

Storm Surge

**By
Kat Smith**

STORM SURGE
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ISBN 13: 978-0-9840521-0-3
ISBN 10: 0-9840521-0-0

This trade paperback original is published by
PHOENIX RISING PRESS
PHOENIX, ARIZONA
www.phoenixrisingpress.com

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED
ISBN: 1-933113-06-5

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Chapter One

The wind blew softly in the darkness, caressing her skin like gentle fingers. It was soothing, reassuring, and hopefully would be healing. The air still held the heat of the day, as did the sand sifting between Alex's toes. It was after midnight, and all of the tourists had long since retired for the night. This was the time of day Alex liked to walk the beach. Something about the darkness and the unending roar of the surf calmed her. Maybe it was the simple fact that the ocean never slept, never tired. Or maybe it was because she felt so comfortable in the darkness. Who knew, who cared, as long as the peace came?

For Alex, peace had been a distant friend for far too long. The last six years had been hard, mentally and physically. However, Alex knew that if life were to move forward, she must find peace within herself. She had spent too many days and nights running from the past. Now she was here, back where it all started, to face the demons, exorcise them, and hopefully move on.

Alex Montgomery, at 35, had been an FBI agent for 10 years. Now as she walked on the beach, she wondered if she wanted to return. Her life was at a crossroad and there were choices to make. Choices that not only affected her, but everyone for whom she cared. The last few years had proven to Alex that she didn't live in an encapsulated world within the FBI.

Every day her life was in danger, but more terrifying than anything else was that the people around her faced danger as well. Her last case had proven that the best way to get to an agent was through someone they loved. The academy had drilled this small but significant aspect into every recruit, and Alex had always been careful to keep her family and friends distanced from her work. However, her enemies had found the one thing she loved most dearly in her life, and extinguished it like a match. They not only destroyed the only person she had ever allowed herself to love, they had destroyed her heart and darkened her soul.

As she walked through the darkness, Alex vowed that they would pay. *I will come for you, Malcolm, and when I do you will pray for death.*

As Alex neared the her beachfront house, the warm lights from within cast comforting shadows on the sand. The air smelled fresh and clean and as Alex climbed the steps to the deck, she decided to eat dinner on the open air deck. She opened a bottle of wine and selected a sandwich from the basket Sam had left for her, before she kicking off her shoes and dropping into the chaise lounge. She lay her head back listening to the cadence of the waves lapping the shore, and was instantly asleep.



The air conditioner hummed in the darkened room, slicing through the silence of the early morning. Conner Harris rolled toward the middle of the bed and felt the cool emptiness. She couldn't remember the last time she'd awakened to find someone beside her? The encounters she allowed couldn't even be classified as one-nighters—they were more accurately half-nighters. Once the sex was over, her immediate needs satiated, she disappeared into the night.

She never allowed anyone into her home. She preferred instead to go to her latest conquest's apartment, house, or as a last resort to a cheap hotel. It was a protective mechanism that allowed her to remain aloof, and alone.

Conner threw back the covers and felt the cool air flow across her naked body. She rolled, and sat on the edge of the bed in one graceful motion, as her fingers raked through her hair. She stood and slipped a silk robe over her shoulders as she headed into the bathroom to start the shower, then headed toward the kitchen, anticipating the smooth full flavor of that first cup of coffee.

"Damn, damn, damn," she mumbled to herself as she looked at the coffeemaker. She dumped three scoops of beans in the hopper and cringed as the grinder roared. "One day I'm going to buy one of those coffee pots that grind and brew with a push of a button," Conner complained to the empty kitchen.

She retraced her steps to the bathroom and dropped the robe as she crossed the threshold of the shower stepping into a rain shower of warm water. She ducked her head allowing the water to cascade over her neck, and was surprised to find tears gliding down her face when she raised her head.

"What the hell is wrong with me this morning?" She snatched the towel off the hook outside the shower and stepped onto the cold tile, silently counting the days, wishing she could blame her wretched mood on a bad case of PMS. "What the hell is it?" She thought back to the overwhelming loneliness she'd felt upon waking—and now this. Surely

she wasn't going to fall apart like this on a regular basis. 'I don't need anyone in my life.' She glared at herself in the mirror. "I have a great job, great friends, and that is enough." She tossed the towel aside, and slipped the robe over her shoulders declaring "I don't need anything or anyone."

Conner looked sideways at her reflection in the mirror and chastised herself for the emptiness that she saw on her face. "Okay, snap out of it, shut it out, and get moving...I have to go to work." She turned her back on the reflection in the mirror and walked out of the bathroom.

The enticing aroma of coffee lured her back to the kitchen and as she reached into the cabinet for a cup, she felt a presence in the room, and all of her senses went on full alert. She thought longingly of her Sig Sauer 9mm under her pillow, then in one continuous movement, slid a knife from the block and spun around to face her intruder.

"Meow."

Conner slumped against the counter and cursed. "What the fuck do you mean sneaking up on me, you little shit? If you weren't the owner of my partner, I would de-fur you right here." The tiny cat meowed again and continued to innocently stare at Conner.

Conner returned the knife to the block and poured a cup of coffee. Casting a vile look at the cat, she leaned back and took a sip of her coffee, trying to ignore the glare from the kitten at her feet.

"Okay, okay, already. Geez, you're just like Seth, always hungry, and always whining. How did I let him talk me into keeping you for a week while he went traipsing around the country?"



Seth had dropped Magnum off the night before, and Conner had stared unbelievably at the huge backpack that contained the cat's personal belongings.

"He'll miss me," Seth said with an embarrassed look on his face. "I just thought he might get along better having some of his toys and stuff."

"Damn, Seth, what's that smell? Don't even tell me that I have to feed this cat sardines and other rotten shit for the next week."

With an even more embarrassed look Seth pulled out an obviously well-worn, seldom-washed piece of cloth.

"No, it's not sardines, Harris," he said a little harshly. "It's just an old t-shirt. I thought he might feel better if he had something that had my scent on it while I was away."

"Please put it away," Conner said while pinching her nose, failing in the attempt to hide her teasing smile beneath her hand.

After enduring a crash course on how to care for the kitten, and going over a detailed bullet point list of Magnum's routine, Conner shoved Seth out the door and off to his long-awaited vacation. Less than five minutes later the cat began crying unmercifully, and continued until Conner finally gave in and tossed the dirty t-shirt into the farthest corner of the room. "That's fine, Seth, spoil the damn cat, but did you have to bring the dirtiest thing in the hamper?"

Magnum immediately ran over, curled up in the shirt, and went to sleep. "Well, I'll be damned," Conner mused. "Who'd have ever believed it?" That was the last time Conner thought of the cat. She turned off the lights on the way to the bedroom and fell asleep almost as quickly as her head touched the pillow.



Now she opened a can of cat food and spooned it into the cat's personalized bowl. Magnum curled around her legs, rubbing his scent on her, marking his territory. "Damn men, you're all alike. Spend one night with a woman and you think you own her. Well, I've got news for—okay, Conner, you are really losing it now. Talking to a cat, what the hell has my life come to?"

As she finished her second cup of coffee, and read the latest edition of the *Florida Times*, she cast an occasional glance in the direction of the kitten. He sat in the doorway quietly grooming himself, all the while keeping a close eye on her every move.

She dressed for work in a pair of faded Levi's and a white cotton tank top, strapped on the shoulder holster, and pulled the Sig from under her pillow, tucking it nicely under her right arm. She topped it off with a brown leather jacket and her Doc Martens.

Conner glanced in the mirror checking for any cracks in the façade that she called her cover. She collected her keys from the hall tree in the foyer and walked out the door, into the cool early morning, and her beloved Jaguar in the driveway. The car started with a roar, and she pulled quickly out into the street. This was really her home—the streets.

The thirty-minute drive to downtown Jacksonville from Amelia Island gave Conner the opportunity to transition into her undercover persona. Life on the island provided the anonymity she needed to survive on the streets. As a rule, she didn't talk with her neighbors, other than the occasional hello as they passed, nor did she have any close friends on the island. All of her friends lived inland, and only the ones she trusted with her life were invited to the island for an occasional weekend of barbecuing, sailing, and beachcombing.



Stuck in traffic, she drummed her fingers on the steering wheel impatiently, then picked up her cell phone and dialed.

“Hey there you sexy thing. Got any clothes on at the moment?” she asked in a low, sultry voice.

“Yes, and even if I didn’t, I don’t think I could ever drag your attention away from work long enough to get you to actually do anything about it. How the hell are you, Conner? It’s been way too long.”

Conner smiled and pictured Sam’s face on the other end of the line. “Well, I was wondering if you wanted to get together for dinner tonight. It’s been a while and we have a lot of catching up to do.”

“Oh my God, something terrible has happened, right?”

“Ha ha, very damn funny, Sam. If you’re going to heckle me, I’ll find someone else to spend my evening with,” Conner said.

“Like hell you will. Mike’s at seven sharp, and make sure you’re driving that cool machine you call a car. I may just feel the need for a drive up the beach and I want to feel some power under my body tonight.”

“You’re insatiable, you know. Always thinking about getting laid. If I were smart I’d take advantage of that by getting you drunk and—”

Sam’s teasing voice cut her off. “Conner darling, hanging around all those drug heads must have mushed your brain; if I remember correctly you’ve already been there, done that—and walked away. I don’t give second chances to just anyone. And anyway, Kelly loves you like a sister, but I think she would draw the line at you providing that kind of comfort while she’s out of town.”

“Well, lover, or maybe I should be politically correct and say ex-lover, I’m not just anyone. However, you’re probably smart by denying me the pleasure. I’d only screw it up like the last time,” Conner said with more than a little sadness in her voice.

“Okay, enough heavy stuff. I’ll see you at seven, and don’t be late.” With that, the line goes dead. Sam hadn’t hung up on Conner; she had simply hung up, a trait that Conner had grown to know well. Never good in uncomfortable situations, Sam chose to avoid them whenever possible. That in itself had made their pairing difficult. Conner always believed in dealing with problems head on. Sam, on the other hand, tended to let everything simmer until it one day exploded.

Their kidding and jesting was their way of letting each other know that the love they had shared still remained, even though neither would ever do anything to rekindle the flame. Sighing sadly, Conner headed into the River City.



Conner walked into the police station house and headed for her desk, but Buet, who always had a cheerful word, stopped her before she could sneak past the front desk. Mack Buetford was the in-house archive for gossip and politics in the department. At 56, he had come to the hard realization that too many days on the beat had worn out his knees. Everyone in the department knew Buet missed the street, so they always included him in their after-shift get-togethers at one of the local pubs.

Conner was resting her elbows on the counter, casually chatting with Buet, when she heard a quiet “excuse me” come from just behind her. She stood and turned just as Buet spoke. It was a good thing he still had his voice, for Conner’s was buried somewhere in her stomach.

A chill ran up her spine as she looked into the bluest eyes she had ever seen, although she couldn’t figure out if the chill was due to the beauty of the irises looking back at her or the danger that lurked just beneath.

“Can I help you?” Buet asked.

Holding Conner’s gaze, the woman lipped her identification in Buet’s direction. “Yes, I have an 8 a.m. appointment with Captain Peterson.”

“Sure. If you’d like to have a seat, I’ll let him know you’re here,” Buet said while looking at Conner.

“Um, well, see ya later, Buet, I’ve got a ton of paperwork waiting.” Conner stumbled over the words, afraid she would choke on them as they left her lips.

As she walked toward her desk, Conner could feel the heat of the woman’s eyes on her back. She dared a glance back as she turned the corner into her cubicle, and noticed that the woman sat directly in her line of sight.

Conner pulled the first of a stack of papers from her in-box. On orders from Captain Peterson, she was taking a desk day to get her paperwork done. “I hate this damn paperwork shit,” she grumbled. “I need to be on the street doing what I do best, not in this damn cubby-hell-hole pushing a pencil.”

From behind her she heard a sultry voice say, “Think of the collar as a great date with the paperwork being a good-night kiss. Together they pack quite a punch.”

Spinning around in her chair, Conner watched as the woman from the front desk walked purposely into Captain Peterson’s office. She sat for a moment looking at the closed door wondering who the mystery woman was. *I hope it has nothing to do with anything I’m ever involved in, since I just made a complete ass of myself,* she thought.



As the blue-eyed woman sat in front of Captain Peterson's desk, she couldn't help but smile at the reaction from the officer outside. She also couldn't believe that she had allowed herself to relax long enough to tease the other woman; it was against her style. *Oh well, I'll never have to see her again, what harm could it possibly do?*

Peterson relaxed and rested his elbows on the desk. "Well, Shadow, you seem to be in a good mood for a change."

The woman's eyes became dark and lifeless. The small office filled with a heavy tension. Peterson shifted and raised his hands in a gesture of peace. "Ease up, Shadow, just happy to see you're still among the living."

The woman relaxed her shoulders. "Sorry, Jack, I had a long trip and I'm still a little tired. Give me a few days and I'll be back to my old jolly self."

Peterson knew the words were hollow. She would never be back to her old self, not after the hell she had endured over the past year. "If you want a few days before you jump in the game again, just say so. I've waited a long time to have you back in the city. A few more days won't make me change my mind."

"Really, Jack, if you don't mind, I would like a few days to get settled. It's been a long time since I've been home and I would really like to get the house in shape and settled in before I get started. Is Monday okay with you?"

"Take all the time you need, Shadow. We'll be here waiting." With that said, Peterson stood and extended his hand across the desk. The woman shook it firmly, and when she began to pull hers away, he held on and waited for her eyes to meet his, "It really is good to see you again. I'm glad you came home where you belong."

She paused at the door slowly pivoting towards the Captain, "One more thing, Jack. The Shadow is dead. She's not coming back—ever. If The Shadow is who you are expecting, then maybe you should reconsider your options before Monday morning. Give me a call if you change your mind." She turned and walked out, leaving the door ajar.

From behind, she heard Peterson say, "See you Monday, 8 a.m., and make it sharp."

As she walked past Conner's cubicle, she couldn't resist a glance inside. The detective was buried elbow deep in paperwork. She stopped and stuck her head in the cubicle "Must have been one hell of a date, Detective."

Conner spun around in her chair, in the process, bumping the cup of coffee on her desk. The hot sticky liquid splashed on her shirt and pants. “Damn it all”. Conner stood, and angrily turned toward the voice, ready to assail the intruder. She stopped in her tracks as she came face to face with the woman, and the most blazing smile she had ever seen.

Just as quickly as she appeared, the woman was gone.

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