



DAVID NIALL WILSON

THE
MOTE ^{IN}
ANDREA'S
EYE

THE MOTE IN ANDREA'S EYE

By David Niall Wilson



MACABRE INK

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DEDICATION

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PART ONE

Outer Banks of North Carolina—1942

Chapter One

The sunrise was a deep, blood red that faded to orange, as its light grew more intense. Andrea sat on the top step of her back porch and watched, her morning orange juice forgotten and her eyes wide. She always watched the sun rise over the beach, its rays coloring the white-capped surf and drawing the long shadows back from rocks on the beach and the pier in the distance. This sunrise was different; she'd never seen the sky so red, and it bothered her. It was as if someone had drawn Mickey Mouse and made him green.

With a quick glance over her shoulder and up the wooden steps that led to the kitchen door, she rose and stepped down onto the wooden walk. It stretched toward the beach and she stared at it longingly. She wanted to feel the wet sand between her toes and to gather seashells from the shore, but she knew better than to wander off without permission.

The squawk of the radio broke the early morning silence as her father turned up the volume and twisted the tuning knob. The sound slipped past her in odd, disjointed bits of conversation and paused once to let a short snippet of music escape into the morning. Andrea closed her eyes and let the notes drift around her, soft saxophone and very faintly a woman's voice, then there was the familiar squeal, and she heard a man's voice. The volume was set too low for her to make out any words, but she knew that he would speak on into the morning, until her father left the kitchen and her mother took control. Then it would be "Kate Smith Speaks," and more news.

Andrea knew there was a war. She didn't really know what a war was, but she knew that it was more important than just about everything. Names like Churchill and Hitler rolled out of the radio's speaker in a steady stream, but none of it made much sense to her. She remembered happier mornings when the radio had found the music and stayed there. On those mornings her mother would already have been out on the porch, sipping her coffee and smiling as Andrea wandered down to the beach to play in the damp sand.

A couple of years before, her daddy had retired from his job in the Navy. He'd been home ever since, working on the house, sitting late into the night with Andrea's mother, the radio on low, the soft roar of the surf in the background. Before the war, the two best times in Andrea's day were those just before sleep, and the hour after breakfast, when her parents smiled and held one another close, aware of her and loving her, but caught up in their own little world. She liked to wander in and out of their smiles, lost in her own thoughts.

Now there was tension in the air that had not been there before, and the radio, which had brought the soothing music and ushered in the best parts of the day, was a constant, droning backdrop. The crackle and pop of static through the speaker charged the air with something, making everyone nervous. Her father spent a lot of time staring into the ocean, sometimes alone, and sometimes with a few of their neighbors.

There weren't many homes near theirs, but her father spoke often about growth and property values. There was talk of a ferry boat—Andrea had heard it as fairy boat, and had brought more laughter and smiles to her parents' faces with questions about elves and Tinker Bell—that would take visitors out to Ocracoke Island. The war had stopped that, as well, but the war would pass.

That was what her parents said, and the radio said, but Andrea had grown so accustomed to the war's presence that she doubted the truth. It was the pop and crackle static in the back of her life, and it didn't seem like the kind of thing that, once it had come, would ever really go away.

She hoped the music would come back, but she feared that the radio had learned a new language, and it made her sad. She couldn't understand half of what was said, but she knew from the expressions on her parents' faces that it wasn't good.

The sun had lifted from the waves by the time the door at the top of the stairs finally opened and her mother stepped through. Andrea saw the morning breeze catch her mother's hair and lift it gently, as if trying to blow it back into the kitchen. In contrast, the open door sucked the voice from the radio into the world of the beach and the sunlight, and softened it. As the door closed once again, Andrea caught the word U-boat and wondered. Her mind conjured images of boats in the vague shape of a horseshoe, and then she quickly dismissed them.

Her mother took her usual seat in one of the white chairs flanking the small wicker table on the porch. She had a porcelain cup and her pink Thermos carafe with the glass handle on the lid. The morning sun winked off that handle, and Andrea smiled. Her mother caught the expression, and just for a moment, the war and the voices crackling away behind the kitchen door disappeared. The two smiled, and the morning sun's warmth took on a reality that had been lacking only moments before.

Then Andrea turned and ran off down the walkway to the beach. The wood slats were buried in drifting sand, and had become a soaked amalgam of creosote and salt water. Andrea's feet made dull slaps on the wood, and then she hit the beach, and slowed. The soft, drifting sand was hard to run through. Her ankles sank in and there was a soft crunch, like she was grinding something to dust every time she planted her foot. Ahead were the damp sand near the water, and the soft ripples of sunlight dancing across the waves.

She carried her mother's smile with her down to the water's edge and wiped away the red morning sky and the crackling radio voice with the wonder of sun and seashells. There were several rocky outcroppings on the small stretch of sand, and when the tide

retreated she found tiny kingdoms in the pools of water they left behind, small caves and cuts in the rock that didn't release all of the ocean's life when the water swept back, but held them and kept them safe, sparkling in the brightening sun.

This was her time, and her world, and she entered it happily, safely guarded by her mother's soft watchful presence.

~ * ~

On the porch, her father left the kitchen as well, bringing the radio with him. He set it on the wicker table and fussed with the cords that lay along the deck, looking for the end of the extension that would bring the news back to life.

Thomas Jamieson was a tall man, holding his almost fifty years with grace. Thirty years in the U.S. Navy had hardened his frame and chiseled salt-sharp lines into the features of his face, but his eyes were dark and expressive, and he still moved with the confidence and energy of a teenager.

His wife, Lilian, watched him with detached concentration. Her gaze drifted back to the beach, caught Andrea's form in the sunlight and lingered protectively. Thomas could handle the recalcitrant electrical cords without her help; her eyes and her thoughts were never far from the safety of her daughter.

The times had beaten it into her. Every time she heard a report of the war, she cringed inside. It had seemed such a distant, meaningless part of her life. Thomas fought the wars, and he did so thousands of miles away. Then, when he was done and their world was safe, he returned.

She'd spent her mornings and evenings writing letters and gathered with huddles of other lonely wives, fighting their own battles against time and boredom. Some had fallen by the wayside, or failed under the pressure, but Lilian Jamieson had waited. This time together at the end of that wait was to have been their reward. This home on the beach, far enough from the military gray of the ships and the neon brilliance of the bars that had lured so many of Thomas' friends away from their families, even when their days of fighting had ended. So many pitfalls and traps avoided to get to where she was, sitting in the sunlight, sipping coffee and watching the daughter that had come to her, heaven sent, in the later years of her life.

Now the voices that came to them through the radio warped it. The wars that had been so far away a year before had actually reached within sight of the U.S. shoreline, not many miles from where her daughter stared out over the waves. German submarines had torpedoed merchant ships, sending them flaming to the bottom of the sea, and when they did this those Nazi sailors were within miles—not thousands, or hundreds of miles—but tens. Ten was far too small a number for safety, and though the radio spoke of patriotic unity and the strength of Allied forces, the ships still sank, and the stability she clung to had grown uncertain.

The radio crackled to life, and Thomas grunted with satisfaction. He slid into the chair across from her and cupped his coffee mug between his hands. Lilian watched

him for a moment as he furrowed his brow and cocked an ear to the newscaster's nasal voice. Thomas' expression was so serious and concentrated that she had to stifle a smile. He had spent so many years in the thick of it all, so many years in command, making things happen and setting things right, that it pained him to be removed from it. His retirement had limited his involvement to hunkering over this radio, or the neighbor's radio, or the radio down at the barbershop in town. He was a spectator, part of the world he'd sworn to protect, and she saw by the way the veins rose on top of his hands that he ached to do more.

"Did you see that sunrise?" she asked him, trying to divert his attention.

He glanced up and paused as his thoughts rearranged, then he smiled quizzically. "No. That's odd, I always used to watch it—like a ritual. Now it seems . . ."

His words trailed away and she nodded her understanding.

"It was red," she said, turning to stare down at the beach. Andrea kicked up sand just shy of the water's edge, and Lilian smiled. "It looked, just for a while, like the clouds were bleeding into the ocean."

Thomas' smile dipped to a frown. He shook his head, caught himself, and turned to follow his wife's gaze.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Probably nothing," he said, his voice, and his mind, suddenly very far away. "Just remembering something. On the ship we never wanted to see that red sky in the morning. You've heard the old rhyme, 'sailor take warning.' It's hard to get things like that out of your system."

Sensing some deep-rooted thing gripping a part of her husband that she couldn't reach, Lilian rose and walked around the table. Without hesitation, she slipped into his lap, surprising him only for an instant. His strong arms wrapped her tightly, and they stared out across the water together.

"It will never really be gone," she whispered into his ear. "It's all part of you, and I—we," she turned and tilted her chin toward Andrea, "love every bit of it."

He hugged her tightly and leaned back, letting her head fall against his shoulder. She had always liked this—sitting in his lap and held close, and safe. The times it had been possible had been too few, and now that he was here, every day, she basked in it.

The radio crackled, and she listened; only half-interested.

"More reports of the hurricane that rocked the Bahamas are just in. There have been twelve deaths reported and untold damage to property and homes. There are reports of flooding, homes blown from their foundations, and at one point a tidal wave washed miles inland, crushing everything in its path. This storm is headed east-northeast. Initial reports indicate it might strike the eastern coast of Florida as early as this evening. Residents are being warned to evacuate the area, and tropical storm warnings have been issued up and down the coast."

Thomas didn't stop rocking her, but she felt him grow tense.