



Molly's "Beaufort Town"

*A ten-chapter story in celebration of the
300th Anniversary of Beaufort, NC*

Chapter Three- "The Storm!"

*W*hen Molly finally made her way to the window with the women, she couldn't believe what she saw. The sky was so dark, it looked as though she could catch fireflies right then and there – but it was the middle of the morning! People were running up and down the street, grabbing up children and pets and holding onto each other as they ran for the safety of their homes. And the wind! It was howling! How could they not have heard it before? The treetops that lined the streets were blowing around and around, like the whirligigs in Molly's front yard.

Molly spotted her mother among the group of frantic women and hurried to her side. She reached for Lydia, grabbed her hand and held it tight. From across the room, Aunt Susan ran over to join them. While the other women were pushing their way out to the front porch, Molly's group found their way out the *back*. The hinges of the screen door were already coming off the door frame as they dashed across the neighbors' lawns, racing against the oncoming storm.

Out of breath, they arrived at Molly's house, which was the closest. They ran up the front steps and into the parlor. Father and Jacob were there waiting for them, holding onto Sarah and trying to keep Toby at bay as they urged the women and girls inside. Quick as a flash, the baby and the dog were handed over as Father pushed the door closed against the wind. Then he and Jacob started closing the rest of the shutters as they all stood together in the middle of the room, waiting. "Waiting for what?" Molly wondered. She trembled and held Lydia's hand even more tightly.

Then the rain came. And it came in buckets! Molly did not remember a time when so much rain fell so hard and so fast. It seemed to never end. It beat against the roof so hard Molly thought that the ceiling would come crashing down at any minute. And through the cracks of the house and down the chimney, the wind whined and whimpered like a frightened puppy, then grew louder, like the bellows of an angry bear. Molly looked at Toby. He was quiet as a mouse, sitting anxiously at Jacob's feet, but his ears were up and alert.

Mother was trying to keep Sarah occupied so she would not be frightened. She held a rattle close to Sarah's ear and played hide and seek with it for what seemed like an eternity. Despite all that was going on around her, Sarah smiled and cooed.

Gradually the rain stopped. The air was still. And the sun shone through the cracks around the windows.

Slowly, ever so carefully, Father and Jacob opened the window shutters and peered outside. When Father announced that all was well again, Molly, still holding onto Lydia's hand, stepped out onto the front porch. There were tree limbs, yard tools and pieces of the neighbors' fence all over the street. There were even a couple of doors, where they had been ripped off the hinges, leaning against the live oak trees. The two girls tiptoed down the steps. The water in the front yard covered their ankles and went halfway up to their knees.

"What happened?" Molly asked. She had wanted to sound brave, but when the question left her, she realized her voice was trembling.

"We must have been brushed by the edge of a hurricane," Father replied. "It came up real quick, but I've seen worse. It looks like the storm hit harder to the west of us."

Aunt Susan suddenly remembered her own house, just down the street. She grabbed Lydia, her only child, and rushed home to find her husband. Molly's Uncle Aaron was the pastor at their church. He had been visiting newcomers to invite them to the Sunday service when the storm hit.

Father had gotten a slower start than Susan, but using long strides, he was quickly right behind his sister-in-law to help where he could. Mother stayed behind with the children to see what damage had been done to their own home. Molly groaned. When Father was gone, Jacob seemed to puff up and boss his sister around. She decided to stay outside, as far away from her brother as she could get.

Molly listened to the sounds all around her. *Now*, Sarah was crying. And Toby was barking. Water steadily dripped from the edge of the house... plunk, plunk, plunk. And neighbors on all sides were emerging from their doorways, calling out to one another to see if all was well.

Molly lifted the hem of her dress and waded out farther into the street. Well, she had wanted to go swimming today, but not like this! Molly muttered to herself, "As Mother would say, be careful what you wish for!"

She looked around the yard. There was the hoop she had been playing with earlier, wrapped around the boxwood in the Thomson's yard. And there was the doghouse Jacob had been building for Toby, smashed against a tree. But her brother was clever. Maybe he could fix it.

As she turned around, she glanced up at the Nelson House. There was Mrs. Nelson, standing on top of her roof, holding onto the rail of the widow's walk. "I'll bet she can see for miles from up there," Molly thought. Then she had a startling thought. Captain Nelson was out there somewhere in his ship! Would he be all right? Suddenly the term "widow's walk" had a whole new meaning. What a terrible name for such a beautiful part of a house!

And what about the Thomsons? They were to the west, in New Bern, where Father said the storm was headed. She worried about William. He could be a pain, just like the other boys on the street, but deep down inside, she really liked him.

Molly ran back inside to help her mother quiet Sarah. If Jacob tried to boss her around, she'd have a thing or two to settle with him!

Next week, chapter four – "After the Storm"

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Newspaper Activity:

Using your local newspaper, find weather news and/or weather predictions. What weather conditions make news? Why? Why do you think many newspapers include weather predictions?

Learn more about weather on the N.C. coast!

Tracking a storm

Today, hurricanes and tropical storms can be predicted and their paths tracked to help residents prepare for a weather emergency. Using the latest in radar, satellite and computer equipment, weather experts at the National Weather Service, located in Raleigh, Wilmington and Newport, constantly watch the area's weather conditions and issue warnings to counties in eastern North Carolina. Their job is to track and monitor approaching storms to warn and protect residents so they can stay safe. (Photo of the National Weather Service in Newport, courtesy of the *Carteret County News-Times*.)

