

## **The Storm Spirits**

By Ing

Si ran into the house slamming the door shut behind him, water dripped from his rain soaked clothes. He had thought he would have had more time, but the storm's rain front had caught him outside battering down the outhouses and making sure everything was secure for the blow. The storm was moving faster than expected, which was why he was in the house on his own. His parents were over on the big island, his mother having gone to pick his father up from the airport, only to find that they could not get back. The high winds had closed the causeway.

Si looked down at the puddle of water that was developing around him. Realising the cause and not wishing to trape water through the house he kicked of his Nikes, dropped his shorts and as he stepped out of them attempted to pull the black cotton T-shirt off. The later resisted, now being wet and tight, clinging to the faintly defined musculature of his torso. After a moment or twos fight, it gave way, and the youth stepped forward naked into the utility room. A flash of sheet lightening illuminated his body and he caught sight of his reflection in the glass of the kitchen door, the reflection of a naked youth on the point of turning into a man.

He shook his head, his long black curls falling wildly on his shoulders. From the shelf by the tumble dryer he picked up a length of cotton cloth and wrapped it sarong style around his waist. He then turned and started to turn the winch handle that would lower the storm shutters at the back of the house. The click of the lock catches had just announced they were in place when the phone rang. Si walked through the living room and picked up the receiver. It was his mother, checking that he was OK. He assured her he was and that he had got everything battened down, omitting to tell her that he had yet to drop the storm shutters at the front. Outside there was another flash of lightening, after which the line went dead, then an almighty crash of thunder. The lights went our and a strange almost silence fell across the room as the power failed.

Si sat there, dead receiver in hand, in the eldritch glow coming from the plasma screen of his computer. The built in back up power would keep that running for nearly an hour before going into power fail shutdown mode. The backup generator would have kicked in long before then. Si tried to remember how long the delay was, to cover for temporary interruptions that were so common on the island, before they kicked in. Somewhere outside a screeching cry sounded, Si shuddered.

He might be sixteen, nearly seventeen, and educated at one of the best schools in England, but deep down he was an island child and he knew the legends. He knew the spirits that walked in the storm. There was a tap tap of a stick on the path outside, Blind Maggie walking? Searching for eyes to replace those she had lost? Si thought of the chem. Lights in his desk and started across the room

towards the computer desk. Two beams of light cut across the night sky outside. Si froze for a moment. A car, on the mountain road in a storm? He considered running down to the gate to intercept it and get a lift into Williamstown. Just when he realised that he would miss it anyway a car horn sounded constantly for a few seconds, then went dead.

The lights came back on, the standby generator had cut in. Si gasped at the sight of an island youth, naked but for a short cotton sarong wrapped around his waist, looking at him from his computer screen. Then he realised it was himself, the WebCam was active. He decided to save some images and walked across and entered the auto save option to take one photo of the room every thirty seconds.

Another downpour of rain lashed at the windows. Si decided he better drop the front storm shutters quickly and started towards the hallway. Just as he entered it the doorbell rang. Si looked along the hallway to the twin doors at the end. Caught in the glare of the security light was a young man, creol by his looks, drenched to the skin in the soaking rain. Si moved to the end of the hall and into the inner veranda. He opened the inner door but kept the bared outer mesh door shut.

“Yes?”

“Is jouw phone up man?”

“No lines down”

“Shitzen, saw the lights, thought you had line”. Si shook hi head.

“Standby gen.”

“Cars off, missed the turn at Widow’s Bend, and caught the rut!” the man informed Si. Si noticed a thin trickle of blood running down the mans face from a cut on the forehead.

“Jouw best come in. Luk like you need some aid”, Si stated, dropping into the island creol.

“Jouw sure?” Si nodded and he unlocked the gate and waved the young man in.

“Better come through to the kitchen, me will fix dat cut.” The young man laughed.

“It’s boter, cum and kucken. Jij creol bin n’t bad for an Englishman”.

“Am I so English”.

“Ja man but jouw hef de island look”. Simon smiled and started to lead the way down the hall.

“Wat bout dez?” the young man asked, indicating his dripping clothes.

“Ja, we go bi the utility,” Si responded turning round and leading the way down the inside veranda. He lead him into the utility room.

“Drop dem rags here I’ll find jouw a robe or something”, Si stated throwing the young man a town.

“heft jouw another of those man?” he asked indicating Si’s sarong. Si nodded and turned to pick one off the shelf. When he turned back the man was naked, standing there towelling himself down. He smiled at Si.

“I bin Filip”, he stated.

“I am Si”, stated Si, handing him the sarong, dropping the creol, somehow determined to keep to the English side of his personality.

“Si or Simon?” asked Filip, wrapping the short sarong round his waist, tying it off at the side, the gap leaving one upper leg and hip exposed, just like Si’s. Si understood the question. His full name was Simon and that was the name he used at his posh boarding school in England, but here on the island he used Si. That was an island name. It was part of the dilemma he now faced. Did he return to England in September and do his “A” levels or stay here on the island and become an islander?

The wind started to rise again, doors and gates rattling as if someone was trying them.

“Long fingered Pete!” exclaimed Filip. Si knew the island legends and nodded.

“Better drop the storm shutter,” he commented, turning to walk back onto the inner veranda. Filip followed him. Si went up to the handle set in the wall that operated the winch that would lower the shutter. He tried to turn it but it seemed stuck.

“Here let me help,” Filip stated. He stood behind the youth, putting his arms around him to take hold of the handle. Si became aware of the warmth of the man’s body next to him. The touch of Filip’s chest against his back, those arms surrounding him, helping him, a feeling of well being having this man close suffused him and confused him.

Back at his boarding school such feeling would have been a problem. Alright he had felt them a couple of times, once with one of the sixth formers and once with the PE teacher who only stayed at the school for a year. Such feelings were not spoken about and considered something to be avoided. Here on the island though Si knew things were different, it was just part of being an islander.

The heavy steel shutters rolled down into place, a clunking click of the locking ratchet promising the securing of the house against the storm outside. Si released his hold on the winch handle and turned to face Filip, the man’s arms still encircled him.

“Thanks”. Filip smiled. Si reached up and touched the cut on Filip’s forehead.

“It’s stopped bleeding.”

“I’m a quick healer,” Filip replied.

“Still we better clean it up.” Si lead the way through to the kitchen, took down the First Aid box and proceeded to clean the cut on Filip’s forehead. Outside the storm appeared to quieten down. Si knew though that this was just a pause before the next storm front hit.

“Hadn’t you better tell your folks I’m here?”

“Not pos, they’re on the Big Island, causeway’s closed.” Si stated. He realised that for the last few minutes Filip had not been speaking creol.

“Then Ma’s stuck on the Big Island. No cause for me to rush down to Williamstown.”

“You better stay here for the blow, won’t be safe on the track,” replied Si. Instinctively he extended a hand to Filip, who took it, holding it in the way island men could, a combination of innocence and sensuality. He lead Filip through to the living room. Outside the blow had started up again. The temperature dropped surprisingly for the island.

Si’s English father had insisted that the living room had a fireplace, an unusual feature for a house on a semi-tropical island. Now though Si appreciated the feature as he placed a few logs in the hearth and quickly got them lit with the gas wand, the warm glow of the fire lighting the room and dispelling the chill of the storm outside.

Filip had seated himself on the settee by the fire, draping himself across the arm in a languid poise that asserted self assurance and a sense of belonging wherever he was. Si moved over to the sideboard and poured a couple of glasses of the local coconut liquor. He handed a glass to Filip, then seated himself down next to this man. It seemed comfortable and right to be here next to Filip.

Outside a piercing howl shattered the roar of the wind, then another and another. Si shuddered, fear creeping in upon him. Filip reached out an arm and put it round Si’s shoulders. Si looked at him and asked “Storm Hounds?” Filip nodded.

“You know the legend?” he asked, exerting a gentle pressure that drew Si closer to him.

“Yes, they are the Storm Queen’s dogs”.

“That’s what they say; in fact they are broken coconut husks. The wind blows through the cracks and creates a howl.” He flashed Si a smile, Si was reassured by the explanation and he snuggled up against Filip. The man ran his hand over the youth’s chest, as he did he smiled. Si looked up at Filip and returned the smile.

A rat-tat-tat of sticks against stone sounded outside.

“Blind Maggie seeking eyes?” Si asked.

“Maybe, more likely a reed thorn uprooted by the wind and rolling past.” Si thought, Filip’s answer made sense, but in some ways Blind Maggie was better. Almost as if he sensed Si’s thought, Filip continued, “Blind Maggie is important. She reminds us not to go out in the storm. All the debris blowing about, you could lose an eye.” Si nodded, it made sense. He communicated this to Filip.

“You’re a strange one. English boy wearing sarong, knowing legends, speaking lingo,” as Filip spoke his accent once more softened to the soft drawl of the creol.

“Nat zo English, mutter halp island,” Si replied. This though brought the question back into his mind. Should he go back to England and get his “A” levels, university and a career, or stay there. He needed to tell his father, when his parents got back but he had not made up his mind.

A cackling laughter sounded in the darkness outside where the storm raged.

“I s’pose dats the wind in a split tree,” stated Si, leaning back and looking up at Filip.

“Na man, dat is une of dem sisters, hunting for a man in the storm.”

“Sisters?”

“Ya der be three of dem, the Storm Queen’s daughters. They will strip the rags off a man out der,” Filip stated smiling, his hand gently rubbing Si’s stomach.

“I pity anyone out alone in that,” the boy stated. Filip looked at him.

“If he’s alone Ya, pity him but the Stormwalker might look after him.” Si looked at Filip remembering what he could of the legend, the Storm Queen’s son who protected those alone in the storm.

“If I was alone I would want to know him,” Si stated.

“Would you? You have to be island for him to come.”

“I know man, but really I’m island.”

Filip looked down at the youth who was now stretched out along the settee his head on Filip’s lap. He leaned forward and kissed Si.

For a moment Si was confused, then elated. Not by the kiss, he had been expecting that, seeking it, but by his admission, he was island. This was an island thing.

He brought his arms up and placed them round Filip’s neck, drawing him down, pullinh him into what was to happen. Filip’s hand moved down, under Si’s sarong to take hold of the youth’s manhood. None of this was strange to Si. He had grown up on the island and played with the local boys on the beach. That though was different, that though was a game in which he was always a bit of an outsider. This time he was being taken deeply in, becoming part of what it was to be island. He brought his hand down seeking Filip’s body. Touch it, caressing it, wanting it, wanting to be of the island.