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After the Storm

Alyssa Woodruff

Photo: Rachel Merton

There's something people don't realize about storms. Whenever tragedy strikes, people search back into their muddled recollections, desperately searching for signs. Omens. Warnings from the past, alerting them of what was to come. It was their ignorance that made them ignore it. It was entirely their fault.

What was it about people that made them such gluttons for punishment? Wasn't it bad enough to lose everything? Why must they beat themselves up and convince themselves that they could've stopped it, they were the only ones that could stop it, and they had failed?

No, there was something that people never realized about storms. They were sudden and short and powerful. They left behind questions and gave no answers in return. They left destruction in their wake. But there was something that no one who had been in a storm could argue.

There was an odd quietness outside. In the last week alone, the neighborhood had seen thunderstorms, racing winds, flooding and more. To wake up to silence was the strangest thing the man had experienced.

They had been hearing warnings about it for days—a hurricane, level 3 (whatever that meant), was going to strike the area. Hurricanes were extremely rare in their area due to their distance from the East Coast. When the man had first seen the news—a large cartoony map of the state being engulfed in a green circle—he assumed it was a mistake, or at least a far-fetched guess. Clearly, the newscasters were just thinking of the worst-case scenario—whatever would get their viewers to pay attention. However, days passed and the predictions did not stop. Eventually the man had to accept that the town would get hit, and he would have to prepare for it.

He hadn't known how to prepare for the storm. The area wasn't built to sustain such a thing. They had been hit by tornadoes in the past, sure. But while hurricanes shared their fast winds, there was little else in common with a twister. He and the other townspeople shuttered their homes and hoped for the best. Some visited relatives to avoid getting stranded. Most, however, did not have that option.

The hurricane was only in the area for about three days before it moved out of sight. But with the windows covered and the power out, the man had no sense of time. The hours seemed to melt into each other until he had no idea whether it was day or night.

He lived on a small dairy farm that had been owned by his grandparents. For generations, the farm had been passed down to the oldest child. He, however, had no children. He lived on the farm by himself.

He hadn't gotten much sleep during the storm. The winds made such a racket that it was impossible to focus, not to mention fall asleep. When the storm had finally gone, he was absolutely exhausted.

Stepping out into the grass, the man saw for the first time just what great amount of damage the storm had done. Pools of water had formed where the ground was uneven, surrounding the remaining buildings in miniature lakes. He had expected to see the power lines down, but the extent of the destruction amazed and horrified him. Somehow his house, old as it was, had survived. Some of his neighbors hadn't been so lucky. Entire buildings had been reduced to rubble. He didn't dare to consider if anyone had been inside. Around him, he saw other townspeople in the same state of shock as he was.

The storm had left silence, but not much else. Members of the city council had met to discuss funds for rebuilding. Parts of the elementary school had to be rebuilt, as well as the public library. The privately owned property was left to the mercy of its owners. Some was repaired, but several families moved away. For them, it was cheaper to move. Some argued that the town needed to be better prepared against another hurricane. But as many pointed out, another storm was not likely. It had been a fluke, but one the town could move on from.

Over the next couple years, the man saw the town go back to its former glory. For him, nothing had really changed in the end. His shock had worn off. Though no one ever forgot about the hurricane, it became nothing more than an old faded memory. Life had resumed, and it was not good to dwell on the past.