Welcome to *Kreefkop Baai* (Crayfish Cove)

Nestled along the windswept shores of South Africa, Crayfish Cove is a small coastal town steeped in mystery, folklore, and danger. In this exclusive first chapter of The Winds of the Wild Coast, meet Jacques van Biljon, a man whose quiet life is about to be upended by forces beyond his imagination. He will be faced with an opportunity like no other, but will he take it?

Prepare for an unforgettable journey into a world where the ocean's whispers carry secrets and the treacherous undertow of an abalone poaching syndicate threatens everyone.

Enjoy reading this preview!

Chapter 1: Jacques

Jacques van Biljon ran out of the workshop. He clutched his left shoulder, blood seeping through his shirt. Something was stuck deep inside, the point jutting out like a sharp iceberg. He half ran, half walked down the pot-holed road. Velvet red liquid trickled down his wrist, mixing with the cold rainwater that plastered his hair to his forehead. The howling wind carried the tang of rain and sea-spray, whipping at his clothes as if the elements themselves were conspiring to stop him.

The dim glow of *The Rusty Anchor*'s sign cut through the storm, its flickering red neon light a small lighthouse in the suffocating darkness. His shoulder burned like a brand, each step sending a pulse of agony coursing through him. He cursed under his breath, more out of stubbornness than despair. Seven months in this backwater town, and life still hadn't given him a break.

He reached the pub's veranda and paused to catch his breath. The timber creaked beneath his weight as he leaned heavily against one of the wooden poles. A lightning bolt split the sky, illuminating the jagged cliffs that framed the town and the foaming black waves far below.

Jacques stepped into the warm, amber-lit interior. The pub's familiar smell of spilled beer, damp wood, and fried fish enveloped him like a worn jacket. He felt the eyes of the regulars on him, their chatter dipping briefly as they noted his disheveled state.

Tino, the barkeep, stared in shock as Jacques made a beeline towards him, his monobrow wrinkled like an engorged hairy worm.

"What on this good earth happened to you this time?"

"You got a first-aid kit Tino?" he breathed through his teeth. "Please…"

Tino hesitated a moment. "Uh. Yeah. Hold on a minute."

Tino disappeared through a door. Jacques sat himself on a creaking bar stool and sighed deeply. His eyes strained against each other as the pain started pulsing through his chest.

Each eye in the pub was transfixed on him. Only the TV made a garbled, semi-static sound to break the silence.

Tino emerged toting the sought-after box with a cross. Jacques grabbed it from his hands and tore it open. He grunted in satisfaction. “Give me that.” Jacques pointed towards the multi-tool hung from Tino’s belt.

The patrons started resuming their previously paused conversations as Jacques clamped onto the piece of shrapnel with the flimsy pliers. Slowly, he pulled harder and harder until it started with an unearthly slurpy sound. Tino shuddered as Jacques pulled out the full length of the foreign object.

Immediately, crimson liquid flowed copiously. Quickly Jacques poured a burning liquid into the wound and pushed gauze into the hole, his jawline tense as he clamped his teeth together. When he finally stemmed the bleeding, he wrapped the wound as tightly as he could.

Exasperated, he leaned far back into the stool and breathed a sigh of relief. The wound still stung from the disinfectant but in a satisfying way.

“Whiskey please Tino.” He said, “Make it a double.”

Tino obliged. He grabbed a nearby cloth to clean the mess first. The greasy rag squeaked across the counter, collecting the mixed rivulets of blood and disinfectant that smelt like a rancid, ferrous soup.

He spilled some of the alcohol as he hastily poured the golden liquid. Jacques grabbed the glass as it slid over to him.

Tino is nice enough.

Once he wiped down the entire counter, Tino set about refilling the other patrons’ glasses. Jacques relaxed slightly as the warm liquid slithered down his throat like a soothing serpent. His eyes darted across the room sizing up everyone. His gaze paused momentarily to look at the poor waitress he collided with on the way in. She was still collecting the shattered pieces of glassware.

Turning ninety degrees to his left, Jacques felt the bar stool wobble underneath him. He was used to it. It had become his unofficial spot in the pub since he arrived in this town.

‘How long has it been?’ he wondered quietly. Silently mouthing the numbers, he counted to seven. ‘Seven months…’

‘Another one?’

Jacques turned to see Tino observing him with inquisitive interest. Pausing for a moment, Jacques mumbled 'Yeah. One more should fix me up nicely. Damn cutting disc blew up in my face.'

'You're lucky mate. Could've been a whole different story.'

'*Ja*. And sorry about the glasses hey. Put it on my tab.'

'Meh. I need new glasses anyway. They were here since my Papi ran this place.'

Jacques chuckled slightly before he gulped down another mouthful. He pushed the empty glass back towards Tino for the refill.

The door creaked loudly as it was pushed open to make way for the burly figure of *Oom* Koos. The salty tang of the ocean washed in like a crashing wave, the scent tainted with a hint of the aroma of fynbos nearby. Jacques could see that the rain was gentler than when he stumbled in.

'The rain is slowing down.' Tino blurted out.

'Huh?'

'You were checking out the rain. You got a ways to walk home.'

'Uh, yeah. Sucks to be wetter than I am already.'

Koos interrupted their conversation, planting his plump rump on the stool neighboring Jacques'.

'*Naand sê* Tino. How goes it?'

'Evening Koos. Not bad. Better than Jacques, that's for sure.'

Koos turned his considerable figure to better appraise Jacques.

'Oh, my dear lad! What happened to you? You look worse than my cousin after he got speared by a jumping javelin.'

'A what?'

'Jumping javelin. Marlin lad.'

'Oh. Nah, blasted grinder disc exploded and planted itself right there.'

'Dastardly machines those. My uncle's second step-father lost a finger with one of them grinders.'

There was a slight pause. Just before it got awkward, Tino asked. 'What will it be Koos?'

‘Ah yes. Let me see. Today’s Wednesday yes?’ he continued after Tino nodded, ‘Jolly good. Let’s have me a nice ol’ brandy please if you’d please, thank ye very much.’

A few dozen minutes later, Koos was even chattier than usual thanks to the number of brandies he downed. Jacques kept looking for an exit but felt compelled to listen to every story Koos had to share. *If only this shoulder wasn’t so damned sore, it would be half pleasant to listen to*.

Koos glanced at a picture pinned next to the mirror behind the counter. After a few intense moments of staring, he begun with his next tale.

‘That smile there of that feller… Reminds me of this gump that fished with me Papi.’ Jacques tried his best to pay attention, but the pain was throbbing feverishly through his whole arm now. Koos persevered.

‘The man was nauseous he was green, green around the gills, you’d easily mistake him for a royal lawn.’ He laughed from deep within his belly.

‘He hurled his lunch over portside. Only tad of trouble was his dentures went in the drink too!’

‘That’s unfortunate…’

‘Then – this is the best part - my Papi takes a fish he just pulled out and puts *his* dentures into it. He turns to his buddy and asks: “Hey, ain’t this your teeth?”. Benjamin - that’s the guy’s name. Benjamin takes the fish, gives it a once over, and chucks the teeth overboard…’ Koos interrupts the joke with his own rambunctious laughter. A few of the other fishermen sitting close by chuckle at this fable.

‘So, Benjamin says: “No, those aren’t my dentures,” so poor Papi came home mouth a’gaping.’ Koos finished with a flourish. Jacques *is* mildly amused and can’t help but let an awkward chuckle escape.

‘That’s one I haven’t heard before’, Tino chimes in, collecting both men’s empty glasses. ‘I think it’s time for you to head back, Koos. You too Jacques. Rain’s stopped a bit.’

Jacques got up slowly, to avoid bumping his left side. Koos followed suit and wobbled towards the door unsteadily. ‘Thank YOU Tino. See ya later!’ Koos shouts as he approaches the exit.

As Jacques stepped out of the bar, the wind whipped at his weathered face, still carrying the distant rumble of thunder. On the veranda, Koos clung to one of the poles.

Jacques sighed and, after a few seconds of pause, approached the burly figure. ‘Come on Koos. Grab onto my shoulder. Which way is your home?’

‘Oh, thank you kindly my boy. Ergh, lets ‘er see here. *Ja, ja.* That way.’

‘Not *that* shoulder!’

Koos hung on as best he could to Jacques’ uninjured shoulder and the two stepped into the darkness of the street. The pair rounded the back of *The Rusty Anchor.* The wind was stronger here. A stone’s throw from them was a sheer drop that plunged into the Indian Ocean. Jacques could hear the punishment the sea mother inflicted with her waves.

The coarse, gritty sandstone cliffs stood tall. Like rebellious children feigning immunity to pain while undergoing punishment, the proud cliffs faced the relentless onslaught of the behemoth waves incessantly. It had been that way for epochs. In places, the foaming fury of the Eastern Cape waters had broken through. Not 100km from here, lay The Hole in The Wall, a witness to the power these waters wielded.

Jacques admired the view each time he approached the pub. Now burdened with a half-conscious acquaintance and a throbbing arm, he wasn’t quite inclined to admire the view at that very instant.

Nonetheless, when the odd lightning bolt flashed hot white above, Jacques could glimpse the outlines of the inky black waves far below.

The sea was a swirling canvas of black and white, its waves crashing against the sandstone, sending plumes of spray dozens of meters into the air. This was the Cape; untamed, unpredictable, and utterly captivating. Jacques admired its beauty; despite the pain it had inflicted. It hurt deep inside where nothing could soothe it.

‘Looks *great* for fishing eh Jacques? The bigger the storm, the bigger the bite.’ Koos slurred.

Jacques shifted uncomfortably. ‘I prefer calmer waters these days.’

‘Ahhgh. You youngsters have no stomach for adventure! This generation is buggered.’ He clicked his tongue to emphasize his disdain. Jacques wanted to protest that statement but thought better of it.

‘Just a little bit further down this street here lad.’ Koos blabbered.

‘Alrighty. Almost there.’

They splashed slowly through the pooling water on the road. Sparsely planted lampposts dappled the wet streets with reflections in the muddied puddles.

Finally, Koos indicated where he was to be dropped off. Koos stumbled through the cottage's door and into his feverishly yellow lit kitchen. On an ancient rocking chair sat a woman, knitting in front of a tiny TV. She got up when she saw the two men.

'Ag, Koos! *Jitte*. How much did you drink again?'

'No, no my love, just a one or two. I swear. Ask him!'

'Each week it's the same story. Ah…'

She turned to Jacques and her mouth parted slightly when she saw his red-sodden shirt.

'It's okay *Tannie*. I had a little work accident, that's all.' Jacques spoke before she could ask. Koos kicked back in his comfy chair in the corner.

'Oh dear. Will you be alright?'

'Yes, *dankie tannie*. I best get home too. I think Koos will be quite alright.' Jacques could hear the first few snores from Koos.

She thanked him profusely and walked him out the door, insisting he take one of Koos' canary yellow rain jackets. 'It's a little torn… He uses it every time they go fishing.'

Jacques muttered his gratitude and headed home, the cold air driving the small drops of rain against his face. The raindrops congregated on his chin before dripping inside the plastic jacket.

He gulped down some painkillers and redressed his wound with a clean sock and some spirits before collapsing on his bed. His mind was uneasy, drifting from the pain in his shoulder to the pain deeper that lay deeper yet. Eventually, he dozed off with the pitter-patter of the rain running across the roof like little mice.