

Hurricane Proof

A Short Story

By
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“Damn, damn, damn,” I muttered. The track of Hurricane “Grace” – the seventh named storm of the year, had turned ninety-degrees and the track now took the eye of the Category Two storm directly into the east coast of Florida.

“JIM,” I shouted to my production assistant. He turned with a serious look on his face. “Get me set up right away. We’ve got to do another weather bulletin; Grace just turned west again – towards Jacksonville – right towards us.”

Together we trotted down the hallway to the studio and then Jim slipped behind the large console with more dials and gauges on it than a Boeing jet. He slipped on his headset and started talking to the network producer arranging our interruption of regularly scheduled programming – currently a soap opera.

I stood over the ‘X’ on the floor in front of a green screen; a large green panel that, through the wonders of electronics, was magically replaced by weather maps as I stood in front of it. Through two large monitors I could see what was actually going out of the studio and right now it showed a large rotating mass of weather out in the Atlantic with me standing in front of it. I checked my clothing in the monitor and decided I was quite presentable.

Jim looked up and said to me, “Ninety seconds, Pam.”

I am Pam Williams. I am thirty years old, single, ‘hot,’ and a member of the American Meteorological Society. I majored in meteorology as an undergrad and in business for my MBA. I picked weather as my major even when I was a teenager after an un-forecast Oklahoma tornado wiped out my grandparent’s home and killed my grandmother. My psychologist told me that I had to confront my demons and making it my life profession seemed to fill that bill.

I added ‘hot’ to that brief description of myself because that’s what my boyfriends have told me. I have a trim girly figure and nice tits – their term, not mine. Also, when the chemistry is right between me and a guy I can really go crazy. That said, I currently have no one special in my life and I haven’t gone crazy for over two years. I’m in a rut.

After I graduated from college I lucked into a job as the weekend weather girl and ‘gofer’ for a TV station in western Idaho. They thought I was ‘cute.’ A year later I catapulted into a weekday morning and lunch job for a station in central Arkansas. Three years later, I was a lot more suave, smooth and exciting in my delivery. So WJAX-TV – the up and coming

Jacksonville network station - recruited me two years ago, and here I am doing anything dealing with the weather from noon to midnight. They take me seriously.

“Fifteen seconds,” Jim said from his seat at weather central.

We both counted down silently then a fifteen second automated announcement broke into the network program. We could hear the sound of the excited male voice, well modulated but compelling attention from the listeners: “Ladies and Gentlemen, we interrupt your regularly scheduled broadcast with this very important weather bulletin. Please stay tuned for this critical information.” An alarm buzzed to ensure listener attention to what I’d say.

The announcement screen faded to show me in front of the weather map.

“Good afternoon. This is Pam Williams with a live update about Hurricane Grace, now three-hundred miles southeast of Jacksonville.” I stared into the camera with a serious look on my face.

“This Category Two storm, packing winds of over a hundred miles an hour is now headed straight for Jacksonville. We had hoped that the northerly turn the storm took at dawn would result in Grace heading out into the mid-Atlantic, but those hopes are gone after plotting another eight hours worth of storm track data. This storm is aimed right at us.”

I had turned and was making my usual gestures at the green board, showing viewers how the track would sweep the storm right into the Florida-Georgia border.

“The hurricane is currently traveling at twenty miles an hour. If this speed is sustained, the eye of the storm should arrive here tomorrow morning. We are already feeling the fringes of this storm and rip currents along the beach have been evident since last night and are now dangerous to swimmers.”

The screen changed to show winds blowing debris around in some earlier storm.

I went on, “Winds are expected to pick up from the current light breezes. By midnight we expect winds to be consistently over fifty miles an hour. Winds will increase hourly as the eye approaches. Just outside the eye winds will exceed a hundred miles an hour.”

I engaged the camera again as the clip of winds ended.

“Folks, I want to add my warning – my personal warning to all the others you’ve been hearing. NOW, is the time to secure loose items and to get to high ground if you live in low-lying areas.” I stared into the camera again, “FURTHER, I think conditions in the ocean favor a strengthening of this storm. I think we might have a Category Four or Five by the time Grace reaches us. This is a deadly storm, and you should take precautions.”

I ended the bulletin as we usually did, “We’ll keep you updated throughout the rest of the day. We now return you to the regularly scheduled program.” I watched as the monitor showed me fading to the Bulletin frame and then that faded back into the soap opera. I wondered how people could watch that stuff when there was so much more exciting ‘real stuff’ happening.

Jim rose from his panel and said, “We’re good for now. Let me know when you want to go on again. I’m not going home. It’ll flood out anyway, and I couldn’t get back here tomorrow.” I nodded and gave a sympathetic look.

Knowing I would be here all night I slipped into our “Nap Room” and lay down for what I thought would be a few minutes. When I awoke Jim was standing beside the cot shaking me gently.

“Pam? Hey Pam, wake up. Time to come back to work.” Jim had his enigmatic smile that I liked so much.

“How long was I out?” I said through my grogginess.

“It’s almost five o’clock. Time to start our ninety-minute drill before the national news comes on. I figured you’d want to check the Hurricane Center again before you go on. You’ve got fifteen minutes.”

I mumbled, “Thanks, Jim,” and stood. A quick stop in the ladies room and I was ready to go. Now I needed something to say. The National Hurricane Center had a four o’clock update. Things were strengthening, and the storm’s relentless track towards us appeared unabated. I’d be the star of the local news for the next few hours.

Jim stuck his head into my cubicle a few minutes later, “Hey Pam, we just got the word you’re also going to do a two-minute cameo on the national network news at 6:42 p.m. You’ll segue over a clip showing the storm’s track from the coast of Africa to its present position, and then your ‘sweeping into the U.S.’ routine.”

“OK,” I said crisply; here were my fifteen minutes of fame. I’d never done a national feed before. Wow!

Two hours later I was exhausted but exhilarated. It wasn’t the standing and dancing around in front of the green screen that made me tired. It was the feeling of responsibility that people were watching me and going to bet their lives on what I told them. I had to get it ‘right.’

I'd just sat at my desk when Jim appeared at my cubicle doorway. "Hey, Pam. NBS wants you to do oceanside clips and the weather channel even wants our feed – all their people are up north or on Hatteras waiting for the sweep north."

"How am I getting around? You driving? Who's the camera?"

"Not me. I'll be talking to you from here on the satellite link. They're bringing in a new guy. He was a big cheese in NBS for years, but is now retired. He's taking our truck. Don't let him prang it up by hitting a tree or something. He should be here in thirty."

I'd kept a couple of changes of clothing at the station, but most of the duds were more dressy and more suitable for looking "pretty" in front of the evening news camera.

"Hey, Jim," I shouted, "What about the eleven o'clock spot?"

He replied from partway down the hall, "You'll do that from Amelia Island – on the beach. You should have just enough time to get out there, get set up and broadcast. I'll update you by cell on anything that comes in on the wire about the storm."

I shrugged and headed off to assemble some storm clothes. Thirty minutes later I'd found some slacks and scrounged a couple of men's polo shirts. I had some running shoes at the office, so that'd be what I wore under my weather gear. I looked great in foul weather gear – all you could see was my pert nose sticking out from under my WJAX baseball hat. I pushed my hair through the back of the hat and headed back to my cubicle to pick up my laptop and purse.

There was a very large man asleep at my desk when I turned into my cubicle. He was wearing jeans, western boots, and a new NBS polo shirt. His head was back showing a ruddy and tanned complexion and a handsome face that had seen a lot of mileage. I could tell he was tall and trim since there was so much leg between my chair and the edge of my desktop where his boots casually rested. His muscular arms were folded over his chest. There was a tattoo on one arm – a smiling dragon.

"Ahem," I coughed to see whether I could wake him. One steel-blue eye opened and looked at me. The other followed. He uncurled from his repose and put both feet on the floor.

"You Pam?"

I held out my hand as he stood, "Yes, Pam Williams." He rose over me; a handsome tower of someone I knew instantly was 'all man.' I'd been expecting some nerdy engineer, and instead got this good-looking hunk of a man. My heart did a little skip as he wrapped his muscular hand in mine.

“Hi. I’m Roy Saunders at your service - chauffeur, network guru, cameraman, and, today, hurricane hunter. I think we should hit the road pretty soon since you’ve got to make a couple of feeds for the late news.” He talked slowly, with a measured cadence and a touch of a drawl. His eyes looked deep into mine: he wasn’t taking my clothes off with his eyes, he was boring into my soul, seeing deeper than I’d let anyone in before.

“Let’s go,” I said, slightly flustered, as I stuffed my laptop into my briefcase along with my wallet and my traveling cosmetics kit.

It was already raining as we got into the network van, a custom made truck containing a quarter of a million dollars of broadcast communications equipment. Roy clearly knew his way around a truck like this for his moves were definite and betrayed a familiarity with the equipment that I realized hinted at years of experience. I looked at Roy trying to guess his age: somewhere between forty-five and sixty-five, I decided.

As we drove I asked, “So tell me about Roy Saunders? I was told you’d retired. Is this a special gig or something?”

He laughed, “Yeah, sort of. I had twenty-five years in the military. I did Navy and Marine news and weather broadcasts all over the place - usually from war zones when we had one. After that I spent a dozen years with NBS, mostly around Washington. Inherited some money, thought I’d try fishing, but got bored and put my oar back in the water with NBS – and here we are driving into the middle of a hurricane. My thing! At least, no one’s going to shoot at us.” I narrowed my guess about Roy’s age down to mid fifties.

When I retired the first time, I moved to a place out on Amelia Island I inherited from my Dad. It’s not much, but I’ve been single for the past twenty years, so it doesn’t matter much.

I gave him a questioning look.

Roy volunteered, “I was married for six years – when I was in the Navy. We both discovered you have to be present to have a relationship. I was bouncing all over the globe back then, so the marriage fell apart. I kept traveling, so I figured I’d better not marry up again. Since I stopped traveling, I’ve never met the right person.”

We swapped life stories and philosophies as we drove from downtown to Amelia Island. The more we talked, the more I liked this easygoing man. He was a gentleman, and I couldn’t believe that some woman hadn’t snagged him somehow.

As we got to the Island, we talked about what we were going to do for the late news and then about overnight feeds that could be used in the morning or in case we couldn’t transmit.

Just before ten o'clock we pulled into the Amelia Island Resort – the pleasure spa that WJAX had arranged as our home base for the next twenty-four hours. Roy and I introduced ourselves to a security man that greeted us as our huge truck lumbered into the posh resort. The place had been emptied, and all the staff had left for the mainland. The one security guard told us he had stayed behind to help secure the place and anchor loose equipment and outdoor gear.

The resort consisted of two large three-story condo buildings with a single-story lobby area. A pool lay in the center between the two housing units and faced the ocean. The resort rented out most of the condos and nice folks that they were; they set aside a two-bedroom condo for Roy and me to use. It faced the Atlantic Ocean, but at this hour all we could see was a pit of black from the little balcony. We rolled the storm shutters back down and went back to set up the van for our late evening broadcast.

Roy pulled the van up close to the building on what we figured would be the leeward side of things for a while. He put up the satellite antenna stopping just at the roofline to minimize wind impact on the antenna. With the help of the security man, he secured the antenna boom to the building for some added stability. Roy really did know what he was doing.

I watched in the van as he fired up the electronics and the video panel. Suddenly, I heard Jim's voice over the speaker, "Hi Pam; sneaky way to get an overnight at a resort. Find a hurricane and this whole place rolls over to be your servant."

I talked into the van's microphone, "Hi Jim. Greetings from Amelia Island. They closed up the place just for us. Just one security guard here."

Jim updated me on the weather, and told me he'd e-mailed me some of the screens they'd splice into my broadcast at eleven. I booted up my laptop as we talked, and soon was logged into the resort's wireless network.

The surface winds were now over forty knots, and the eye of the storm was about a hundred and sixty miles from landfall with top wind speed of a hundred-twenty – the storm was a Category Three. I noted that Amelia Island was directly in the center of the projected landfall of the eye. The rest of the maps and satellite photos were predictable. I made some notes on a three-by-five card to refresh my mind just before we went on the air and then suggested to Roy that we find a place to set up the camera.

At eleven o'clock, I was standing beside the pool at the resort. Roy was a good cameraman; he knew his stuff. The rest of the feed took care of itself. Shouting into the wind, I did my cameo in the news segment of the broadcast and then ten minutes later did an in-depth update on Hurricane Grace and what to expect along the Florida and Georgia coasts. The news was not good.

I suggested to viewers that given the growing intensity of the storm and its track right for the city that viewers check in at four a.m. for a special storm update. We'd set that up with WJAX earlier at Roy's suggestion; we'd probably be live at least every half-hour after that.

Roy and I folded up the van and went up to the condo that had been assigned to us.

I felt a little surge of arousal as we went in the door to the apartment. I felt chemistry between us – really strong chemistry. If there were pheromones about, I was certainly receiving his. However, Roy seemed quite comfortable sharing the quarters with a female.

“He's old enough to be your father,” I told myself. That didn't work. I still felt chemistry. I liked this man – a lot. I didn't know what to do about it, but he did, but I was starting to get some ideas.

About that time, Roy said, “Pam, we'll have to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in four hours. We both better get some shuteye. I have an alarm clock.” He shuffled off towards one of the bedrooms, leaving me standing in the living room wishing he'd picked some other alternative.

I went in the other bedroom of the condo unit, got ready for bed, lay down and quickly drifted to sleep, assisted by the sound of the wind and rain hitting the storm shutters.

“Pam? Pam? It's time to get up.” I heard the voice from afar and a knocking on my door. I had a sudden feeling of panic as I wondered where I was. The voice was more persistent as he rapped on the door. “Pam, get up. Time to go.”

“OK. OK. I'm awake. I'm moving. Thanks Roy.” I was fully aware now. I listened to the storm sounds for a minute. They were more ferocious than when I'd gone to sleep. I went to turn on the bedside light, but found only darkness.

“Hey, I've got no power. Is everything out?” I yelled as I fumbled towards the bedroom door.

“Yes,” Roy said in a loud voice from the direction of the living room. “Do you need a light?”

“Yes,” I yelled; I decided to stand still in the unfamiliar room. “I have nothing. I forgot we might be in the dark. Funny I tell all my viewers to be sure to have flashlights, but I don't take my own advice.”

Roy opened my bedroom door again and handed me a flashlight, then turned and left the room. He didn't appear to notice that I was just in my NBS polo shirt and bikini briefs. I found myself disappointed that I didn't see a response from him, and I remembered my

feelings for him as I went to sleep. I went back to my bathroom to redress. I decided to skip any makeup since I guessed that anything I put on would be washed off in seconds outside the building.

Roy was waiting for me when I came out of my bedroom area, pulling the last of my rain suit on over my slacks and shirt. Roy already had his rain gear on.

“Ready?” he asked.

“Let’s see what we’ve got,” I replied.

We stepped out into the maelstrom. The wind was blowing about sixty miles an hour and the rain was nearly horizontal and stung as it hit my face. Roy pulled me along the short distance from the door in our section of the condo to the nearby van. He pushed me into the van and slammed the door behind us.

Roy sat at the main console, started a generator on the van, and fired up all our broadcast equipment. It was a quarter to four in the morning. I was wondering how I’d be able to talk and do a broadcast from outside the van with the severe weather.

“I need to get on the Internet, or access to the National Hurricane Center satellite broadcasts, or better yet, both,” I told Roy. He pointed to the other console in the van and up on the screen popped the latest satellite photo of Hurricane Grace.

“Oh my God,” I said. “It’s gotten bigger. It’s huge.” He told me how to change the screen and check things on the Internet. I madly dialed in screen after screen of meteorological data on the storm. I was swearing aloud as every screen brought worse news than the one before it.

I heard Roy talking to Jim at WJAX. He gave me a five-minute warning and suggested we go set up the camera someplace where I could broadcast. I unzipped my rain gear momentarily, and attached a wireless microphone to inside my gear.

I followed Roy from the van, pushing the door shut behind us. We set up on the leeward side of the nearest condo building. It was still gusty but with the camera against the building and me about ten feet away, it wasn’t too bad. The camera lights highlighted the horizontal rain right behind me.

After setting things up, Roy yelled, “Sixty seconds.” I nodded.

A minute later Roy cued me. I started talking rapidly, practically yelling my broadcast.

“This is Pam Williams broadcasting from Amelia Island, just off the coast from Jacksonville. I’m standing on the protected side of this resort; however, the winds are howling at sixty to seventy miles an hour and the rain is horizontal on the other side of this building.”

I went on, “I have some bad news for you. Hurricane Grace is now a Category Five storm. The warm waters of the Atlantic have fed energy into this storm, and it is now a killer. If you are in a low-lying area this may be your last opportunity to move to safer ground. Get to high ground!”

“The eye will likely pass directly over me and very close to the downtown areas. Flooding can be expected over a wide area. Winds near the eye will be over one-hundred-sixty miles per hour. Rainfall is estimated at three to six inches an hour over a wide area with heavy flooding, particularly near the St. Mary’s and Nassau Rivers and all feeder streams. Again, get to protection and high ground – NOW!”

I gave some other statistics about the storm then had a thought. I told viewers, “If Roy, my cameraman, can follow me, I’m going to step out from behind this protected wall and show you the power this storm already has.” I walked backwards towards the corner of the building where there was no protection from the wind.

As I came into the wind stream, my body was lifted and carried about ten feet before I landed in a rolling pile on the ground. I flipped and flopped over a couple of more times before I could crawl, on hands and knees, back into the protection of the building. Roy started towards me, but I waved him away.

Roy motioned that I was still on camera. “Wow!” I said to our viewers, “That was a little more than I expected. I should tell you I weight about a hundred and twenty pounds, and stand five-foot-six. To be blown around like that shows you the power of this wind already, and when the eye gets here it will be over twice this speed – that’s at least four times the energy. Winds will be around 160 miles an hour! If you live in a mobile home or an older home not built to new hurricane protection standards, you need to find better quarters to ride out the storm. Get going – NOW!”

“This is Pam Williams, signing off. We’ll try to be back with an update shortly.” We ended the feed.

Roy came and put his arm around me, pulling me in the direction of the truck’s back door, “That was stupid!” he admonished me. “Are you all right? You could have been hurt or hit by debris. That’s why we’re on the protected side of the building. Don’t do that again.” He pulled me towards the van and with his other hand grabbed the camera and tripod. Soon, we were all inside the truck’s small studio. Even in the protection of the building, I could feel the truck roll and yaw in the wind.

He cast an evil eye at me. “You had me worried about you for a minute,” he said, his voice softening, even though he was right; I had done a stupid thing. He added, “I just found you, I’d hate to lose you so soon.” He studied me. A little voice inside me screamed, “He’s noticed you; he cares!”

“I’m sorry, Roy,” but I had to do something so people watching would get a sense of the power of this storm. If I think of doing something like that again, I’ll set it up with you. OK?”

“Not if it puts your pretty butt in danger,” he replied protectively.

“My pretty butt is covered up with foul weather gear,” I said. “You can’t tell whether it’s pretty or has warts all over it.”

“It’s pretty,” he said in a matter of fact tone. “I peeked before you covered it up with all that rain gear.” He gave me a wry grin and turned to the console in the truck. We both laughed. I was also pleased that some of that chemistry existed on his side of things. I liked knowing that this handsome hunk of a guy was attracted to me.

Roy pulled out a small ice chest. “I didn’t plan to be as isolated for so long. I have a couple of drinks, and two turkey sandwiches. You interested?” I nodded so we sat in the rocking truck and finished off our few provisions. I was still hungry.

We did half hour updates. By five-thirty dawn had come and we opted to do the updates from inside the van, although the noise level from the wind was becoming excessive. Wind speed was up to eighty miles an hour according to the National Weather Service estimates for this area.

For the six o’clock morning newscast, we took our equipment into an interior meeting room of the resort so there’d be less wind noise. We did wireless video and audio feeds to the van. We set up two spotlights powered from the van. Roy had fed some views of the ocean to the station about fifteen minutes before we went on. The waves were up right at the edge of the dunes, on sea swells and a storm surge of almost twenty feet. The water was boiling. The air was thick with salt spray and debris. He caught a few frames of a roof rolling past the resort from one of the upscale homes nearby.

The feed was spectacular. I watched it later. It was a team effort. Jim was splicing Roy’s storm feeds from the windows of the resort into my live broadcast.

After we finished, Roy lowered the antenna of the van. He figured the wind speed was hitting a hundred miles an hour, and the antenna was only rated for sixty. Although it was protected, he was worried about it ripping off the truck. We went back into the meeting room we’d used to broadcast from and sat in near darkness listening to the wind howl.

The eye came ashore at seven o'clock. We were right under it. It was eerie to suddenly hear the wind almost cease. Cautiously, Roy and I went outside and stood. The security guard appeared from somewhere in the bowels of the other building. We stood and looked at the wall of clouds and water all around us; yet above us we could see a few puffy clouds and blue sky.

While the eye was with us, Roy popped up the antenna, set up the camera, and we did a quick two-minute clip back to the station. Jim said 'all hell was breaking loose in Jacksonville' and there was concern at the station that they'd lose their satellite dishes soon. He'd still be there trying to figure out how to get us on the air. He estimated winds at a hundred-and-thirty.

After we finished I noted that we could look almost vertically up the eye wall, perhaps for 30,000 feet. It was hard to tell. On our side of things the sky was blue and almost serene; the eye wall was a seething dark and malevolent monster waiting to strike. The dark wall moved closer.

Roy re-stowed our equipment and moved the van to reposition it for the change in wind direction we expected when the other side of the eye arrived. We got back into the resort at seven-twenty, just as the storm started again with a vengeance. Roy had brought the wireless units with us into the condo, hoping we could maintain contact with the station through the van's radio link. Even in the interior room, however, we could only hear the wind screaming at a level beyond imagination. Then I felt the building shake and twist.

Several windows blew out in the next room. We felt the hot humid storm air penetrate the hotel. I went and sat close to Roy in a corner of the room. "I'm scared. Hold me," I told him. I'd never been in any weather this severe. I suddenly worried about my life.

He smiled at me, "Why that'd be an honor, Pretty Lady." He put his arm around me and protectively pulled me to him. It was not the most romantic of circumstances – I was still in my foul weather gear from head to foot, and for that matter so was he. Our lights were off, but we had some light from the hallway doors that we'd left open.

Almost every minute we heard another major crash or something akin to an explosion somewhere around the resort complex as one thing or another blew away or things crashed together. The crashes and groaning of the building went on and on.

Then there was a horrible tearing sound above us. Roy said, "There goes the roof on this building. It's peeling off in the wind." He no sooner finished the sentence than we heard a tremendous crash – almost an explosion of debris right outside the building. We assumed it was the roof hitting the ground.

Almost immediately we felt the wall behind us start to give way. A large crack appeared in the cinder block and sheet rock behind me, and I could see daylight through it. We both scrambled towards the far interior wall near a door jam. Then the ceiling started to cave in on the side of the building we'd just left. Light fixtures fell to the floor along with most of the ceiling tiles, and a gale force wind ripped into the room, throwing tables, chairs, and anything that wasn't nailed down, all over the place.

Something hit my head, and I lost consciousness. I had a nice, warm dream of Roy holding me close and saying sweet words to me. Then, I started to come to and there was Roy kneeling over me with a bloody rag in his hand. I felt really woozy.

"Come on girl," Roy said. "That's it. Welcome back to the real world. You took a really bad hit – piece of concrete. Knocked you right out. Here. Can you sit up? You're still bleeding from the gash on your temple, but I think you'll be all right. You might carry a little scar to remind you that you fought it out with a hurricane, however."

"Storm? Broadcast?" I mumbled.

"The truck is gone. It went bye-bye in the wind; got pushed into the other building – about five feet into the other building. The satellite antenna is gone too, ripped off the truck. When the wind dies down I'll see what I can salvage."

I sat up, a little more alert. "How long was I out?"

"About half an hour," Roy replied, dabbing at my wound. I noticed the rag was what had been his shirt. Without his shirt I could see he had strong ab muscles, a good tan, and a masculine chest. I wanted to touch it - that chemistry again. I reached out and stroked the gray chest hair.

"How's the other building?" I asked, thinking we could find shelter there. My brain was starting to function again.

"Demolished," he replied. "I doubt the security guard survived; the place totally collapsed. It could have happened to us too if we hadn't moved when we did – right before you got hit in the head. I think half this building fell in, fortunately we're on the right side of things."

I noted that the wind was still howling outside, but it seemed less intense than just before I passed out. "Wind speed seems to be dropping," I observed.

"Yeah, it's dropping slowly. The storm is probably going to lose some punch now that the eye is ashore; that'll help drop the winds a little faster for us too. When the speed drops down to about sixty, I'll go out to the van and see whether we have any type of communication with the outside world. I might be able to get the van out of the rubble."

I surveyed the room we were in. Even the wildest party could not have created the kind of devastation that I saw. On the far side of the room, light was visible where the wall had collapsed and then dropped the two upper floors of the condo – concrete, furniture, and remnants of the roof, into a pile. Rain pelted in the opening, but we were far enough inside against the other side of the large meeting room to stay dry.

Roy had created a small space where he could lay me out and minister to my wound. He'd propped up some of the debris to create a small fortress, but I doubted it was sturdy enough to withstand a further collapse of the upper floors.

“Shouldn't we move?” I pointed upwards.

“As soon as you can stand we should climb out of here. I think if we try to go down that hallway towards the lobby area it might be safer. There were no upper floors there.” He pointed to a door that was now blocked by debris.

“Give me a minute and I'll be ready,” I said as I carefully got up on my knees. I gathered up my raincoat; Roy had used it as a pillow under my head. It had a lot of blood stains on it.

“Am I still bleeding?” I asked.

“Yes, but not as much as you were initially. Head wounds do that. I should tell you that I was a backup EMT – Emergency Medical Tech – in the Navy. I didn't just go around taking pretty pictures.”

I finished standing, holding onto Roy. The woozy feeling passed slowly. I could move slowly as long as I could hold onto something. I liked holding onto Roy.

Roy moved towards the door, heaving tables and chairs from my path. At the door, he tried to both pull and push until he could get the door open about a foot. He peered through and then said, “It's wet and windy, but I think it's safer than staying in this wing of the resort.”

We both squeezed through the narrow opening. What had been a glassed in hallway to the main reception area was now obliterated. The concrete pad of the walkway was in tact, but the glass sides and roof were gone. Some twisted remains of the HVAC ducts lay a few yards away.

“Let's try the reception and lounge area,” Roy said.

He helped me along the path, supporting most of my weight as we threaded our way amid the wreckage. Three hundred feet later, we were soaked but safe in the resort's reception area.

Windows were gone, but the roof had remained in tact. Further, most of the lounge furniture had survived.

“Sit here,” Roy said leading me to a wet sofa. Let me see what shape things are in around here. He went into the rooms behind the reception desk and was gone for several minutes.

When he came back he announced, “No nothing. Phone service is out completely. The cell tower is out. There's no electricity. But, I have some good news.” He smiled and produced two containers of orange juice from his pocket and a dozen peanut butter and cheese crackers.

I laughed and reached for the nosh. I said in a fake southern drawl, “Why, Mr. Saunders, you take your girlfriends to the nicest places and spare no expense. I am truly impressed.”

Roy bowed and sat beside me. We ate and waited for things to quiet down amid the howl of the wind. I nestled into his shoulder and closed my eyes.

I awoke about an hour later. Roy's yellow rain parka was again stained with my blood, but he said I was in good shape and that the bleeding had stopped. He noted that another section of the building we'd been in had collapsed so it was a good thing we moved. He also noted that the wind speed was now down considerably, and he wanted to go and check out the van.

He made me promise to wait where I was, and he went out through one of the nonexistent windows and headed towards the other building. I stood and went to the opening to watch his progress.

The front of the van was about five feet into a windowed wall of the other section of the resort's condo units. Rubble surrounded the truck and lay atop the unit. As Roy reached the truck, he clambered in the back door of the unit and slammed it shut behind him.

Five minutes later he reappeared and went around to the cab of the truck and just managed to squeeze in. With some difficulty, he got the truck started and was able to back the unit out of the hole it had created in the structure. He drove the truck across the well-manicured lawn, leaving deep tire tracks, until he was next to the reception area.

Roy got out of the truck and ran back to where I was.

“Darlin', the truck seems in good shape except for the lack of a satellite antenna and a cracked windshield. If I can find it I might be able to get it working again. In the meantime, we have a radio link. I can hear a lot of emergency traffic talking, but it's all from the downtown area; that's almost twenty miles from here. I don't know whether anyone can hear me. Didn't try all that hard for now. Just yet, I don't think we're an emergency.”

“I do have one other present for you, though.” Roy reached under his parka and produced a first aid kit. Five minutes later my head wound was treated and gauzed over, and my entire head was wrapped to hold the dressing in place.

“OK, I’m ready to do the weather now,” I announced as he finished. I stood, primed, and acted as though I was wearing a new Dior suit; I said to him, “Do I look all right?” I realized I looked like shit – a pile of shit that had been pummeled with sweat, blood, debris, water, wind, dust, and dirt.

We went to the van and sat for another hour listening to the Jacksonville emergency units struggling with one disaster after another. Roy tried several times to make contact with WJAX on the two-way VHF radio, but there was no response.

Eventually, he announced he was going on an antenna hunt. I sat in the van, and Roy went out to wander the property. He came back in ten minutes and told me he’d found the antenna boom, but all he wanted was the dish antenna and the feed cable. He took a toolbox and headed back out.

I lay down on the floor of the van again, dozing until I heard noises that I took to be Roy returning from the hunt. I opened the door, and he was standing there with the satellite dish antenna and about thirty feet of antenna cable over his shoulder.

“OK, let’s see what we can set up,” he announced.

I decided I’d call him MacGyver, after the TV character that could create miracles with a paper clip and rubber band. Roy fastened the antenna to a patio chair and rewired the unit to the truck. All this while standing in forty-knot winds and rain.

After a lot of in and out of the van to get the antenna aimed at the right satellite, Roy was reasonably happy that he was aimed in the vicinity of the geostationary satellite we used. He got a partial lock on one ‘bird,’ and we started to try to make contact again.

“WJAX, WJAX, WJAX. Mobile One here, how do you read?” He repeated the message over and over again.

Then suddenly, after we’d been tweaking things for fifteen minutes, a booming voice came in over the truck’s speakers, “Mobile One, this is National Broadcasting Service. How do you read?”

“NBS, Mobile One here. We read you five by five. How do you hear us?”

“You’re five by five as well. Where are you? Are all in your party safe?”

Roy responded, “This is Roy Saunders and I’m with Pam Williams, the WJAX meteorologist. We are at the Amelia Island Resort. We are OK, although Pam has a head wound. There is probably a dead security guard here. The resort is in shambles and most of it has collapsed. How’s the rest of the area?”

After a silence the speaker came on again, “This is NBS in Atlanta, and you’re talking to Bill Walsh. WJAX and most of the Jacksonville and southeast Georgia radio and all the TV stations are off the air. Antennas are down mostly. When they went out we started to monitor their satellite frequencies. You’re about the only one out there other than emergency crews around the City. Is the head wound on the woman OK or do you need emergency assistance?” I shook my head “no.”

“No emergency here in terms of personnel. How are roads?” Roy asked.

“The north bridge to your island is gone - destroyed. The southern one is probably gone too. I think you’re going to be there for a while. There are a lot of washouts and flooded highways. I wouldn’t try to move very far. The storm is well inland now; the storm center is up near where Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee come together; it’s only a tropical storm now. Lots of rain and flooding going on.”

“OK. Can we stay in touch?”

“Most definitely. Say, hold on for a minute, my producer wants to talk to Pam Williams.”

There was a long silence and then another male voice came on the radio. “Pam, this is Ron Caufield, executive producer of network news for NBS. Are you able to broadcast over this link? Video?”

“Hold on, we’ll set up the camera and see,” I said into the mike, as I leaned over Roy’s shoulder.

Roy played with a camera and the connection wires. Suddenly, the monitors in the van came to life with the picture of the inside of the van and me sitting in the chair.

“Great!” the voice over the speaker said, “We can see you? Are you really OK? That bloody bandage looks impressive. Are you still bleeding?”

“Yes, I’m fine thanks to Roy Saunders here. He was an EMT, so I’ll take his word that I’ll survive. I feel OK, just sore – all over.”

“Can you do a clip for us in about ten minutes? Be good if you could be outside? You know, show some views of the debris and all.”

Roy nodded, and I said, “We’ll be ready.”

Fifteen minutes later we’d set up outside the van. Roy cued me to start talking.

“This is Pam Williams talking to you from Amelia Island, Florida, where five hours ago the eye of Hurricane Grace passed directly overhead. The hurricane destroyed two three-story buildings of the condominiums that you see over my shoulder. My colleague Roy Saunders and I were in one building when it collapsed, and that’s why I have this bandage around my head – I didn’t fare too well and got knocked out. At the far end of that building is also the body of a security guard left here by the resort to ensure that the property was safe and secure; Hurricane Grace killed him.”

Roy panned the camera around the property as I kept talking.

“Everywhere you look there is destruction. This is what winds of a hundred-sixty miles and hour will do. Down the road you see in the picture right now is the main highway off the island. The only trouble for us is that the bridges to the mainland are gone; blown away by Grace or swept away by her storm surge.”

“We can hear the radios of the emergency crews on the mainland – mostly from Jacksonville area. They have their hands full right now with every kind of emergency you can imagine. This is a time for neighbors to be helping neighbors. It is also a time to avoid downed power lines and the other hazards that this Hurricane has left us with.”

The camera came back to me, “Pam Williams, NBS News.” I stood still for a moment. Roy then motioned us back inside the van.

Ron Wilson came on the speaker; “Pam that was marvelous. You’re a natural. That’ll go on the national news tonight every half hour between five and seven. We’ll keep this line open in the meantime.”

Roy leaned into the mike, “Let’s take the van and drive a little and see whether we can find anything else of interest. Might not get too far, but we’ll let you know if we find anything newsworthy. We’ll do videos to upload to you later.”

“OK, we’ll be on this channel. NBS on standby.”

Roy disconnected the antenna and left it untouched. “We’ll come back to broadcast plus there’s food in the kitchen behind the resort reception desk. If we can make it, my house is just down the road from here. I’m sort of worried about whether it’s still there or not. Wasn’t much, as I said, so it’s probably gone.”

We got in the front of the van, and Roy slowly threaded his way down what had been a picturesque roadway up to the resort. Trees were down everywhere, but only one of them blocked the road completely. Roy used a chain saw from the van and cleared it in less than five minutes. I was impressed with how well equipped the truck was.

There was a small general aviation airport on the way to the bridge. We pulled the van into the airport. It was deserted. Roy filmed me doing a clip against a backdrop of a dozen planes, flipped and tossed every which way by the Hurricane.

When we got to the bridge, we were met with a staggering sight. The long suspension bridge to the mainland had disappeared into the muck and mire of the Amelia River. Only a few steel girders, twisted and distorted against the swollen river were visible. We did another video clip.

Roy turned the van around, and we drove through Amelia City – the place was not only deserted; it was destroyed. There was no sign of life as we drove slowly through the street along route A1A. Roy had me run the camera out the window of the truck as we drove down the littered main street. Roy then headed for the other end of the island to see how that bridge had fared.

The bridge over the Nassau River was gone as well. Roy pointed at one of the flattened buildings as we drove by. It would have been a pretty location, but now trees were down, and the house lay in shambles.

“My place,” Roy pointed, as the truck lumbered by some rubble. I saw the name ‘Saunders’ on the mailbox that still stood at an odd angle beside the road.

“Oh Roy, I’m so sorry,” I said as I touched his arm sympathetically. I could guess that he had feelings for the beach house; Roy had called it ‘home.’ However modest it was, it was a loss.

“Place needed rebuilding anyway. Glad I wasn’t at home. I would have been of a mind to ride out the storm there.” He paused and looked at me and grinned. “See, you saved my life.” I suddenly realized that Roy saw me in a new light. Now I felt regret that his home had been leveled, yet happiness because he’d taken the job to work with me, and had thus escaped personal harm.

Many of the other homes and businesses we passed were destroyed too, some were repairable and some, like Roy’s, were unrecoverable. We made a few more video clips then drove back to the resort.

Roy hooked us up to the satellite antenna again, and we uploaded our videos much to the joy of NBS news central. I also did several different news feeds standing with the destroyed

condominium behind me. According to NBS New Central we were the only game in town, at least within a hundred miles of here. All the other networks were rushing crews and equipment into the area. We were already here, but now had nowhere to go.

After our ‘work’ was done, Roy led us on a food foraging expedition into the kitchen area behind the lobby of the resort. Amazingly the kitchen had survived almost unscathed. Roy found a gas stove that worked, and soon he’d whipped up a meal of eggs, sausages, bacon, rolls, milk, juice, and a few other tidbits.

Although it was late in the afternoon, we enjoyed our breakfast. While he cooked, I watched amazed at his culinary skill. Everything about this man was desirable: he was an all-around good guy, a nurse, a broadcast genius, and now a cook. I thought, what more could a girl want?

The rain ceased while we were eating, and the first sign of some blue sky started to appear in the east. We found some patio chairs that hadn’t been destroyed and set them up beside the resort pool looking out over the ocean. The tide was down from when I’d last noted. The storm surge had passed..

Roy excused himself and returned a few moments later with a bottle of very expensive wine and two glasses. We sat and sipped the wine, as we looked out at the ocean. I reached over and held Roy’s hand as we sipped our wine. The chemistry I’d felt earlier returned and I found it almost overpowering.

“Quite an adventure,” I commented in a flirty voice as I started to stroke his hand in a sexy manner.

“Yeah, an adventure,” he said with a raised eyebrow. He stroked back.

I stood. I think I can take off my foul weather gear now. I’m not going to sleep in it again. I’m all sticky and sweaty under here. I probably smell like it too.”

I glanced at the pool. The large resort pool was full of water and debris from the trees; a few pieces of patio furniture were also visible sitting on the bottom. The water was mostly clear, so I figured it was all right to use. I stated, “I think I’ll take a swim and clean off.”

I pulled off my boots and rain suit. Everything under the suit was sopping wet, more with perspiration than rain I thought, but it was hard to tell.

I hesitated and thought about what my next step would be, but then yielded to my wilder side and peeled off my pants and my shirt – the latter covered with some blood I noted.

Almost naked, I walked carefully down the steps into the pool, ensuring I kept my head dressing dry. “Oh, Roy, this is marvelous,” I shouted up to him as I started to float.

Roy had watched every move I’d made – I’d made certain of that. Now he stood and peeled layer after layer off his body. His shirt was long gone – used to soak up blood from my head wound. He took off the parka then his boot and pants. I watched as this Adonis’ body slowly appeared from beneath the rest of the foul weather gear.

Roy stood in his briefs at the edge of the pool for a second then slowly came down the steps and ducked under the water. I was impressed with what I saw.

Roy surfaced with a chair he tossed up onto the nearby lawn. He also threw a few more pieces of furniture and some palm fronds from the pool. He finally turned and ducked under to swim back in the path he’d created.

I moved to intercept his underwater path. He came out of the water in front of me. I put my arms around his neck and pulled him towards me with my best seductive smile. We kissed for the first time. It was as though we’d kissed a thousand times before. It was perfect: lips, feel, texture, emotion, body posture, skin to skin contact, and every sensation combined into the ideal kiss.

Our bodies entwined, and one kiss led rapidly to another and another. Our tongues carefully came into play revealing the underlying passion both of us had carried from the moment we met. As we kissed I felt his fingers undo the clasp to my frilly brassiere; I pulled the flimsy material down my arms and tossed it aside when he finished.

Roy’s hands found my hips. He held me and then pulled me more tightly into his own body – into his fullness. The nipples of my breasts grazed the salt and pepper hair on his chest and hardened.

“I’d like you to make love to me,” I said softly.

Roy nodded and smiled lovingly at me. He kissed me with a passion I hadn’t known before in my life.

He carried me a few steps to the edge of the pool, sat me up on the side, and pulled the lacy pants from my lower body. He kissed his way down my taut body, spending time enticing each of my breasts to full excitement. After a few moments of this hedonistic pleasure he continued his journey down my body. I welcomed his advance.

Through my gasps I told him, “Make love to me.”

Roy shed the last of his clothing and then was on me. I clutched his shoulders and pulled him into my willing body. Now I gasped for air again as the intense pleasure from his penetration hit my brain. Soon, my legs were over his shoulders as we moved at each other at a rapid rate, driving to complete our union, to achieve a climax to this day.

I dropped my legs and used them to pull him into me with an urgency I felt for the first time. Then we exploded into each other. Our bodies arched into each other as we completed the act of lust – and of love. A new sound filled the air: our gasps for much needed oxygen joined the remnant wind in the palms.

I exclaimed as I floated down from my high, “You are a magnificent lover. I can’t wait to do that all over again.” I gave him a coy smile.

“Darlin’, you ain’t too bad yourself,” Roy whispered in my ear as he kissed me and nuzzled his unshaven masculine face to me. His hands again found my breasts and he smoothed them to my delight.

Roy pulled me into the water and I drifted into his arms, and we kissed some more. Right now, I didn’t want to be anywhere other than in his arms.

We drifted around the pool, touching frequently, as the last vestiges of daylight disappeared in the stormy west.

At one point, Roy gestured to the nearly collapsed part of one condominium building where many shattered windows stared down at us. “Do you suppose anyone is up there watching us? I can’t believe we just made love in a very public place. Sort of exciting wasn’t it?”

I told him with a smirk, “I think I have an exhibitionist streak in me anyway, so it wouldn’t matter. I hope someone took a video; I’d like a copy so I can remember this forever.” I kissed him tenderly.

Roy spoke a few minutes later, “Before we lose all our daylight we should settle in somewhere for the night. I was thinking of the lobby again; it’s the most sheltered and probably safest.” He gestured towards the resort.

“Sounds good. Let me gather my clothes so I have something to wear tomorrow.” We rinsed our clothes in the pool and wrung them out.

We put our boots back on, but none of our clothes. We were an interesting contrast as we walked through the debris field to the truck. I put my running shoes on instead of my boots; and we left our weather gear in the van. The two of us then walked naked towards the lobby, carrying our wet clothing. I wondered if a convention of nudists had ever stayed at the resort.

Inside we made ourselves at home in the lobby and kitchen. Roy found some dinner candles and we set them out. I hung our clothes up various places around the lobby with no expectation that they'd be dry anytime soon.

The second time we made love was more moving and emotional. The first time was mostly for lust, this was for love. Our kisses carried more unspoken messages, our embraces more desire and passion, our looks more caring and compassion, and our coupling greater longing for something lasting and more permanent with each other.

When we were done, Roy held me close. We rolled to our sides and fell asleep.

Sometime in the night I awoke. Roy was sleeping beside me. In the flickering candlelight, I studied his masculine form. I was hooked. This was the man I wanted in my life for the rest of my days – his days – our days.

After my reverie, I snuggled back against Roy. He woke momentarily and wrapped his strong arms around me again. I was in heaven and all was right with the world.

We woke shortly after dawn and took another swim to wash the remnants of our night's love making from our bodies. After dressing, we fired up the van and reestablished communications with the NBS news central.

"NBS, this is Mobile One on Amelia Island. What happened overnight?"

"Good morning, Mobile One. Pam and Roy isn't it. Tim Morgan here. Well, Hurricane Grace is now just a tropical depression centered over West Virginia, but everything within five-hundred miles from the storm's center is wet and flooding."

"How'd the late news go?" I asked.

"We used almost every second of all those clips you sent. You're famous. I'm just a flunky here, but I think the big bosses want to make you an offer to move up to National - big pay jump if you do. You made a great impression."

I grinned at Roy, and we did a little 'high five.'

"What's happening at WJAX?" I asked. "Are they operational again?"

"No TV in Jacksonville is up yet. All the towers got wiped out I'm told, not just NBS but all the stations. They're all buying into a temporary tower that should be operating later today. Power is still out in most of the city anyway; it'll be weeks before things get back to normal."

“How can we get off this island?” I asked. “Any chance you could arrange a boat or something for us to get back to the mainland?”

“Sure enough. Stand by for a bit and I’ll let you know what we can do.”

Roy and I set up lounge chairs outside the van door and sat naked in them holding hands while we waited for word from NBS. The day was sunny, hot and humid.

About an hour later, the speaker over the console crackled and Tim’s voice rang out. “NBS to Mobile One – Amelia Island.”

Roy scrambled into the van and got on the radio, “Mobile One here, go ahead.” I moved in beside him, thankful the video cameras weren’t hooked up.

Tim spoke, “We have a working airlift for you two. What we want you to do is get to the airport where you took pictures yesterday. We’re sending in a chopper from Charleston, and it should get there in about an hour. Leave the van at the airport and lock it up, but take a couple of the cameras and batteries. You’re going to do a flyover the entire area about the damage from Hurricane Grace. This is for tonight’s national news. Upload after you get back on the ground. WJAX guys should have that capability by the time you get there.”

“THAT’S GREAT!” I cheered into the microphone. “Any special instructions?”

“Nope,” Tim said. “You’re the reporter on the ground and you know the area. The crew of the chopper can set up a broadcast in the air if you see something truly spectacular, but otherwise use a lot of tape, and we’ll sort through it later. Do lots of lead-ins and transition-outs between each segment; that’ll help us splice stuff together later.”

“OK, we’ll fold up and start for the airport,” Roy said into the mike.

“Just one more thing,” Tim said. “I really hope to meet you guys. You’ve survived something extraordinarily horrible, and I’d like to shake your hands. You have an aura of unbelievable luck surrounding you and I hope some of it rubs off.”

“We both look forward to it,” I said into the mike.

Roy folded up the van and antenna, we dressed in our damp clothing, and we collected the few things we’d left outside and drove to the airport. An hour later we were aboard a large Bell helicopter plastered with NBS logos.

The tour from the air showed the tragedy of the hurricane. From the time we lifted off, we could see the devastation, particularly near where the eye had hit the mainland. We did two

hours worth of taping, capturing in one flight the horror facing North Florida and Southeast Georgia.

Part of the WJAX building was damaged, and, of course, the satellite dishes were trashed by the winds; one twelve-foot dish blew away completely. They were scurrying about getting back in business. The helicopter we were in landed in the parking lot, and Roy and I hopped out. Within the hour, we'd uploaded the tapes to NBS news in Atlanta.

Roy and I then sat the rest of the day and put together a one-hour special. We called it 'Amazing Grace.' I figured I'd do part of it live at WJAX even though they still didn't have local broadcast capabilities. We went live at eight o'clock – prime time! NBS picked up the feed and put it on national. I had thirty-five million viewers!

I am pleased to say that we scooped all the other networks. We had the best and most up-to-date coverage. Roy, WJAX, and I captured a whole bunch of awards including the prestigious Peabody Award for Outstanding Excellence in Broadcast Journalism.

The plaque for the award sits over my desk. Oh, yes, my desk is now at NBS headquarters in Atlanta. My partner, Roy, has the office right across the hall – Roy and I specialize in weather and technology news, so we travel around the country a lot because weather is news. We don't do the day-to-day stuff, just the really big events – tornadoes, hurricanes, blizzards, monsoons – you get the idea.

Oh yes, Roy and I got married the day I accepted the new job at NBS News. We couldn't live without each other. He moved to Atlanta with me, providing we spend much of our time at the new home we're building on Amelia Island. Supposedly, it's hurricane proof.

*

“Now reporting from Central Oklahoma, the site of the devastating tornado that destroyed a whole town there today is Pam Saunders. Pam.”

“There are no words that can describe the terror that this small town felt in the middle of last night when an F-5 tornado descended from the mamato-cumulus clouds overhead and totally destroyed over three-hundred homes and the entire commercial center of this town of over a thousand people ...”

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