



**WARNING:**  
MATURE CONTENT

*The* **EYE** *of the*  
**HURRICANE**

**Q**READS

JANICE GREENE



***H**urricane Phillip is traveling directly toward southern Florida at this hour. The big storm is expected to reach the coast at approximately 6:33 P.M.," the radio blared.*

Laina shifted uneasily in her chair. The three clerks—Laina, Cesar, and Bobby—were taking a break in the back room of Florida Foods.

"I wish he'd shut that radio off," said Laina. "It's getting on my nerves."

Billy Maddox, the store manager, usually blasted music over the PA system. But today there was nothing on but hurricane news.

"Nah," Cesar said. "Playing the radio's a real good idea. It scares the customers. You

know—it makes them panic so they buy more groceries.”

Before the store even opened, lines of people were waiting to stock up on food. The three clerks were having their first break in 11 hours.

*“Thousands have boarded up their homes and businesses and evacuated. Traffic is at a crawl on major highways as motorists flee the advancing storm.”*

“Maybe we should get out of town too,” Laina said nervously.

“You crazy?” Cesar cried. “You wanna *leave* when Maddox is paying us time and a half for sticking around?”

“Laina—would you feel safer if we went to a shelter?” Bobby asked.

“You’re *kidding!* Go to some shelter full of screaming kids?” Cesar butted in. “Nah, this is better. Maddox said we’d be safe out by the loading dock if it gets bad.” He put his arm around Laina. “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you.” His voice was soft and sweet.

Bobby gritted his teeth. He hated it when

Cesar talked to Laina like that. At the same time, he wished he had Cesar's gift for such easy sweet-talk.

Laina pulled away from Cesar. "Okay, I'll stay," she said. "But first I want to make sure that someone drove Tia to a shelter. She said she'd leave a message on my machine." Without another word, she sprang up and headed for the pay phone at the front of the store.

*"Forecasters are predicting tides rising up to 13 feet and major flooding in low-lying areas. Governor Hermosillo has declared a state of emergency and called in the National Guard."*

Cesar tilted his chair back and fingered the silver chain around his neck. "If Maddox was smart," he said, "he'd jack up the prices. People will pay *anything* right now!"

Bobby stared coldly at Cesar. "Maybe because he's not scum," he said.

Cesar's chair slammed to the floor. "You calling *me* scum, Diaz? Is that what you're saying?" he demanded.

“I’m saying that anyone who would take advantage of people’s fear is scum,” Bobby said.

“Whoa! *Mr. Saint!*” Cesar said mockingly. “Excuse me for breathing the same air as you! You know something, Mr. Saint Diaz? You know what’s good about a thing like a hurricane? It makes things real—like who’s gonna survive and who’s not. And the ones who survive are the smart ones! It’s the law of the jungle. All this polite stuff we do every day—it’s not real. The reality is that we’re all just animals.”

Bobby glared at him. “We’re worse. Animals only hurt each other to survive. Only people are greedy.”

Laina walked up. “There’s no message!” she said in a quivering voice. “I called Tia’s neighbors, but none of them answer their phones.”

“Don’t worry, babe,” said Cesar. “Tia’s okay. She probably just forgot to call.”

“Do you want me to drive you over there?” Bobby offered.

“That would be great, Bobby! Tia broke her hip last month, so it’s real hard for her to get around.”

“I’ll tell Maddox,” Bobby said.

“I’m coming too,” Cesar chimed in as he turned to Bobby. His mouth was grinning, but his eyes were hard as flint.



**B**obby pulled his car out of the Florida Foods parking lot. The sky was an eerie yellow. Rain was now falling in sheets, blown sideways by gusts of wind.

The traffic was crazy. Cars sped down side streets or crawled along main roads, their horns honking. On one narrow street, Bobby had to pull over to avoid an SUV that was barreling down the wrong side of the road.

It took almost an hour to reach Tia’s neighborhood. Bobby peered through the windshield. “Which way?” he asked.

Laina pointed. “Turn left at the end of the street. It’s next to the creek.”

The sky was black now. Street lights were

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