



# Hurricane on Grimm's Island

A HIGHGATE MYSTERY



Don Sawyer

## CHAPTER 6

**After the Storm**

It had been one scary night. Stitch had been through the devastating 2007 earthquake while vacationing in Martinique. The two tornadoes that hit Ontario in 2006 touched down just a few miles from his house. He was used to violent thunderstorms. But this had been something else.

Shortly after 9:00 that evening the first hurricane force winds had hit them. From there it just got worse. For more than four hours the hurricane battered the island. Stitch, George and Tomlin heard the metal roof creak as the fierce winds tore at the eaves. Outside, trees cracked and branches slammed into the walls. Pushed by winds screaming at more than 100 miles an hour, rain leaked under doors and around the plywood covering the front windows and doors. No one slept.

Around one or two in the morning, the winds finally began to die down, but they still howled.

George and Stitch sat in chairs in the middle of the dining room. A kerosene lamp glowed

yellowly on a table between them. The wind seemed to moan a little less loudly.

“Is that the worst of it, George?” Stitch asked hopefully. “Did we make it?”

George shook his head. “We’ve had the hardest winds. But now they’ve shifted. The eye is southwest of us. That means the winds have slowed, but they’re still strong. They’re coming at us out of the south now. Later this morning they’ll shift again. Come straight at us from the west.”

Stitch sat back in his chair. “Cripes. I thought it would hit and move on.”

George chuckled. “No, my boy. That’s not the way hurricanes behave. They want to do as much damage as possible. They fool you into thinking it’s over. Then they hit you with a left.”

George was right. Stitch could hear the winds shifting. But they still howled and screamed outside the windows.

It wasn’t until 10:00 the next morning that the storm began to die down and the men felt safe venturing out. While the winds had abated somewhat, they still shrieked. The sky remained an angry black and grey.

What they saw when they stepped out of the back door stunned them. Even in the deep gloom they could see the extent of the devastation. Everywhere trees had been uprooted. The row of palms down to the beach that George had so carefully nurtured had been

flattened. The roof of the dive shop had been blown off leaving only the rafters. The pool was filled with debris. And everywhere there were gigantic branches on the ground splintered and tossed around like match sticks.

The men walked cautiously around to the veranda. Below them, the ocean still thundered, but at least the surge had not flooded the building. A thick, uneven line of branches, sea foam and debris lay just a yard away.

George ran his hand over his head. "That's how close we came. Another few feet and we would have been under water."

"Incredible," Stitch said quietly. "We're 40 yards from the ocean. And, what, George? Ten or twelve feet above sea level?"

"Just over 12 feet," George replied. "In the 20 years we've been here, I've never seen anything like this."

The three of them stood and surveyed the jumble in front of them. "Did you bring your chainsaw down from Canada, Stitch?" George asked. "Looks like we're going to need it."

"Sorry, George," Stitch replied. "I couldn't fit it into my checked baggage. And for some reason they wouldn't let me carry it on."

George shook his head and smiled. "The airlines these days. They're getting so fussy about security."

They turned as they heard a truck labouring up the long driveway from the main road.

Molina was driving the Nissan pick-up. Morgan was in the passenger seat. Molina parked the truck and opened the door. She looked around and put her hands on her hips. "Bloody hell," she said. "What a mess." She walked over to the men and put her arms around George. "Thank God you're safe."

"I'm not sure God had a lot to do with it," Stitch said, gesturing at the destruction. "He did a pretty good job of hammering us."

Morgan came up behind Molina. "They say the power could be out for a week," he said. "And telephone land lines are down."

"I'm not surprised," George said. "What are the roads like? I can't believe you managed to get in."

"Trees everywhere, George," Molina said. "If it hadn't have been for Morgan we wouldn't have made it. It's just a half a mile, but it took us more than an hour. Between the two of us we moved most of the bigger branches. And we were able to drive around or over the ones we couldn't get out of the road."

Tomlin looked at Morgan. "Anyone hurt?"

"Nah, Mr. Hepburn. Everyone at home is fine. I tried calling Manley Town on my cell. No good. But I sent my son down. Lots of roofs are gone. But they all knew it was coming. Everyone got inland to shelter."

Tomlin nodded. "That's good. That's very good." Tomlin turned to George. "Cell phones

are out. You think the relay towers were blown down?"

George shook his head. "I doubt it. The towers are supposed to be able to handle 150-mile winds. But the power cables were probably snapped. Last hurricane we had they twisted around the tower like spaghetti. And who knows? Maybe the back-up generator isn't working either. Wouldn't be the first time."

"So there's no communication to and from the island?" Stitch asked.

"Not until we get the relay tower fixed. That could take weeks."

"There's that satellite phone at the Island Health Centre, Mr. Campbell," Morgan pointed out.

Molina looked at Stitch. "I always thought a satellite phone was the same as a cell. Apparently they're not."

George shook his head. "Completely different technology. Cells need land relays. They cover only certain areas. Satellite phones get transmissions directly from the satellites. They can cover the entire earth. Expensive as hell to make a call. But in an emergency, they can be a lifesaver."

George turned back to Morgan. "Right you are, Morgan. But the satellite phone is way up in Cat Harbour. That's more than 15 miles away. If the road is as bad as you say, we'd have to walk to get there." He looked

up at the sky. “Besides, it’s no good until the clouds clear.”

“In the meantime,” Tomlin broke in. “Perhaps I could cook us up a bit of breakfast? Maybe some of that lobster from last night in an omelette? With a pot of strong coffee. We need that most of all.”

George smiled. “Spot on, Tomlin. But please, a spot of tea for me instead of that paint thinner you call coffee?”

Tomlin grinned and headed for the lodge.

George turned to Morgan. “Morgan, would you go down to the beach and have a look around? Check out what damage has been done. I have a feeling we are going to be doing a lot of palm tree replanting.”

Morgan nodded and headed down the stone footpath.

“How about the rest of us getting the shutters down? It’s dark enough without those. And it is going to get real steamy inside without any air conditioning or fans. The breeze will be nice.”

“That was some breeze we had last night,” Stitch commented.

Molina nodded. “I checked our anemometer.”

Stitch looked puzzled. “Anemometer?”

“Sorry, Stitch,” Molina said. “An anemometer is a wind speed meter. Anyway, we clocked speeds of over 120 miles an hour.”

“Category 3,” George mused. “With climate change, it’s only going to get worse.”

Suddenly Morgan sprinted up the walkway. "Mr. Campbell!" he shouted. "Hurry! There's a body washed up on the beach."

George looked at Stitch, and they both followed Morgan at a run. The surf was still angry, but it had receded well out from the shore. Logs, branches, plastic bottles and hanks of nylon rope littered the sand. To their left Morgan stood looking at a shape behind one of the logs. George and Stitch hurried over.

A woman's half-naked body lay face down. Her left arm was thrust into the sand under the log. Her right was stretched out toward the sea. Her legs were slightly bent and curled toward her chest, as if she were sleeping. As Stitch kneeled down, the ocean grumbled behind him. He picked up the woman's right hand and pressed on her wrist. After a few seconds he lowered it back to the sand. Then he carefully slid his hand underneath the woman's face and turned her head toward the log.

He stood up and took a deep breath. "It's Ellen," he said quietly. "She's dead."

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