



The Last Year-Round Resident of Cedar Point

The evacuation notice came on a Tuesday in Margaret's mailbox, just like any other piece of mail. The sky outside looked perfectly unthreatening. It was a brilliant blue with only a few clouds on the horizon.

"Mandatory evacuation by Thursday 6 PM," she read aloud to her empty living room. "Due to predicted storm surge..."

Local officials had made it clear: this was a mandatory order, not a suggestion. Yet the weather had been perfect all week, making the warning feel almost silly. But there was something ominous about those distant clouds on the horizon. The clouds seemed to get bigger and darker even as she watched.

Margaret had lived on Cedar Point for forty years. She had taken all the proper precautions each hurricane season. She'd stocked supplies and reinforced windows and doors. She'd taken those same precautions over the past week. If all precautions had been taken, surely that was enough!

But Margaret had also watched the neighbors' houses empty one by one over the years, as families moved inland after each big storm. Several homes had been demolished by previous hurricanes.

Many of the remaining cottages were filled with visitors at different times over the year. But Margaret was the last year-round resident on her stretch of beach. The isolation usually felt like a gift, but today it overwhelmed her. It felt like she carried the weight of being the only one left to watch the sea rise.

Her daughter had been calling all morning, leaving increasingly urgent voicemails. "Mom, I saw the evacuation order. Please get out. Don't argue this time."

Margaret looked out at her husband's old fishing boat at the dock just beyond her kitchen window. She'd watched it survive three hurricanes, though the last one had come close to demolishing it. When he was alive, John had always refused to move it during storms. He always said that the boat was safer in the water than on land.

"The sea knows how to hold its own," he used to say. But Margaret wasn't so sure anymore. The storms were getting stronger, more ominous with each passing year. She felt the isolation more keenly now than ever before, standing alone in her kitchen while everyone else had fled inland.

She picked up her phone and dialed her daughter's number, watching the clouds grow bigger and bigger over the water. Sometimes surrender wasn't really surrender at all, but a different kind of strength: the strength to recognize when the tide had finally turned.