

## Prologue

A full moon tonight. The ebb and flow of the desert wind like a breathing thing, hard then slow... sporadically interrupting the faint noise of traffic rushing by on distant Interstate 20. Then the quiet breathing of the West Texas wind continues Acappella as nocturnal animals venture out for sustenance.

A tall Joshua tree stands swaying, bright moonlight illuminating its greenish-white leaves and casting a chorus line of dancing black shadows on the desert floor. A young mule deer nibbles eagerly at the tree's creamy white blossoms. His ever-vigilant ears twitching at the slightest disturbance – but the only sound he hears is the whistling wind.

The buck maneuvers around the old tree, struggling to reach another cluster of succulent flowers. Bouncing and waving crazily – taunting the animal's ineffectiveness – they remain just out of his reach. Tantalizingly close.

The animal stamps his feet in frustration kicking up a cloud of dust. His hooves dig deep furrows into the ground, uprooting a tumbleweed bush at the base of the tree.

The wind snatches the uprooted tumbleweed and sends it sailing away. The Joshua tree is but a distant speck on the horizon as the tumbleweed rolls away, bouncing crazily and flying through the night.

The brilliance of first light begins to warm the crisp morning air and gradually reveals the tumbleweed hanging prisoner on a rusty barbed-wire fence.

Many miles from the comforting shelter of the Joshua tree, the unrelenting sun bombards the bush day after grueling day. One week, then two, until its leaves wilt and wither away. A random gust of wind rips the weakened stems free from the barbed wire and once again, the tumbleweed is careening across the desert.

Coming to rest in a ditch just north of Mentone, the tumbleweed has been rolling for days. Pushed and guided by the wind, Fate has rolled it into the bar ditch alongside State Hwy 302. There, the wind finally relaxes its hold on the dry bush.

Perched precariously close to the two-lane blacktop highway, it quivers whenever the huge eighteen-wheelers roar past.

Suddenly the wind kicks up and a gust blows it onto the highway, directly into the path of an oncoming truck. The behemoth truck's chrome bumper and spinning tires loom close

but miss it by mere inches. The tumbleweed rolls to the edge of the pavement – amazingly spared from instant obliteration.

Then, the draft of the speeding eighteen-wheeler snatches the tumbleweed and hurls it violently through the air, impaling it on the barbed-wire fence alongside the highway. Many days pass and more tumbleweeds pile up around it. Under it. Above it. A dense wall of tumbleweeds blocking the persistent desert wind.

Weeks later, the tumbleweed is still a prisoner of the fence – along with hundreds of other prisoners just like him. His story could have easily ended there – just another casualty of the indiscriminate wind and the clutches of barbed wire. However, providence intervenes again as a huge storm cell settles over West Texas.

Fat raindrops begin falling, kicking up dust as they impact the ground. The parched desert absorbs the rain thirstily until it can absorb no more. Yet, the torrential rain keeps falling.

A flash flood of water three feet deep barrels across the highway and smashes into the tumbleweed floodwall. The barbed-wire fence instantly collapses under the raging weight. And the swirling, churning, muddy water sweeps the tumbleweed away.