



## I don't blog: I brag, celebrate, and shamelessly advertise!!!

*Welcome!* In response to relentless pestering and sheepish bribing, here is the current DRAFT of Chapter One of Storm Surge. There is no guarantee this is how it will stand in the end.

For those who find it hard to believe there will ever be a Storm Surge, and I've had that thought from time to time too, here is a sneak peek.

Storm Surge  
~ Chapter 1 ~  
Anonymity

"How was your trip?" Karen repositions herself to look toward me over the back of the sofa.

"Great! Austria was great!" I turn back to watch the final drip of brewing coffee land in the pot with a 'plop.'

"And, Mr. Goldstein?"

"Mr. Goldstein is absolutely wonderful!" I inhale the rich coffee-scented steam rising from the cups as I fill them. "He is—"

"Katey! Katey, Listen to this!" Karen points the remote toward the television; rapidly increasing the volume.

The sound of danger in her voice sets off alarms in me. My pulse races in response. Karen is the calmest 'calm-under-fire person' I know.

Bringing our coffee, I pause behind the sofa, studying the television in search of what piqued her interest.

"...just minutes ago, Alistair McKenzie announced, at a scheduled press conference, that his granddaughter, Kathryn McKenzie, will assume control and management of the McKenzie empire beginning..."

The reporter's voice fades in my mind while I study the old man in the wheelchair. The camera perfectly captures my grandfather's compelling nature. He is in control and there is no doubt everyone knows it. The reporters dare not tempt the scope of his anger. Even the cub reporters know not to be reckless with him. It is no secret he is ruthless, and that is exactly how he wants it.

The station returns to the news studio where an anchorwoman reads a litany of McKenzie holdings. Each company logo appears inset on the screen. The list is impressive. I had no idea the McKenzie family owned so many companies.

My gaze remains fixed to the set as I move around the end of the sofa to join Karen. Leaning forward to set down our cups, I misjudge the coffee table. Without a word, Karen intervenes to avoid the spill.

"Beginning immediately." I gasp. The whispering echo haunts me with its truth. Life as I know it just ceased to exist. I feel the weight of great wealth laid upon my shoulders.

My fingers reach for the locket around my neck. I seek strength from the people in the photos inside it. Unfortunately my dead parents cannot rescue me from Alistair Winston McKenzie.

Tears well in my eyes. Not once in the past four years has Grandfather hinted of his intentions to involve me in the family empire. I was perfectly happy thinking I had been disinherited by default for being Catholic. Grandfather should have groomed me for this. My God, he was cruel to announce it publicly before telling me.

The ringing phone jolts me. Pushing my hand against the sofa cushion, I fumble to get up.

Karen puts her hand on mine and applies pressure. "Don't answer that."

The answering machine picks up. A reporter leaves a request for an interview.

I sigh in frustration. "Now I need an unlisted number."

The truth is, I don't want the spotlight. The thought of it makes me ill. I resent the intrusion. Grandfather's world was never a world I wanted.

Karen approaches the machine that has suddenly transformed from secretary to shield against the advancing army of reporters. She presses the record button and lowers her face toward the machine.

"Miss McKenzie is not accepting appointments for interviews at this time. A statement will be released later. Thank you."

She smiles and pushes the reset button.

"Come on, Katey," she says, taking the cup from my hand before my first sip of the life sustaining brew.

"What?" I hear her dump the coffee down the sink and set the cups in it.

"Get your purse. We're getting out of here." Karen proceeds through the apartment shutting off lights.

I am numb inside, but I pick up my purse and Dodgers jacket. Karen takes the house keys from my trembling hand and locks the dead bolt after us. She keeps looking toward the street as we hurry down the stairs.

A van with a TV station logo on the side rushes recklessly into the parking lot, stopping abruptly in the Fire Lane.

Immediately Karen changes direction away from my car, pushing me around the corner of the building.

"This way. I parked on the side street."

"Where are we going?"

"You're staying with me."

"But I need my car for work," I protest as I look back over my shoulder.

My cell phone rings—startling me. I dig through my purse fumbling to silence it before it calls attention to us. We increase our stride and rush through the dimly lit courtyard toward her waiting car.

Pounding footsteps of someone running up the stairs is followed by a voice shouting, "Here it is, Bill! Over here," followed by beating on a door.

We slow to a hurried walk when near the other side of the complex. Someone hollers to us, "Do you know which apartment is Kathryn McKenzie's?"

Karen answers, "I don't live here—just visiting," which is deceptively true.

I keep my head down to avoid the streetlight, trying to act as composed as Karen. I feel dizzy from the adrenalin rush and steady myself against the car as I reach for the handle.

Karen clicks the door lock while sliding behind the steering wheel. I slip low in the passenger seat as her car begins to move. A nervous laugh slips out as I fidget with the seatbelt latch. The cars ahead and behind have parked close. Karen struggles to maneuver away from the curb. She seems so calm.

Another news van hurries past us and turns into the apartment complex across the street from mine. We giggle at the van crew driving determinedly in the wrong direction. They have no idea who they are looking for, but they are driven to scoop their competitors for the first photos and interview with Ms. McKenzie. If they only knew—

Karen turns right at the corner. She slows to view the activity. Two more news trucks have arrived. The news crews scurry; carrying cameras, following reporters trailing microphone cables. Everyone is in a hurry to get the first words of the new "matriarch of money."

This whole thing is silly. Now I understand why my grandfather keeps them reined-in. He masterfully manipulates them. Good for him.

But not good for me. The power of a few words turned our relaxing evening into chaos and permanently altered my life.

Grandfather enjoys the attention he gets from keeping the media stirred up in precisely timed headlines to accommodate his business agenda. What was it this time? A hostile take-over? A leveraged buy-out? What?

~

Karen passes the freeway entrance ramp, pulls into a fast food drive-through, and orders two coffees. When the drinks are in hand, she says, "To your new life, Kathryn McKenzie."

Ordinarily I might have laughed. But tonight is far from ordinary. She is right it is a new life, one full of protocol and spin doctors.

I rise to the occasion and graciously accept the gesture. "And to old friends."

Karen stays on surface streets rather than the freeway. Frankly I need every extra minute the longer route affords me. It is no longer secret who I am. Whether I want it or not, soon my face will be as well known as Grandfather's. The dye has been cast—there will be no going back.

"He could have at least warned me. I need clothes for work." I plead disconnected thoughts.

"Are you planning to work tomorrow?"

"I should at least go and give notice, don't you think? It is the right thing to do. Isn't it?" I struggle to hold onto my life before every bit of it slips away. "I should say 'Good-bye' to everyone at St. Mark's—and Shasta. God! I have to talk to Shasta."

Shasta may be in the fifth grade, but she is as definite about how life works as when she was a first grader. She still greets me at the front door every morning, though now, not so much to make sure I am coming back again—just habit.

My mind is racing with memories. I long to get lost in them; to pretend the present doesn't exist—not this present.

"You can wear my robe. I'll wash what you have on."

"Mother Elizabeth doesn't allow jeans."

"I think she will make an exception—this time," she jokes, but reassures.

I nod in agreement.

Of course Karen understands her sister-turned-Franciscan-nun better than me.

My mind circles in disbelief. Grandfather gave no indication of his plans even as recent as last month before my trip to Austria. I always assumed because he had disinherited my father for marrying a Catholic, that I was disinherited by proxy. Besides I am perfectly happy with things the way they are between us.

My money is nothing in comparison to his, but I have worked, saved, and invested. I have managed my money fairly wisely, even during my five years as a bartender in Nebraska. Plus I have the trust my parents set up for me. I don't want the McKenzie money. I don't want one penny.

I didn't expect anything from him. Nothing monetary anyway. All I wanted was to get to know him. There is no guarantee how much time we have to be together. His age and wheelchair remind me that we have lost too much time already.

"How could Grandfather do this to me?"

Ignoring my tone, Karen asks, "Who else is he going to leave in charge?"

"In charge?"

"He isn't a young man—" Karen's voice trails off, echoing my own thoughts. "You know what your McKenzie cousins are like."

The truth spoken out loud washes over me. "Oh God! Is that why he located me?" Hurt enters my voice.

When he arranged for us to meet four years ago, I thought he wanted to atone for the way he treated my parents or maybe to make up for lost time with me, his first grandchild. Now it seems it was all a business maneuver—nothing personal, as they say. He was simply after a successor, his heir apparent.

Hurt doesn't begin to describe my feelings. Has Grandfather played me the fool? I feel used and it feels even worse because he is family.

The city blurs past my window as Karen makes her way home to the foothills. Confusion deletes the enjoyment of this last opportunity to be a commoner. Street lights and my confused thoughts, that's all there is. I have lost everything else that was my life an hour ago.

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We talk intermittently and drink real coffee while my clothes launder. My mind is too busy for a sustained conversation. She was right about not waiting to pack a few things. We would have been caught by the media if we had stayed a minute longer.

Karen gives me a new toothbrush and toothpaste from the stockpile she keeps for when her daughters come home from college. Not having my things only accentuates what I have lost.

There is so much to think about. Do I move now that the media knows where I live? Hire private security? Grandfather probably expects me to live at Pacific Estate—safe from the outside world. I already spend a weekend a month at the mansion. But I don't know about full time.

I have been careful not to play-up the preferential treatment he gives me over my cousins or even acknowledge its existence. I assumed Grandfather behaved warmly toward me out of guilt for excommunicating my parents.

There is a slight possibility it is because of his four grandchildren, I look the most like our grandmother. As a matter of fact I look almost identical to the portrait of her hanging in the mansion library.

I suppose it will be easier to learn the business if I live with Grandfather for a few months. I hope this isn't his way to make me another possession like my three McKenzie cousins who live with him. I'd better keep a place of my own, so he understands staying with him is temporary.

I look up when Karen returns from the laundry room.

"Who called you?"

"What?"

"When we were leaving your apartment, didn't your phone ring?"

"I don't know. I shut it off."

She waits. Finally she says, "Why don't you see who called?"

"Oh! Right. You don't think it was a reporter, do you?" I ask half afraid to turn the phone on again. The call is from my cousin, Nick. I play the message and roll my eyes, then grin at Karen. I play it again with the speaker turned on.

"Katey, it's Nick. How 'bout a loan, Moneybags?" He follows with a devilish laugh. "No really, just checking on you. If you need me, call. Love ya, Cuz."

"He's my Stewart cousin-Nick."

"Yes, I got that. Go ahead, call him back. I'll make sure your room is ready."

"Thanks. I'm fine. Really, I'm fine." I smile to make my point. We both know that I am not fine. I am nowhere near fine.

It was a good thing Karen was visiting when the announcement came on the TV. Imagine what it would be like if I hadn't known what was happening when reporters started banging on my door?

My cell phone rings. This time it's my cousin Ilene.

"Kate, I saw the news. Are you okay?"

"Yes, I'm at Karen's house for the night."

"You're welcome to stay with me."

"Thanks. I'm fine. Really," I lie.

"Did you know he was going to do that?"

"No, it was totally unexpected."

"Are you going to do it?"

"Do it?"

"Well you don't have to do what he says, you know. He isn't God. He isn't the boss of you."

"I haven't really had time to think."

Her point made, she changes the subject.

"Aunt Grace is here. She says she's going to call you. She's heading home now—unless you want her to stop by tonight."

"No, I'm fine. I'll give you a call in a few days."

"I love you, Cuz. You know that."

"Yeah, I know. I love you too, Ilene. Bye."

My Stewart family has gone into their rally-the-troops mode. God love them. I do need them. I just can't think clearly. Never in my wildest dreams did I expect this from Grandfather McKenzie. I still can't believe it. It has to be a bad dream and I'll wake up any minute now.

I try to be a good guest, but I'm squirrely-restless. Karen seems to understand this is not the time to push me. She forgoes wearing her therapist's hat and gives me a break.

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Emotions and thoughts are bursting for expression. I don't have the energy to speak them and I didn't think to grab my diary. It's one more reminder of my abrupt, forced exile. My heart aches.

*I am forever changed. Regardless of what I do now, this seemingly good fortune will challenge my character as it has never been challenged before. I am sure those, yet untested, aspects of me will yield the greatest insight. I can only hope that life progresses at a sane pace from here, so that I can handle it gracefully.*

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That's how it stands for now. I'm not going to all 'Mark Twain' on you and serialize the whole ms. I just thought I'd make believers out of the people who are beginning to wonder if this ms does exist.

If you haven't read Kathryn's Beach and High Tide, you just read a huge spoiler. The problem is those books went out of print a few weeks ago. At that time, Infinity had two copies of KB and one of HT (or the other way around). There are probably less than 10 copies floating around internet bookstores.

I hope to see a proof of Kathryn's Beach in a few weeks. High Tide is a ways down the road yet, early 2009 I suspect. Storm Surge is further from finished. It needs more polishing and the final approval of my beta readers. Maybe it will be available in time for my birthday in June. (Gemini)

After that, I think I'll work on Act Like You Mean It and Red Planet Revolt and see which moves forward fastest. Though, Raven's Song is pestering me to work on it too. Maybe 2010 for one of these.