east. Like a fickle friend, nature will be one time boxing you round the ears, the next stroking the back of your hand. Not to be trusted. Pa also used to say that 'it's an ill wind that brings no good.' Well, turning round and looking inland I figured he'd got that one wrong - I couldn't see any evidence for that particular sentiment.

Like I said, nature, she's fickle, and there sure didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason in what she'd let be and what she'd consigned to the dustbin of history. Whole houses were now no more, a concrete base the only thing to mark their previous existence – like a plain old gravestone, blown flat. Then next door, no further than a guy could spit, their neighbour's place with no more than a broken shingle. Didn't make no sense to me.

And it was quiet – real quiet. Hours earlier, when you couldn't see your hand this far from your face, it was like all the banshees that ever were had decided to pay us a visit. And there was me, hunkered down like a little kid, shaking and praying, though I hadn't set foot in the local church since the day Ma and Pa passed away. And I'd stayed like that all night 'til the first rays caught the back wall of the kitchen and I knew it was safe to go out.

So I walked. All around me things were in the wrong place: a table in the middle of the road, a truck in a store doorway, power lines everywhere, some of them sparking ominously. Here and there, someone would wave to say they were okay, others looked too shocked to say or do anything. But mostly the place was empty, the ones that could get out having beat it whilst they could.

Mac and Betty were friends of ours. Their house had survived. One of the lucky ones – it looked untouched. I walked round the side to the yard I knew so well as I had played there many times as a kid. There was little apart from a sheet of corrugated-iron lying in the middle of the grass. It looked too perfect so I just had to lift it and take a look.

Gasping, I fumbled for my cell-phone and dialled.

'Sherriff McCarty.'

'Sherriff, it's Toby Andersson. I reckon you need to come down and see Mac and Betty's back yard...'

This ill wind had brought no good to my late next-door neighbours.

500 words