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## Time and Tide

by Daniel Judd

He stood waiting on the ridge of what was the former sluice gate. The point where the water lapped in and became something else; power.

Ever since he'd arrived in Tide Mills, Tyler had been alone. A stranger to the many; the Shutlers, the Wilmsbursts - the descendants of those that had worked the mill and kept the place alive.

A horse whisperer is what they called him. A profession not needed nor understood. Witchcraft they called it.

Then the lights came. A few at first. Beautiful, wondrous yet eerie. Lighting up the night sky then ripping it until every last spot was bathed in an unnatural green light.

Tentatively the whole village stepped outside. Women pushed their children in front of them. Men stood at the back scratching their heads. He stifled a cheer.

For he knew what was coming. The oncoming storm. The staccato sound of the lights became a rumble then a roar as they coalesced to form a perfect circle. And then the ship came down into the water. They'd arrived and nothing would be the same again.

Or so he thought. For someone had another plan, a defence mechanism that no one could control. Thunder then lightning but this time no sudden build up. No time to count the gap to see how far away it was.

Immediate sheets of power making everything silver white. Followed by rain and wind the energy of which made everyone feel like a spec of dust. Inconsequential. Unimportant.

It was like mother nature was putting a piece of muslin on a jar and tying it tight with string. Putting a lid on it. Putting them firmly in their place. Taking time back. Making them safe. The tide had turned. Buildings had been obliterated and the burial of the ship causing the Mill to lose its power source and purpose.

But the residents of Tide Mills stood fast. Indomitable. Some were offered work in the cotton mills of Salford and Leeds but the many stayed. The men fished or planted certainties in the bleak, exposed landscape. The women mended nets, sold stuff out front or served tea in their parlour.

But if the storm hadn't shifted them, then fate had another trick up its sleeve. A battle with a monster that didn't discriminate. Husbands, sons and brothers died at its hands. But still the village stood.

The war brought pain, death and little glory but Tyler was dealt a different hand. The arrival of an ex-jockey and his field hospital for horses created new work and saw Tyler's talents utilised and his status grow. For a man who revelled in his solitude he was now accepted and some people's friend.

Then the railway came and the mill became a warehouse, storing produce for bright, young things in the city. Like his fellows he adapted to survive. He took a job as a signalman. Again he waited. Looking for trouble.

It came from an unexpected source. The very water that had given the area life now was now deemed unsafe to use let alone drink. The new sanitary legislation meant the villagers could no longer remain, although some did try.

But then the bombing started. This stretch of coast caught in the rat run as the enemy dropped their remaining deadly cargo on the way home. The village was no more. The remains resembling the trenches its men had once protected. Tyler became the last man standing, appointed night watchmen. The protector when he was anything but.

But would they come? Had he been forgotten? He dismissed those twilight thoughts of doubt. Caused by a crippling lack of sleep. He would wait. Wait for the lights of the reconnaissance. Bide his time. Being human.