

THE
Green Day
PROPHECIES

A Novel of Global U.N. Terror

By
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The Green Day Prophecies

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About the cover-

Across the top, family farms burn as the Authority sets America's heartland ablaze in preparation for mass relocations and new agricultural policies in the buffer zones. The middle features a solid gold enforcer's badge; a symbol of power and authority given to sadistic individuals whose duty it is to enforce the Guidelines (laws) in the urban areas of the New Society. It features the seal of the United Nations and two Unification Stars in the enameled lower half, along with a scene from a typical urban area recreated in gleaming 18K gold on the top half. At the bottom is the tribute to Bill Clinton for his contributions to the United Nations and the New World Order: His face immortalized on Mt. Rushmore in South Dakota. Stamped across the cover are some of the various treaties, agreements, and proposals that will soon allow this nightmare to become a waking reality.



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Preface

“It is the sacred principles enshrined in the United Nations charter to which the American people will henceforth pledge their allegiance.” - President George Bush addressing the General Assembly of the U.N., February 1, 1992

On May 14th, 2014, the final legislation was enacted to combine all the world’s resources, population, and laws, into one global power known as the Authority. Based on Green ideas and communist socialization, the Authority has decided that the world is overcrowded and must be protected at any cost, including human lives and liberties. The day this came into being, was announced as “Green Day,” and celebrated as a world holiday on each anniversary thereafter. It also marked the day of the beginning of the largest genocide our planet had ever witnessed.

“The Green Day Prophecies” takes these ideas - and pieces of legislation already proposed - and implements them into a plausible chronological order, where the America we know today ceases to exist. Fully one half of the United States is now off limits to any human intervention - deemed as “wilderness reserves” and barred from our lives - or so we are led to believe. The majority of the remaining half is labeled for limited use, mostly agricultural, and only a select few are allowed jobs in this sector; the reward for being a good citizen.

The remaining ten percent is divided between existing Indian and military reservations, and the seventeen densely-packed urban areas set aside for human habitation, where the survivors of the Biosickness now live and work; all twenty-nine million+ of them.

Nothing short of overcrowded feudalistic communes ruled by sadistic overlords and brutal enforcers, all private transportation has disappeared; replaced by mass transit - light rail and electric streetcars - and close proximity of one’s work to his or her domicile. Since needs are relatively few, most supplies are within walking distance of one’s domicile anyway. Citizens are allotted ten gallons of water per day by the Authority, from neighborhood filling stations called wells, to be strictly rationed for drinking, cooking, washing of dishes and laundry, and bathing.

The Authority – the all-seeing, all-knowing network of enforcers, overseers, and directors – has taken away all decision making from the individual. No longer are people allowed to waste resources such as water, fuel, timber, and minerals. The Authority controls all such items with rations and mandatory recycling. Housing, or domiciles as they are called, is owned and controlled by the Authority, and consists of warehouse-like apartment structures five stories tall, with businesses located on the first two floors, and residential domiciles on the upper three.

All work is meaningful, and decided by the Authority. Meaningless jobs, such as entrepreneurs, independent writers, CEOs, and financial advisors were all removed from

the workplace and replaced with jobs beneficial only to the community. Everyone's job directly correlates to his or her place in society, and has no financial rewards. This keeps all citizens equal, and assures that no one may gain power over another by becoming financially superior.

Diet is strictly controlled as well. Red meat was outlawed for consumption in 2015 due to potential health risks in citizens, and a "sensible" diet of protein-rich vegetables and limited amounts of white meats and fish, now sustains the population. Sugary foods, fast food, etc., have all been combined into the "junk food" category and removed from citizens' diets as well, except for certain occasions of celebration, namely Green Day.

Basic luxuries are no longer known. Workplace and domicile air conditioning is a waste of energy and therefore unnecessary; as is any amount of heat over fifteen (fifty-eight Fahrenheit) degrees in the winter. Only the strong survive in the New Society, and any show of resentment or weakness is dealt with quickly and harshly by the Authority.

Urban Area Eleven citizen George Cooper and his mate Brooke, already have one dependent, and Brooke is pregnant with their second; the legal limit. After it is born, both George and Brooke will undergo mandatory sterilization to prevent any future dependents and population growth. At two dependents per couple, the population is kept in control and cannot exceed the resources allotted by the Authority for sustainable existence.

George and Brooke are rare mates, in that although they were chosen, they are truly in love. Both want more dependents and dread the thought of not being able to have more. This, coupled with their love for one another, leads them to plot the unthinkable; escaping to the forbidden wilderness. The baby is due in September, and there is only one day per year when citizens are allowed "junk food" and free roam of the urban areas without monitoring; May 14th, the anniversary of Green Day.

There are no walls or fences surrounding the urban areas to keep people in, just boundary signs, although a special permit is required to be within the buffer zones. Many have attempted escape over the years, and most were caught; given away by the network of motion detectors that monitor movement on the borders of agricultural buffer zones and wilderness reserves or corridors where any human presence is strictly forbidden, under penalty of death.

George and Brooke decide that this is their only chance if they want to have a bigger family together, and plan their escape accordingly. George's father was a farmer in Indiana before the Biosickness, and he remembers much about the old ways when he was a child on the farm. If he and Brooke can manage to get their young son past the motion detectors at the perimeter of the buffer zones, to the freedom of the wilderness beyond, he feels certain they can survive; living free and away from the confines of the urban areas, and the harsh rules that accompany them.

Aided by their aging friend and neighbor, Frank O'Reilly, George and Brooke make their escape with their young son, Joshua, on Green Day. What they soon discover, however, will change everything they have ever been taught by the Authority, and it will pit their resourcefulness against the wealthiest and most powerful people on the planet, leaving them in a battle not only for their freedom, but their very existence.

Foreword

“Today, Americans would be outraged if U.N. troops entered Los Angeles to restore order; tomorrow they will be grateful! This is especially true if they were told there was an outside threat from beyond, whether real or promulgated, that threatened our very existence. It is then that all peoples of the world will pledge with world leaders, to deliver them from this evil. The one thing every man fears is the unknown. When presented with this scenario, individual rights will be willingly relinquished for the guarantee of their well-being granted them by their world government.” - Henry Kissinger in an address to the Bilderberg organization meeting at Evian, France, May 21, 1992

“*The Green Day Prophecies*” is a novel based on current political agendas and legislation that is either proposed or has already been passed into law. Some of these ideas may seem farfetched or outlandish, but I assure you they are all real, and many have already been implemented into our lives.

That is where we begin the preface; the current truth. Part I of this book deals with these truths, whereas Parts II, III, and IV take place twenty-five years after the truths end, and reveal the world that I envision from what I have learned as both a candidate for public office, and as a political columnist. While based largely on speculation, it is still founded on truth. Truth is in fact, sometimes stranger than fiction, and will manifest itself as such in this book. “*The Green Day Prophecies*” is my future vision that the direction in which current treaties and local policies will take, should they continue to be voted into law in direct violation of the Constitution.

As a former candidate for public office, I learned these things firsthand. I was given a copy of the infamous Agenda 21, which serves as a blueprint for many of the scenes in this book. I was supposed accept these things and pawn them off to the public as a good thing, yet I did just the opposite. I wanted to reveal the truth to the public; to warn them of the dangers that light rail, MX zoning, and green spaces truly present. The result was that I was investigated by three-letter agencies, and I was discredited in the media.

Locally, our politicians received training to counter the truths about Agenda 21 to constituents who might question their motives and demand the truth. A pet project of the mayor, it was hinted that this agenda be preserved at all costs. This included deception, and in my case character smearing, to keep me from telling the truth, or at least to keep the public from believing anything I might say. I decided to counter their communist tactics by writing this book instead.

They may have succeeded in forcing me to remove myself from the local political race, but that will not stop me from presenting these facts to you in the form of this book. “*The Green Day Prophecies*” presents facts in fictional form. The first part of the book

will combine fact with fiction to lead up to what I personally foresee happening in this country's near future.

Parts II, III, and IV are completely fictional, although I believe them to become our future; unless we do something now, to curb the bloodthirsty path that not only our own country but the rest of the world - through the United Nations - has cut through our liberties and freedom.

Throughout *"The Green Day Prophecies,"* you will see many photographs that illustrate points or scenes in the book. There are three reasons for this. First, not many novels have illustrations anymore, and I wanted an old-fashioned book.

Secondly, this book is intended for people of all ages, and younger readers can appreciate information better if they can see a picture to accompany it.

Third, the content of some of these photographs simply cannot be described in the same way visual proof can present it to you. For example, describing the Georgia Guidestones or a "Man and the Biosphere" plaque has nowhere near the same effect as seeing a photograph of these objects of the New World Order.

I encourage all of you to research topics such as the Georgia Guidestones, Agenda 21, the Rio Earth Summit, and the United Nations "Man and the Biosphere" program for yourselves. Look at what the Wildlands Project truly means for our rural areas. It's all there for you to look up on a search engine.

The truth

Agenda 21 - also referred to as Sustainable Development in many areas, or in some cases by one of its two subparts - Smart Growth - by the politicians who attempt to pawn it off on an unsuspecting public, recently gained a tremendous stride toward implementation, with the ruling by the United States Supreme Court regarding property rights.

In a stunning example of contempt for personal rights, this ruling effectively gives private corporations the same gun to point at citizens' heads, that up until now, only governmental agencies have enjoyed. Under Eminent Domain laws, a local, state, or federal entity may forcefully purchase your property at or below market value (sometimes even confiscated [stolen] outright), if the good of the people demands it. This might be for, say, a new interstate, railway project, or even a government installation. However, up until now a company that wanted your property for a new shopping mall or super-center had to buy it from you at your terms or go elsewhere. Not anymore! Under this ruling, Henry's Home Center may now approach your local government and force you under Eminent Domain, to sell your property; the family farm that has been passed down for five generations. Henry can now legally put a gun to your head and say, "leave, or we will have you thrown in jail or killed if you resist." How did we get this far? Well, let me tell you all about Agenda 21.

Known as Sustainable Development or Smart Growth in most communities, it is anything but smart! In fact, it reeks of Socialism, Marxism, even Communism, and is nothing short of the environmental hijacking of all private lands in this country by an elite few. Sustainable Development is made up of two subgroups: The Wildlands Project and Smart Growth.

Both of these subgroups can now be put into place with the unconstitutional passage of expanded Eminent Domain laws. Let me explain:

Under the Wildlands Project portion of Agenda 21, the United States will be categorized into five “zones” that dictate use. *Wilderness Reserves and Corridors* will be off limits to all human activity and will make up roughly 50% of the entire United States! *Buffer Zones* will encompass 80% of the remaining 50% of America not taken up as a reserve, and will heavily restrict human activity in these areas. The remaining 10% of America will be divided into *Indian Reservations*, *Military Installations*, and finally, *Normal Use* (cities - actually megalopolises - where over 300 million people will be crowded into dense housing and working areas. Does the movie *Soylent Green* come to mind)?

Under Smart Growth, private property will no longer exist, as people will live and work within walking distance of each other. This centralized control of everything from energy and water use, housing, population, health, and eating schedules, to education, mandatory recycling, waste management, transportation, and all economic activity, will transform the country and planet into a network of huge feudal-like communities that serve no purpose but to fuel the Machine.



By allowing private entities to use the same gun-to-the-head tactics as the Government, this will exponentially speed up the process in the Smart Growth sector by seizing housing and other acreage for dense housing and business, and in the rural areas, by declaring tracts of land to be used for commercial agricultural purposes.

Bear in mind that many of our national parks have already been put up as collateral to the United Nations under the guise of UN Biospheres and World Heritage Sites. While the brown biosphere signs have all been removed due to public outcry, the bronze “Man and the Biosphere” plaques like the one to the left still remain in the visitors’ centers of all the parks affected. Look for them; they may not be openly displayed, but they are there.

Now, remember what I stated earlier about energy and water regulation? Well, according to the Global Water Supply and Assessment Report of 2000, reasonable access to water in urban areas is defined as “the availability of 20 litres (approximately ten gallons) per capita per day at a distance no longer than 1,000 metres.” Does this sound to you like a community well that allots ten gallons of water per day? It certainly does to me!

Sustainable Development was contrived by the United Nations as part of their one world government, and unveiled to the world in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit. For those of you still not convinced of the intentions of the UN, let me present ten examples of three separate plans. In each line the first example will be Vladimir Lenin’s plan, the second, the **Green Party plan of 1989**, and the third is the *President’s Council on Sustainable Development* (established by Executive Order 12852 in 1993, courtesy of Bill Clinton).

- 1) Planned society, **Planned society**, *Planned society*
- 2) Small communities, **Green communities**, *Green communities*
- 3) Cooperative societies, **Cooperative communities**, *Cooperative communities*
- 4) Local economic focus, **Local economic focus**, *Sustainable local economy*
- 5) Public, group decisions, **Public, group decisions**, *Public, group decisions*
- 6) Socially useful work, **Meaningful work**, *Meaningful work*
- 7) Share wealth, **Share wealth**, *Share wealth (social equity)*
- 8) True democracy, **True democracy**, *True participation*
- 9) Free education, **Lifelong learning**, *Lifelong learning*
- 10) Progressive tax, **Progressive tax**, *Progressive tax*

Note how eerily similar they are; nearly verbatim. Remember this chilling quote by Bill Clinton in a USA Today article from March 11th, 1993: “*We cannot be so fixated on our desire to preserve the rights of ordinary Americans.*”

Does the bigger picture begin to emerge? It has been implemented before, and we all remember the cost; fifty years of communism behind the Iron Curtain. Will the same ideas and goals produce the same results? I would imagine so. Let us look to northeast Georgia for further corroboration of the “bigger picture.”

One of the most chilling and openly displayed facets of the New World Order is the Georgia Guidestones. Erected atop a small knoll in 1979 outside Elberton Crossroads, in upstate Georgia, this “American Stonehenge” initially attracted only a few curious visitors, but has grown in recent years to become a terrifying expression of global dominance, slavery, and genocide.

Sometimes incorrectly referred to as America’s Stonehenge (the real location of that title lies in North Salem, New Hampshire and was built thousands of years ago), the Georgia Guidestones do in fact resemble the British monolith to a degree. Built on a natural power point, these stones at first attracted visitors who were more interested in their supposed spiritual powers than those who actually bothered to read them. Early visitors were mostly made up of American Indians, UFOlogists and those seeking harmony with nature; an irony in and of itself if one reads the inscriptions in the massive stones.

I encourage any of you who live close enough, to visit the Georgia Guidestones. I invite you to witness firsthand, the words that are carved into the faces of the massive slabs of granite and reflect upon their meaning, for they are even more imposing in person.

Inscribed in the eight major languages of the world, the stones stand as a monument to the New World Order by defiantly proclaiming the Ten Precepts for a global community, with chilling allusions.



The Georgia Guidestones; a monument to the New World Order

- Maintain humanity under 500,000,000 in perpetual balance with nature.
- Unite humanity with a living new language.
- Rule Passion - Faith - Tradition - and all things with tempered reason.
- Protect people and nations with fair laws and just courts.
- Let all nations rule internally resolving external disputes in a World Court.
- Avoid petty laws and useless officials.
- Balance personal rights with social duties.
- Prize truth - beauty - love - seeking harmony with the infinite.
- Be not a cancer on the earth - leave room for nature - leave room for nature.

Now we know how we will all fit into these feudal communes; almost five billion people will have to be removed from the Earth's population. The last one also allows for the Wilderness Reserves, by "leaving room for nature."

Nothing is ever done without a reason, so there should be some defense for eliminating 90% of the world's population and crowding the rest into nothing short of reservations. Control of the world's resources, banking, and now private real estate, is the goal of Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development. No matter what you call it, it amounts to the genocide of most - and the enslavement of the rest - of the entire world, with the exception of the few that will control it all.

The story based upon the truth

"*The Green Day Prophecies*" - although a fictitious story - follows what I believe will happen to our country in the near future, if we do not secede from the UN and cease meddling in the affairs of other countries around the world.

George and Brooke represent the American patriot that made this country what it is today. In their quest for freedom, the pair exhibit what in our day and age are considered felonies, but two hundred years ago were seen as acts of patriotism. We can only hope that when the chips are down, tens of thousands of Brookes and Georges will emerge from the shadows to help us recover our God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

My biggest fear as a politician who believes in the free America that our forefathers fought and died for, is that this country will indeed follow the footsteps that I foresee trampling our Constitution, but my biggest *hope* is that people like you shall prove me wrong. We can only pray that 1984 was nothing more than a year and a meaningless number - that our future does not consist of a nightmarish reality - and that people will come to see the light, and right the wrongs of our society.

D.A. Hänks

Part I

Thunder in the Distance

CHAPTER 1

“Once again a majority of this court has proved that ‘if enough people get together and act in concert, they can take something and not pay for it.’ ...But theft is still theft. Theft is theft even when the government approves of the thievery... Turning a democracy into a kleptocracy does not enhance the stature of thieves; it only diminishes the legitimacy of the government.” - Justice Janice Brown’s dissenting opinion, San Remo Hotel vs. the City and County of San Francisco.

July 27th, 2013

The early morning sun arose over the misty cornfields of Matt Cooper’s farm, in rural Knox County, Indiana, sending shafts of golden light through the humid stalks of ripening corn. His young son, George, was helping his father spray insecticide from the back of their aging tractor, to ensure a healthy crop.

The farm wasn’t big; it covered some thirty-five acres in total, with about twelve of those acres planted in corn. Another thirteen were divided between the house and yard, barn, and grazing area for the small group of livestock they raised for meat and milk, and ten acres in hardwoods, but it was home.

The stillness of the hazy summer morning was suddenly shattered by the sound of a supersonic aircraft streaking overhead. Seven-year-old George ducked instinctively, then jumped as a loud sonic boom followed.

“Bastards!” Matt exclaimed, as he shook his fist at the rapidly-disappearing jet. “They’re trying to give us a message; let us know they know we’re here. This is my farm! My father passed it down to me from his father, and they won’t take it from me! It’ll be a cold day in hell before those sons of bitches get this farm, Georgie.”

George looked at his father and smiled.

“I don’t ever wanna leave, Dad.” he replied.

“We won’t.” Matt said grimly. “My great-grandfather built this place. He plowed these fields with two mules, and nailed every board on that barn by himself. This farm has been in this family for over a hundred years, and by God I’ll never leave.”

George nodded, as his father turned the tractor around and headed in the direction of the large, faded red barn.

“They want our land, Son.” Matt continued, as he turned the tractor off. “The whole country’s gonna be turned into a giant park or something. They say we won’t need it anymore anyway; that when they do this, all the people are going to be moved into the city and given new jobs. I don’t want another job, Georgie! Farming’s all I know; all I’ve ever known. I don’t want to live in some city. I want to be out here where the land is ours; where we can fly kites and watch the deer come into the yard at night.”

Matt closed the heavy oak doors to the barn and latched them into place. He looked up into the sky at a jet trailing a wide contrail, and sighed.

“How are they going to fit the entire country into a few cities anyway?” he mused.

Neither Matt nor George had any idea that the answer to that question lay in the contrail of the jet flying high above their farm. Not really a contrail at all - which comprised of hot exhaust gas which created visible condensation in the cold atmosphere - but instead a chemtrail, which did not dissipate in a few minutes like a normal contrail.

Chemtrails stayed aloft for hours, often spreading for miles, and creating hazy patches in the sky. They had been appearing over American skies for more than thirty years, and contained everything from chemicals to aluminum dust, and even white blood cells and other carcinogenic unidentified substances. People often became sick in areas where chemtrails were heavily laden in the skies, and the mystery surrounding their existence continued to baffle people.

Identifiable by the hazy, residual trails and crisscross patterns they often left in the skies, sometimes even forming a symmetrical grid, chemtrails were occasionally discernable through polarized sunglasses under certain conditions, where they appeared to have a rainbow-like hue.

Some suspected it was a way to dispose of toxic or biological waste more cheaply than incineration, while others suspected a more sinister motive, such as weather and climate control. No matter which side of the argument one was on however, no one believed they were there for any positive purpose. No one had any idea either, that very soon the almost four decades of testing chemtrails as a means of creating huge radio antennae and releasing test agents into the atmosphere would answer Matt Cooper’s question.

The farmer put his arm around his young son’s shoulder and they walked toward the house, where Matt’s wife of eleven years, Gayle, had breakfast waiting for the two men in her life.

“No Sir, Georgie.” Matt continued. “They’ll have to kill me to take this farm away from us.”

Matt Cooper had no idea just how prophetic that statement would soon become; not just for himself, but for over three hundred million additional Americans, and close to five billion people worldwide.

How had America come to such a ghastly state of affairs? How had the entire planet embarked on such a journey of mass genocide and slavery? To fully understand, we must go back in time to view the legislation that not only allowed this chain of events, but embraced it. And so the story begins.

August 2nd, 2005; eight years earlier

“Mr. President, it’s ready for you to sign, Sir.”

“Excellent.” the president responded enthusiastically. “Perfect timing on that Supreme Court decision last week to allow the expansion of enimen ... emimim ... Jesus - I can’t say the simplest words sometimes - *eminent* domain laws into the corporate leg of Smart Growth too.”

“Maybe one of these days you’ll learn to say ‘nuclear’ properly too.” Jeff Goldstein, his haughty, twenty-seven-year-old aide thought to himself, as he handed the recently-passed CAFTA bill to his superior to sign into law.

Like many people from certain families or backgrounds, he had nothing but contempt for the president. Not just because he acted like an oaf at times, but because he was not of the same “caliber” of genetic material that Jeff prided himself on being. They may have both attended the same university and been members of the same secret society, but that made no difference to the younger man. The president was still inferior as far as he was concerned.

“First they gave us the power to expand our ability to condemn private property, which will be key to our implementation of the Wildlands Project,” the president continued, “and now with CAFTA, we can begin opening the borders to hasten the downfall of the economy. Passing the FTAA in a few years should be a breeze. I’ll have to give Daddy the good news. We’re two steps closer to the New World Order, now. That was always his dream, to implement globalization and a world economy.”

“Mr. President, if I may,” Jeff interjected, “all this happening so close together may have the exact opposite effect on the people.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well Sir, if you pass too much too soon, they may balk. That’s what happened with NAFTA, and why we’ve had to pass CAFTA as an interim for the FTAA. People tend to overreact when it comes to authority here in America. Instead of accepting it like they should, for some reason they dig their heels in and fight back. They never learn that we know better than they, what is best for them. I don’t know what it is with these people; they never accept that they need to be told what to do. Otherwise they’ll just screw things up.”

“Hmm, I hadn’t thought of it that way.” the president agreed. “I see why my brother sent you up here to help me out. That might pose a problem though.”

“How so, Sir?” the aide inquired.

“LOST.”

“Sir?”

“The Law of the Seas Treaty, Jeff. I’m being pressured real hard to sign it. I don’t know that I can put it off without ruffling some big feathers.”

“I know what it stands for, Mr. President. I merely meant that if there is any way to put it off, I would, Sir. We’ve already hit them with a double whammy. If they get a third, you may not keep the support in the House, let alone the Senate. Forget the feathers for now. Concentrate more on the fur coats. They’re the ones that keep the feathers preened.

“We pulled a lot of strings and twisted a lot of arms to push CAFTA through. It was all we could do. If we hadn’t borrowed a trick from the Democrats and held the voting open a full hour after it was supposed to close, CAFTA would have never passed. Hayes has been getting hammered by everyone in North Carolina for changing his vote. This is a dangerous time Sir. I really would recommend that you hold off on signing it.”

“It’s already been ratified.”

“Exactly. Jimmy Carter signed it and it’s been bounced around ever since. Reagan really set us back by flushing it; that old coot. That’s what we get for electing someone

who cared about freedom and the future of the country. How in the hell he ever made it past the Committee is beyond me.

"My point is this: if it's lasted this long, then putting it off for another year or so won't really hurt us, but by then the public will have forgotten about the recent events."

"I see where you're coming from with this, Jeff," the president replied. "You keep going, and one day you'll be the director of Homeland Security or something. I'll put you in for something before I leave, you betcha. I know your family is part of the bigger picture here, so I understand that you need to stay with the game plan. I know you stick together when it comes to long term goals and agendas."

"*Like glue*" Jeff thought in response, "*That's how we got where we are.*"

September 18th, 2005

Fred Corbin scanned the desert to the south of his location in Cochise County, Arizona. His ranch was located about three miles from the Mexican border, to the east of Douglas, and constant vigils were required to keep his property from being overrun with illegal aliens and drug smugglers.

They cut his fences and killed his livestock. They sometimes shot out his windows or fired in the direction of his truck. Things were only getting worse, and Fred - along with most of the other ranchers all along the international border - had had more than his fill.

Prior to the passing of CAFTA things had been bad, as the president had seen no use in masquerading border patrols in light of the bill's certain passing, but since then, any help at all had become almost non-existent, except by the courageous men and women who volunteered their time and money to come to the border and do their best to try and help the ranchers and other landowners along the border with Mexico. These men and women were often branded as racists by the media, who did whatever they could to discredit their actions and give them bad publicity.

Worse, under pending legislation, Americans could soon be charged with a federal hate crime for simply defending their own property! Several farmers and ranchers had already lost their property in lawsuits by Illegals who had gotten hurt while trespassing or had been escorted off the property at gunpoint, and hostilities were beginning to grow. The open border policy was quickly turning the Southwest into a boiling mass of society-clashing, and it was spreading as the brown tide increased to a virtual tsunami that crossed the shores of the Rio Grande. Soon, the amber waves of grain would become the amarillo waves of grain, as Spanish-speaking people swarmed into the heartland of America as well.

CAFTA had never been about free trade, but rather about the breakdown of independent governments and therefore, society as a whole. There was no way the American economy could be expected to support the massive wave of immigration flowing across an unsecured border from seven countries, but when the Free Trade Area of the Americas included the entire continent of South America as well, the entire infrastructure of the American way of life would soon fail. This of course, was exactly what certain people in power wanted, for as bad as things were, Americans were still free and for the most part, educated.

Adding tens of millions of uneducated and disease-ridden people into the country was the perfect way to create pandemonium and strife, which of course allowed the politicians

and those who controlled them, to create even more legislation to curb additional liberties and freedoms.

Fred glanced to his left to see his neighbor, Jason St. John, approaching from his homestead to the east via an ATV. Jason had a look on his face that Fred had come to recognize over the years, and it meant his friend was fit to be tied over something. Fred could only guess it had to do with border jumpers.

“Morning Jason.” Fred greeted his neighbor of fifteen years, as he turned the machine off. “What brings you out this way so early? No bad news, I hope.”

“They crapped in my watering troughs again, Fred!” Jason burst out as he dismounted the machine. “It’s like they’re taunting us. ‘We’ll come here and do whatever we want and you can’t stop us.’ This is my land, damn it!”

“I know, Jason.” Fred replied, shaking his head in disgust. “It makes me want to dig trenches and set up barbed wire and Claymore mines, and shoot anything that gets through. We’re prisoners in our own country; hell we’re prisoners on our own damned property now!”

“Wait until the FTAA passes in a few more years.” Jason responded grimly. “We’ll be lucky to get out of here with our lives. What in God’s name has gone wrong with our country, anyway?”

“That’s the problem right there.” Fred stated crisply, as he kicked the dusty ground in anger. “It’s no longer *our* country.”

February 27th, 2006

Officer Roy Guilbault, with the New Orleans Police Department, pulled his car to a stop adjacent to a crowd of teenagers. He had been called in as backup to assist with information and crowd control due to a stabbing off Dauphin Street in the height of the Mardi Gras celebration.

Roy had been with the department for nearly eighteen years and was looking forward to his retirement after twenty-five years of service. Officers were required to work Mardi Gras every year, and every year it got worse and worse. Most officers despised having to work the event, in spite of the overtime pay. To many, it simply was not worth the aggravation. Roy happened to be one of those who felt this way.

There were many who had not believed the Big Easy would have enough of the city cleaned up after the wrath of Hurricane Katrina the previous August, when the storm toppled twenty buildings and several breaches in the city’s levees had left eighty percent of the city under water for weeks. Determined to keep the tradition going however, the city had worked feverishly to restore the French Quarter so at least the most famous portion of the celebration could continue. Most of the damage was minimal and mostly due to wind, as the buildings were masonry and had stood for over a century.

While the parades normally avoided the Quarter, this year it was the area of focus and celebration. Much of the city was off limits to visitors, as many buildings were still unsafe, and chemical and sewage contamination was prevalent in those areas as well. Additionally, the most famous portion of the city had also fared the best, with minimal to no flooding, as it was located on some of the highest ground in the city. Many areas had been submerged under twenty to thirty feet of water closer to Lake Pontchartrain.

Some had called for the outright abandonment of the city after Katrina virtually decimated the area, but the people had prevailed. One couldn't help but wonder however, that due to soaring insurance costs, when some of these areas might need to be vacated for safer, or at least higher and drier, ground. Rumors of impending legislation were beginning to trickle down to the masses, that perhaps in the not-so-distant future, areas that suffered natural catastrophes might not be allowed to rebuild.

With several thousand casualties and tens of thousands of displaced residents, only a fraction of the people had returned. Eight hundred thousand homes had been destroyed, and the majority of the residential areas minimally affected by the disaster also happened to be low income, which was not helping the general makeup of the native crowd for this year's celebration.

As Roy made his way toward the group of witnesses, he saw a rookie officer attempting to get the address of a black teenager.

"Where do you live?" the young man was inquiring of the teen.

"That way," the teen replied.

Roy smiled to himself, as he watched the new officer becoming agitated at the teen's seemingly evasive replies. A fifth generation Cajun, he had called the city home for all of his forty-three years, and hated the direction that he felt it was taking. Skyrocketing crime, particularly the looting that had followed the hurricane, was beginning to take its toll on the economy and his patience. Billy however, was making the same mistake that most newcomers made when discussing domiciles with Southern Blacks.

"Hey Billy." Roy finally greeted the rookie in a strong Cajun accent. "Come over here a minute would ya?"

The flustered officer joined Roy, who whispered in his ear.

"Billy, I know you haven't lived here that long, but the first thing you have to understand, is that they don't 'live,' they 'stay,' okay?"

"Oh," Billy replied, "okay."

He had moved to New Orleans from Bellevue, Nebraska two years previously, and knew nothing of southern ways, much less the entirely different book of rules by which many Blacks and Hispanics played.

"Come here." Roy instructed Billy's witness.

The teen looked around and then placed his finger against his chest inquisitively.

"Yeah you." Roy responded. "Where you stay at, Boy?"

"CL 10."

"Where the hell is Sealton?" Roy burst out.

The teenager pointed in a westward direction.

"Look here," Roy said, scratching his head, "you live across Canal, right?"

The boy nodded.

"In the Projects?" Roy prodded.

"Uh-huh."

"And you live where?"

"CL 10."

"Boy," Roy burst out, "I've lived here all my life, and I ain't never heard o' no Sealton."

He looked back at Billy Hampton.

“Did you get all his information?”

Billy nodded.

“I’ll take him home. I ain’t never heard of no Sealton. I wanna see where the hell this kid lives.”

He turned to the teen.

“Get in the car. You point and I’ll drive.”

They crossed Canal Street and proceeded west for several blocks before winding around and passing under, Calliope Street. A few streets later, the teen pointed.

“Turn here.”

Roy looked at the street sign on the corner and stopped the car to stare dumbfounded at it for several seconds, as the obvious sank in. There, in large white letters on the blue sign, was the name of the street in question: **CLIO**.

Roy would later discover that no one in the Projects had ever heard of Clio St., but everyone knew right where CL 10 was.

“Thank Brown versus the Board of Education for the condition of our public school system.” he muttered, as he watched the boy greet several friends on the corner. “And opening the borders is supposed to make this fantastic system of ours even better? Hoss hockey.”

May 1st, 2008

Matt Cooper looked at Gayle and smiled. His wife was pregnant with their first child, and at seven months was really beginning to show. She was reclined on an easy chair in the living room, as the couple watched the evening news on television. The local anchor out of Louisville finished the local news and the cameras changed as he began the national report.



The corner of S. White and “CL 10” in New Orleans

“The president signed and ratified the Law of the Seas Treaty, or LOST, into law today.” David Kendall announced in a solemn tone. “This of course will give the United Nations sole control over our oceans, and everything within them including the sea life and oil we currently drill, as well as the airspace over them.

“The US was the last country to sign this piece of legislation and in doing so, effectively nullifies our own navy and turns it over to the UN. The UN will now have sole jurisdiction over every cubic gallon of salt water in the world, except for salt lakes and inland seas, and will have the only say-so for issuing permits, collecting impact fees, and royalties of all minerals and animal life harvested from the oceans.

“It is now illegal to fish off the pier in San Diego where I spent my vacation earlier this year, without obtaining an international fishing license. All boats will now have to be registered with the UN as well, and they can actually deny our US Navy access to our own waters.

“I cannot believe that we have allowed our government to go this far.” David commented. “We literally no longer own our own coastal waters. They even own the airways over the oceans now. The UN will be responsible for granting flyover permits for commercial airlines. If they so choose, they can literally stop all sea and intercontinental air traffic.

“What in the world is our president thinking? Under this treaty, the UN claims jurisdiction over outer space as well. This means NASA will now need to obtain permission to-”

David was suddenly cut off as two station security officers grabbed him and dragged him from the set. His co-anchor appeared onscreen in his place.

“Um, we uh, will now break for these commercial announcements.” Sandy Williams commented shakily. “We apologize for any unprofessional behavior on David’s part. He certainly does not represent the position of this station.”

The screen then changed to an advertisement for toothpaste.

Matt looked at Gayle in alarm.

“What in the world?” he burst out. “I don’t know which is worse, what just happened to our rights, or what just happened on TV.”

“That treaty.” Gayle responded.

“Obviously,” Matt replied, “but my point was that what happened to him shouldn’t be happening either. This world is degrading fast, Gayle. We couldn’t have picked a worse time to bring a child into this world.”

“Can they really sign our rights over to the UN like that?” Gayle inquired.

“Yes,” Matt replied, “but only because we let them. According to the way this country was founded, no, but ever since Abraham Lincoln illegally gave the federal government authority it does not constitutionally have, it has only worsened. If you challenge them they will throw you in jail, even though they legally can’t do it. They get away with it because the people believe they can.

“The people of this country believe that the president has the authority to sign away our sovereignty, so they go along with it, instead of demanding his impeachment and imprisonment for treachery.

“Clinton signed away most of our national parks and historical landmarks as collateral to the UN. Most of them are now labeled as International Biospheres and World

Heritage Sites, and really belong to the UN. Now they own our oceans too. I wonder when they'll start declaring private property as some kind of UN jurisdiction under the Eminent Domain stuff the Supreme Court passed last year. This is bad, Gayle. Really, really bad."

*

In New Orleans, Roy Guilbault stared at his television in stunned surprise.

"They're crazy!" he burst out. "They just signed over jurisdiction of all our oceans and oil rigs to the damn UN! I'm gonna need some kind of UN license to fish off the pier now too?"

He left his apartment and began walking down the street, encountering many people, but no one said a word. A hush had fallen over the entire city that was so heavy; one could feel it in the air. People milled about aimlessly in shock, as they tried to understand the full meaning of the new treaty.

Many people in the Crescent City made their living from the ocean, from shrimp boats; fishing - either commercially or as a guide - to those Orleans that worked the oil rigs out in the Gulf.

Under LOST, the UN decided who needed the resources the most, and the American rigs were in danger of being handed to a poor country such as Mozambique, that the UN decided need the oil and profits more. Even if the American companies were allowed to keep their own rigs, the UN would demand "drilling fees" and large royalties of all the crude pumped from the sea floor. Roy could easily foresee those companies blowing their own rigs to keep someone else from using them. No doubt that would be yet another violation of the newest Green law to pass into being, and carry some sort of fine designed to bankrupt the corporation into liquidating their assets or signing over the shares directly to the UN for payment. It wouldn't be long before they devised some scheme to apply this latest hijacking of American sovereignty to the entire land surface as well. LOST covered two thirds of the planet's surface; taking control of the remaining third was only a matter of time.

Slippery slopes are a lot like ant lion traps. Once you fall into one it is almost impossible to get out, and the only direction to go is downhill. Once you reach the bottom, the only thing that awaits you is the evil monster that created the slope. In this case, the ant lion was the United Nations and the small group of people that secretly controlled it. Master control was its diet, and its appetite was voracious.

CHAPTER 2

“I am for Socialism, disarmament, and ultimately the abolishing of the state itself as an instrument of violence and compulsion. I seek social ownership of property, the abolition of the propertied class, and sole control by those who produce wealth. Communism is the goal.” - Roger Baldwin, founder of the ACLU.

November 11th, 2008

The governor of Arizona cleared his throat and addressed the mass of cameras in front of him.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your time. I have called this press conference to notify the public that under the Eminent Domain laws reinforced by the Supreme Court in 2005, I have been in contact with the commissioners from all the border counties in Arizona, to work out a massive new state park plan. This park will be unlike anything ever implemented before. This is new ground, and merely reinforces the fact that boundaries really only exist in the human imagination.

“God created this world for *all* of us; not a few select individuals who can afford to purchase a piece of the Lord’s world. It’s time to share our natural resources with those who are less fortunate than us; those who had the misfortune to be born into a country of poverty; where they cannot even afford to live beyond the status of a pauper. No one is born any differently than anyone else, so why should some of us have more than anyone else? This is not fair. Everyone should have the same opportunities and rewards in life. Everyone should be able to reap the fruits of success.

“Under the revised law of 2005, local approval must accompany any private use of the Eminent Domain laws. This applies to a private corporation that wishes to have property condemned for a business purpose, such as a strip mall or home center. However, a statewide emergency plan or any project that benefits the State or conserves the State, requires state approval *only*. Therefore, we could have and should have, instated this plan years ago!

“I have met with the county commissioners to advise them that the State of Arizona is creating an international peace park, to extend from our border with California to the west, across through Yuma, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Cochise counties, to the New Mexico border on the east, with the exception of the Papago Indian Reservation, which of course, is exempt from all local, State, and Federal jurisdiction. The park will also skirt any military bases and National Wildlife Refuges. I did not, under Eminent Domain laws, even need to approach the affected counties of this new park, but I did so out of friendship and courtesy.

“This new park, named the Dos Amigos International Peace Park, for our two countries, will extend from the Mexican border, north to the I-10. All land within that area will be declared part of the park, and any citizen of either country is free to enter it at any

time, with absolutely no proof of identity or citizenship. This is after all, a peace park, not a discrimination park

“With this new tool of peace and friendship, both of our countries may now enjoy unrestricted access to this portion of our new, soon-to-be, single country. I realize that many of you will be displaced, but so must be the sacrifice for the greater good of our future. Since international borders will soon drop with the Free Trade Area of the Americas, we will have a single country that spans from the Arctic Ocean to the tip of South America, and covers two continents. We have taken this step here in Arizona in advance of legislation which is still years down the road, to extend our hospitality to our brothers and sisters to the south.

“Because of the size of this project, we cannot afford to give you tax value for your property, but we will give you all apartments in Phoenix at very reasonable costs to you. I understand that this may be difficult to accept, but it is for the good of our people. The needs of the many exceed the needs of the few. This is of course is the purpose of Eminent Domain, and why it was created in the first place. We will give the people involved, one hundred twenty days to comply with this measure. After that, they will be removed with force if need be.

“I urge the governors of the three remaining border states to enact similar measures in the name of peace with our neighbors to the south. The time has come to share our resources with them, and they with us. I welcome our friends to America, and for those of you watching tonight, I ask you to welcome them as well. This is the beginning of a wonderful new era in our evolution; we will come together as one. Good night.”

“Governor!” several voices shouted, in order to ask questions for the television audience. “Governor! What can you tell us about...?”

The governor quickly left the room without answering any questions, as a loud chorus of boos quickly rose to a roar. Even the Leftist journalists realized the travesty of justice that had just taken place.

In Cochise County, Fred Corbin stared at his television in disbelief. Tears began to fill his eyes as the enormity of the situation began to sink in. His father had given him the ranch where he spent his entire life. There was nowhere else he could go; nowhere else he *would* go. This was *home*.

“They’ll never take this ranch from me.” he vowed to the television screen. “I’ll kill them first. They can’t just come here and steal my land! This is *my* land! How can they just take it?”

He was startled by a knock on his front door. Fred reached over and picked up the Springfield 1911 he kept on the coffee table before heading cautiously for the door. Jason St. John was standing on the porch, as he peered through the curtain of the living room window. Fred opened the door and silently motioned for his neighbor to enter. One look at Jason’s face, and Fred knew he had just witnessed the revelation as well.

“We fight.” Fred responded to the unasked question.

Jason nodded.

“I agree. They’re going to kill us, but we’ll take a lot of them with us. Another Ruby Ridge or Waco, but maybe this time the public will stand with us.

“This is so wrong, Fred! This is our country, our land, and they are taking it from us to give the Mexicans a place to freely enter this country! It’s like a nightmare.”

"The kind you can't wake up from." Fred agreed. "We have four months to prepare. We'll need to set up in centralized locations and strategic places where we can defend the area from above. If worse come to worse, we can hole up in the Cochise Stronghold or even Karchner Caverns."

"If it gets that bad," Jason said doggedly, "we'll torch it. Set fire to the entire range. They might get it, but no one will enjoy it when we're finished."

"You do realize this is only the beginning." Fred mused, as he retrieved an AK47 rifle from a cabinet in the living room and began loading thirty round magazines for it. After us, it'll be California, New Mexico, and Texas. Who knows how big this 'park' will end up being."

"They're going to bring cholera, dysentery, smallpox, and even the bubonic plague into this country!" Jason burst out. "We have no immunity to that anymore. Don't they know what that will do to us?"

A chill suddenly swept over Fred, as he picked up on something in Jason's remark.

"Oh my god." he said softly. "I think they do. That may be the entire purpose of their plan."

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"Arizona's implemented their own version of the Wildlands Project, Sir." Jeff Goldstein remarked, as he dropped some papers on the president's desk. "Looks like they're going to designate about one sixth of the state as some kind of international peace park with Mexico."

"Where do they get off doing that?" the president inquired. "Now it's going to look like we copied them when we implement the real thing."

"Um, the governor is urging the rest of the border states to do the same thing." Jeff added.

"What?"

"Apparently, they've worked out their own deal with the Mexican and Central American governments." Jeff explained, indicating the sheaf of papers he had deposited on the large mahogany desk. "The park will essentially become a new Mexican state; their dream of Aztlan realized. It will drastically reduce some of the overcrowding in the poorer areas. In return for the expansion, Arizona and the others that go along with it will get access to inexpensive light sweet crude from Tabasco."

"What is this crap?" the president demanded.

"There is also a rumor that they will divert water from the All American Canal or the Salton Sea, back into the Colorado River, so that Baja California will get water instead of a dead river that dries up in the desert." Jeff continued. "They seem to be setting up the prelude to an independent state."

"Why, that backstabbing bastard!" the president burst out. "An independent state? Who does he think he is? That's part of our nation."

"I wouldn't worry about it, Mr. President." Jeff said lightly.

"Why not?" the president barked.

"It will help to get the people used to the bigger picture, when it happens across the board. We can do it in stages as well. In fact, it will make the relocation much easier. We won't need that part of the country anyway. It will still be designated as No Man's Land."

Only thing that might be out there are some lions and cheetahs. They'll probably migrate south into Sonora anyway. There'll be more food down there."

The president glared at his aide.

"When it happens, the survivors will be more than happy to relocate."

"The sur--"

"Never mind," the president snapped. "There are some things you still don't know about this master control plan of yours. How do you expect the relocation of the entire state of Is--"

He was interrupted by the sound of his intercom buzzing.

"Mr. President, Justice Stephens is here."

"Send him in."

He looked across his desk at Jeff, and motioned with his head in the direction of the door to the Oval Office.

"You tell your uncle not to worry about this. It won't affect the big picture at all. You're a good kid, Jeff. How would you like to be an Urban Director?"

"Urban Director would make a good retirement position; directing the enforcers to keep all the sheeple in line, but I want to be a Population Controller first." Jeff stated emphatically. "My grandfather died in Treblinka. I'd love to return the favor one day. Six million is nothing compared to three hundred million. What comes around goes around. Payback's a bitch."

An evil grin spread across his face.

"Life's a conundrum sometimes isn't it, Mr. President?"

"What kind of a drum?"

*

"Da."

"Well hello, Georgie." Matt Cooper greeted his son.

George Washington Cooper was already two years old and speaking fragmented sentences. It didn't seem like so much time had passed since Gayle had given birth. It seemed that in no time at all, Matt would be seeing his son graduate from college. How the time flew when you had a place to call home, a beautiful wife, and a young child to occupy it.

"Hi Da'y." Georgie responded.

He tottered over to the small, longhaired tuxedo cat curled up on a braided rug in front of the black wood burning stove. The cat lazily opened one eye as the boy sat down next to her.

"Hi Coo'ie." he greeted the cat.

Cootie yawned and pretended to pay no attention to the boy as he petted her, but she began purring happily in response. She was a very lovable cat, and Matt had needed to keep her sequestered from his son for most of the time until recently. The small cat loved to lay on Matt or Gayle's chest and go to sleep; a friendly gesture toward an adult, but potentially lethal for an infant. Unable to breathe under the weight of a sleeping cat, many infants had died over the years; killed literally, by love.

George was now big enough to overcome the weight of the tiny, five-pound cat should she climb on him, and spent as much time with her as he could. He would sometimes playfully pull her tail as most young children will do, which resulted in much

loud protesting and an occasional hiss from the cat, but she never showed any real aggression toward the small boy.

A knock on the kitchen door diverted Matt's attention from his son, and he arose to answer it. His friend from a neighboring farm, Martin "Charlie" Davidson, had dropped by to accompany him on the ride into town. With gasoline and diesel at well over four dollars a gallon, many small farmers simply could not afford to get supplies as often as they needed, and tractor use was kept to a minimum. Sometimes, a group would get together and drag a trailer behind the pickup to make it literally a community event, reminiscent of times long in the past. Everyone would chip in a portion for gas, keeping operating expenses for the trip to a minimum, while enjoying time together to chat in the back of the particular farmer's pickup or hay trailer.

Today was Matt's turn to drive, and it would be the first time that George would be going with him.

"Come on in, Charlie." Matt greeted his neighbor, as Gayle appeared from the basement with a basket of wet laundry destined for the clothesline to the side of the small farmhouse. "Rode Hellion over, I see."

Charlie nodded. Like many who owned farms or ranches, he also owned horses, and in the increasingly expensive age of fuel, most country dwellers had once again begun riding horses for local errands and visiting. Almost every house in the country had a watering trough and a group of hitching posts or a hitching rail at either the front or back door. Matt and Gayle's house was no exception, and Matt left a patch of uncut grass around the trough for visiting guests' horses to feed upon for short visits. For an all day visit or ride into town, the horses were turned loose in the pasture or boarded in the red barn out back if the weather was less than cordial.

"Hi Charlie." Gayle greeted her neighbor, as she slipped by with the laundry. "How's Lisa?"

"Just fine, thank you." Charlie replied. "Little one should be arriving in about four months."

"It'll change her forever," Gayle remarked as the screen door slapped shut behind her, "but it's a good change."

Matt closed the door behind her. The November day was unusually warm for this time of year, but chilly nonetheless. The stove was easily taking the chill from the air inside the kitchen and living room, and saving Matt from having to turn the furnace on. The ten acres of hardwoods on the property afforded him some of his firewood, due to sensible harvesting, and he often traded a weekend of labor with Johnny Bartlett for the rest at some point in the season.

Johnny had a modest farm of some two hundred, fifty acres, and no less than sixty of those acres were wooded. Bartering was commonplace in the rural areas of the country, and specialized farmers would often exchange their crops or livestock, for whatever others in the area had. Instead of growing individual gardens, many simply swapped corn for tomatoes, or potatoes for squash.

Johnny raised cattle; some for beef, and others for his dairying business. Matt usually let Johnny have a portion of his corn plants for silage after he harvested the ears. In return, Johnny would give Matt a side of beef, and a few cords of standing wood; Matt only needed to cut it down and drag it home, where he would cut, split, and stack it. The

remainder of the corn plants, Matt used to make grain alcohol, not for drinking, but to mix with gasoline for fuel.

All in all, the community acted like a community, not like the cesspools that most cities and large towns had degraded into. People in the country were adaptable, and counted on one another to get by and make their lives as convenient as possible in an increasingly difficult and expensive world. Before long, communities like Matt's would probably sequester themselves from general civilization, as they seemed to do as well if not better.

Charlie sat down, and Matt brought him a cup and a pot of coffee.

"That'll warm the chill from my bones." Charlie remarked, as he took a sip of coffee. "That stove is cheery too. I got busy with other things this summer and never got around to splitting my wood yet. It's okay though, Lisa and I have been keeping warm at night, no worries there."

Matt laughed.

"That's why she's got that bubble in the belly, eh?"

"Nah," Charlie replied good-naturedly, "that was Independence Day. Sex with fireworks, you know."

Matt blew coffee through his nose as he tried to hold back his laughter.

"Let's get that horse of yours out to pasture," he said, as he wiped his face with a napkin. "Denny and Bob should be here shortly. Georgie's coming with us too."

He looked at his son, who was still playing with the cat.

"Come on, Georgie. Get your coat on and come out to the barn. We'll be leaving shortly."

"Okay, Da'y." George replied. "Bye, Coo'ie."

"Mrrp." the cat replied lazily, stretching in the warmth of the Vermont Castings stove, before drowsing off again.

The two men exited the house, and Matt breathed in the aroma of the hardwood smoke that wafted across the yard.

"Damn, Charlie. There's nothing better in this world, than living in the country and smelling the smells of simple living."

"No doubt about that." Charlie agreed, as he led his horse to the galvanized steel gate of the pasture.

He gazed at the sky and frowned.

"Damn chemtrails. They usually stop this time of year."

"Huh?" Matt inquired. "What are you talking about?"

"Chemtrails, Matt. Look at those contrails. They're one right after the other. They aren't normal jet contrails."

"What are they, then?" Matt inquired curiously.

Charlie was a bit of a conspiracy theorist and a definite gun nut. While Matt was sometimes skeptical of Charlie's theories, he had to admit that his friend almost always had evidence to back his claims up.

"Chemtrails. A normal contrail will dissipate in a few seconds to a few minutes, because it's nothing but water vapor. A chemtrail is petroleum based or in powder form, and contains some pretty scary stuff."

"Like what?"

“Aluminum powder, chemicals, toxins, even white blood cells have been found in them. Some contain polymers that can kill you and most of the stuff is carcinogenic.”

Matt was intrigued.

“What do you think it is?”

“The military started experimenting with them back in the 50’s.” Charlie explained. “They dumped aluminum powder into the air to act as a huge antenna to transmit radio broadcasts across the country. It made people sick too. Gave people all kinds of breathing problems. They’re still going on today. In any city that experiences a chemtrail attack, and make no mistake, these are attacks against the civilian population, the number of hospital admittances for respiratory ailments increases exponentially. They try and blame it on the ozone. That’s why they try and keep everyone inside under false red warnings. Don’t want them breathing certain kinds of chemtrails. It’s sick, Matt.”

“My personal feeling is that the military noticed this and began experimenting with different compounds, to use as a possible delivery system for chemical or even biological agents. I think the private sector has jumped on the bandwagon as well. It’s a lot cheaper and easier to dump bio waste than to incinerate it. Instead of dumping it in the river, they just dump it in the sky now. It’s a billion dollar a year industry, but no one can pinpoint what is going on or who is profiting from it.

“Couple years back, this big white blob fell out of the sky in Washington State. No one could figure out what it was but it made those that went near it, sick as hell. My guess is it was the concentrated ingredients of a chemtrail that got dumped accidentally; all at once, instead of being dispersed with the delivery agents. Had a big thing on TV about it, on one of those mystery shows. People suspected the military was involved, but they never would admit anything. Surprising, huh?”

“But how can you tell which is which?” Matt inquired.

“For the average Joe, you need to look at the makeup of a genuine contrail.” Charlie explained. “Look at that one. See how it dissipates about twenty seconds behind the plane?”

“Yeah.”

“Look at this one here.” Charlie said, indicating to another point in the sky. “All it’s doing is spreading. It won’t go away. It’ll get wider and wider, and more and more diluted, until a whole section of the sky is a hazy cloud. Contrails don’t do that, because they’re nothing but water vapor. Aluminum powder doesn’t evaporate; it just hangs there and blows across the sky. Tomorrow, there will be a light dusting of silvery powder on everything out here, but it will only show up on dark paint, like a black car.

“Usually, they’ll be in lines or even a grid pattern. Those are the ones that are more than simple bio waste dumping. It’s deliberate. As far away as we are from Lousyville, they drift this way sometimes when the air currents reverse. If they ever become commonplace out here, we’ll be in big trouble.”

Charlie wasn’t terribly fond of the large city located some one hundred miles in a straight line to the southeast, and commonly referred to the home of the Kentucky Derby, as “Lousyville.”

“I’m used to identifying them so I have no trouble, but for the novice there’s an easier way.”

“What’s that?” Matt inquired curiously.

“Polarized shades.” Charlie responded, removing his sunglasses and handing them to Matt. “Put these on.”

Matt removed his own sunglasses and donned those of his friend and neighbor. He let out a gasp as the “contrails” in the sky above him suddenly took on a different personality. The true contrails were white, just as they appeared to the naked eye, but the ones that Charlie had pointed out had a rainbow hue to them and were easily discernable from the others.

“Those are aluminum powder.” Charlie explained. “It’s used to reflect sunlight back into space and combat global warming. The other ones don’t rainbow like that, but they’re still obviously not simple contrails.”

“I’ll be damned!” Matt exclaimed. “How’d you find out about this?”

Charlie winked.

“Computer.”

“We can’t live totally in the 1800’s out here. Gotta maintain a lifeline to the times. I’ve found the plans for something called an orgone generator that’s supposed to break them up too. If they ever start dumping that crap over us on a regular basis, I’m going to build one. I can get everything I need for about a hundred and fifty bucks at the hardware store and the automotive supply house, except for some crystals. Any head shop in Lousyville should have those, though.”

He was interrupted by a shouted greeting from across the yard. He and Matt turned to see Denny Cartman and Bob English pulling around the house in a horse drawn wagon that belonged to Bob.



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Chemtrails spread across the sky above Matt and Charlie’s farms

“Carpooling, eh?” Matt inquired good-naturedly, as the pair pulled up alongside the “playpen for the animals,” as Matt called it, on the house side of the barn.

“Yippee.” Denny replied. “Hay’s going for three cents a mouthful at the pump now.”

Charlie burst out laughing, and extended his hand to his neighbors, as they descended from the wagon. There was a certain air of camaraderie between the neighbors, who somehow knew that the present was past, and the past was destined to be the future.

“Unhitch the team, and put ‘em in the playpen.” Matt instructed. “I have the trailer hooked up to the pickup, and we’re all ready to go.”

“Sounds good.” Bob replied, as he freed the horses from the wagon and escorted them into the small arena that Matt had set aside for neighboring animals to graze without disturbing his own animals.

“You guys want any coffee before we head out?” Matt inquired.

“I’m good.” Denny responded.

“Me too.” Bob added. “Let’s get going.”

“Come on, Georgie!” Matt called out. “We’re leaving!”

His son hastened his pace, as he walked across the yard toward his father. Gayle waved at her husband from the clothesline, where she putting up the last of the morning’s laundry in the weak November sun.

Matt climbed into the cab of his 1969 Ford pickup, and George and Charlie joined him in the front seat. Bob and Denny climbed into the bed of the white pickup, and Matt headed for the road into the town of Washington, dragging the hay trailer behind the antique truck.

“Well, Georgie,” Matt exclaimed, clamping his hand on his tot’s leg, “you get to ride into town with your dad and see what life is like when we get supplies from the outside.”

“It’s like a movie.” Charlie cut in, looking at young George intently and shaking his head. “The kind that has no plot. I wish you could have seen what it was like when we lived in an ascending society, instead of a declining one, George.”

April 25th, 2009

“My fellow Americans,” the fledgling forty-fourth president of the United States greeted the captive television audience, “I am proud to announce that today, our Senate voted on and passed, the Free Trade Area of the Americas. I am confident that the House will also pass this important piece of legislation so that I may sign it into law. This is a huge stepping stone for the future of this nation, and for possibly, the entire world. Let me explain:

“For those of you who do not know what the FTAA is, it is the continuation of NAFTA and CAFTA, to also encompass the continent of South America. This will combine North and South America into one huge free trade zone; the likes of which the world has never before seen. International borders will basically cease to exist. People will be free to migrate wherever there are jobs, and it will enable manufacturing facilities to relocate to areas where the cost of labor is much cheaper. Also, it will bring cheaper labor here, reducing the need for artificially expensive pay scales. By bringing in competition, companies can circumvent labor unions and end the need to pay so much money to anyone.

“This is the European Union on steroids. It will effectively turn the entire Western Hemisphere into a giant EU; a place where free trade can exist with no restrictions across two continents! In other words, we will have one huge country, where borders do not exist; and people are free to move about without passports or other identification. We can employ cheap labor from points south, to boost our failing economy. Think of the implications this can have for capitalism.”

“Mr. President!” David Kendall called out.

After his dismissal from the Louisville TV station, David had managed to land a position as a freelance reporter with a global satellite news agency, and he now traveled around the world on assignment. Covering such an event was now typical of his job.

“Mr. President!” David called again.

This time, the newly elected president acknowledged the reporter.

“Yes David?”

“What will happen to the Americans who already hold these jobs? This seems like a good deal for third-world nations, but what about the United States, where we have a standard of living that far surpasses that of Central and South America?

“What will happen to the millions of jobs that Americans hold, when corporations are able to bypass the federal minimum wage and pay a Guatemalan twenty-five cents per hour, instead of a North Carolinian ten dollars an hour? It seems to me that this will not benefit capitalism, but instead create monopolies that capitalists cannot hope to compete against. Isn’t there a distinct possibility that this may cause a new depression on a hemispheric scale?”

The president glared at the reporter and whispered something into the ear of a suit-wearing gentleman standing next to him before answering. The man exited the stage as the president responded to David’s question.

“I don’t foresee that happening at all, David.” the president replied smoothly. “In fact, this will bolster our economy by allowing cheap labor on this end, while relocating Americans to points south, to act as management over Central and South American corporations. I see no danger of any kind of economic depression. I only see fear of the unknown.”

The camera panned to another reporter, and David found himself being dragged away once again, this time by Secret Service agents who although they had no legal right to arrest him, detained him long enough to get his personal information, including his address and worst of all, his Social Security Number. One week later, David Kendall would find himself audited by the Internal Revenue Service. As he was finding out the hard way, it sometimes just didn’t pay to uncover the truth.

*

Jason St. John scanned the valley floor with powerful binoculars for signs of movement from high atop a spire in Chiricahua National Monument. Something caught his attention and he zoomed in on the location. A group of perhaps fifteen Mexicans had set up camp on their way to points further north, most likely Tucson. Jason was in the monument scouting for a bug-out to retreat to when the hired guns came the following month to force him and his friends from their homes.

They would fight; agents would certainly be killed, and it was distinctly possible that he would be as well, but it was the principal of the entire thing. It was also possible that

no one would be sent, and anyone who remained would be at the mercy of the roving hordes of aliens that would overrun the area. Chances were, there weren't enough officials in the state of Arizona willing to enforce the new ruling, let alone chance being caught by the very people they were inviting into their state.

Rage suddenly filled Jason at the thought of being forced from his land; rage at an illegal government and rage at a group of people that had been ruining his life for decades. He slipped the bolt action .308 from his shoulder and sighted the crosshairs of the riflescope on one of the figures below.

Jason took a deep breath and slowly exhaled as he gently applied pressure to the trigger. The rifle kicked against his shoulder as the figure fell forward. The group scattered, milling about in every direction, uncertain from where the shot had come.

Jason ejected the spent cartridge and chambered another.

"This is my home," he said quietly, as he aligned the scope on a second figure and squeezed the trigger. "This is my country, and my land. You want to take it from the natives; you die for it like my forefathers did two hundred years ago."

With nowhere to hide, Jason's wrath picked the group off one by one like fish in a barrel. In less than ten minutes, it was finished. Jason took a deep breath and began to realize what he had just done. His fingers shakily extracted a pack of cigarettes from the breast pocket of his flannel shirt and he lit a cigarette, taking a drag and inhaling the smoke to calm his nerves. After several minutes, he slung the rifle back across his shoulder and mounted the ATV he had ridden into the remote badlands. As he approached the area where the Illegals had been, Jason once again took the rifle from his shoulder. His attention had been drawn to a moving figure in his peripheral vision.

Jason gave the machine throttle and approached the fleeing figure at high speed, sticking his foot out and striking the invader squarely in the back and knocking him flat on his face. He jumped from the ATV and planted the muzzle of the rifle directly against the man's forehead.

A small amount of blood stained the Mexican's shirt where the bullet had grazed his side, but he seemed to be alright, other than that.

"Lucky you weren't a cougar," Jason remarked casually. "That shot would have gotten someone else killed."

The border jumper swallowed loudly, as Jason kept the rifle pressed firmly against his head.

"*No hablo inglés.*" he said in a raspy voice. "*Se habla español?*"

"*No se habla español aquí pero se sabe disparar los rifles.*" (no one here speaks Spanish, but they do know how to shoot rifles) Jason said curtly. "*A los blancos aquí no les gustan los mexicanos. Largate ya.*" (the white people here don't like Mexicans. Get out of here now).

"*S-si, Señor.*" the man stammered.

Jason removed the rifle barrel from the trembling man's face and motioned for him to get up.

"*Largate ya!*"

With wide eyes, the Mestizo backed up, then turned and broke into a run.

“Se les dispararan a los intrusos!” (trespassers will be shot) Jason shouted after him, firing the rifle into the air. *“No hay nada aquí que vale tu vida!”* (there is nothing here worth your life).

“No Señor!”

Jason leapt back onto the ATV and lit out for his pickup truck. He ran the machine into the bed and headed for his ranch forty miles to the south. An hour and a half later he screeched to a dusty halt in Fred Corbin’s front yard.

“What the hell?” Fred muttered, as he hurried out the door to greet his neighbor.

One look at Jason told him something was wrong.

“What happened? Did you find a place up in Chiricahua?”

“I didn’t have a chance. I saw a bunch of Mexicans down in the valley and I got pissed off. I wasn’t thinking straight.”

“What did you do?”

“I just went off and took them out.”

“What? How many?”

“Fifteen.”

“Jesus, Jason. Did you check on them?”

“I got them all except one. I nicked him. I caught up to him and I gave him a message, and sent him on his way.”

“You did what?” Fred hollered incredulously. “What in the hell for?”

“I wanted him to spread the word.”

“He’ll spread it, alright. And the goddamned authorities will come here looking for whoever did it. We need to find him, Jason.”

“I guess I wasn’t thinking.”

“I guess not. Doesn’t matter now; the damage’s been done. We need to fix it now. That’s what’s important. Mount up. It’ll be like looking for a needle in a haystack, but we need to find him.”

The pair headed north in Jason’s pickup, stopping occasionally to scan the open desert with binoculars. Fred finally located a small target about five miles in the distance, moving in their direction.

“That way.” he instructed, lowering the binoculars and pointing. “I hope the hell it’s him.”

Several minutes later, they approached the figure. It was indeed, Jason’s quarry.

“Alto!” Fred shouted out the window at the man.

He placed his hands atop his head, and Fred looked intently at his friend.

“It’s your mess Jason; you fix it. You know what to do.”

Jason removed the .308 from the rifle rack in the rear window and pointed it at the alien, who crossed himself and muttered something incoherent. The sound of the shot echoed across the desert plains, as the man dropped to the buff-colored alkaline dirt.

“Better get used to it.” Fred stated grimly, as Jason pressed his foot to the floor and cut the wheel, leaving a rooster tail of beige dust arcing high into the dry air behind them. “We may not have started it, and we may not even finish it, but we’ll do our damndest to fight for what’s ours until we die.”

CHAPTER 3

“I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of the freedom of the people by gradual silent encroachments of those in power, than by violent and sudden usurpations.” - James Madison.

September 2nd, 2010

“Stay tuned for the latest on Hurricane Josephine.” the weatherman reported, as the channel faded to a commercial.

Roy Guilbault watched, as the weather coverage came back on and showed the powerful hurricane’s track as it rounded the Florida Keys. Already a Category 4 storm, with winds at one hundred, forty-seven miles per hour, it still had to cross the warm waters of the Gulf, which was certain to intensify its strength even more.

At over five hundred miles across, the hurricane was huge and reminiscent of Katrina five years previously, which had struck the Crescent City almost head-on. The projection cone of the storm’s possible path was still extremely wide, as it had still not completely cleared Florida, but New Orleans was well within the area of a possible strike.

“No sense in worrying about it yet.” Roy thought, as he turned the television off. *“May as well go to bed and check on it in the morning.”*

When he switched the television on the following morning, Roy was stunned to see the hurricane’s winds up to a staggering one hundred, eighty-seven miles per hour. It was also slowing, although continuing to grow in strength. Not only would it fuel the monster even more, when it struck land, a slow-moving storm would dump more rain and cause extensive flooding regardless of where it was. If this one hit New Orleans as well, it would make Katrina look like a thunderstorm. Much of the city was still in a shambles from Katrina, and some parts still had buildings waiting to be torn down.

“This isn’t good.” Roy mumbled to himself. “If this one comes here, I’m not staying this time.”

He had taken the insurance money from the loss of his house in Metairie and purchased some acreage in Montana, outside of Kalispell. A father and son contracting company had erected a log shell and dried it in for him. Roy had spent his past two vacations at the cabin, working on some of the interior projects, and planned to move there when he retired in another three years. He had found an inexpensive apartment in the meantime, and had most of his belongings packed into a utility trailer in a storage facility.

Not one to be taken off guard twice for the same mistake, this was the main reason he had everything but basic necessities in the little apartment. He could probably pack the remainder of his important possessions and clothes into the back of his aging Bronco in a few hours.

“Clothes and guns first.” Roy muttered, as he began to drag suitcases from the closet.

He was soaked in perspiration, as he crammed the remaining space on the seat next to him with a box of books and the dishes he had just washed in the sink.

Roy turned the radio on that he had set off to the side while packing, and tuned it to the NOAA weather frequency. Winds were now at one hundred, ninety-two miles per hour, and the governors of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana were already calling for evacuations in preparation of landfall. Regardless of where it hit, all four states would be affected to a certain degree, and no one wanted to take any chances, although most people are quick to forget.

Roy knocked on his neighbor's door, and Mark Boudreaux answered.

"Have you seen the latest projection?" Roy inquired.

Mark nodded.

"Seen you packing up," he said, as he backed away from the door and motioned for Roy to enter his apartment. "I got it set on the weather channel. Packed your TV up did you?"

"Yeah. I'm leaving. I'm not sticking around for this again. I won't get my full retirement, but I'll get something. Something's better than nothing. Jesus, would you look at the path they're showing!"

"It's getting narrower and narrower," Mark commented. And for the most part, it looks like dead center of that cone is over Terrebonne Parish. If we catch the right side of a Category 5, it'll look like an atomic bomb went off here. Every levee will let go, and we'll have Lake Pontchartrain, the Mississippi River, and half the Gulf flowing in. Those kinds of winds will take at least some of the taller buildings down, let alone the houses, if they don't flood first. I think I'm gonna pack some stuff together and head for my sister's place in Tennessee."

"Sounds like a smart idea," Roy replied. "Whereabouts?"

"Morristown. It's north of Knoxville."

"Sounds like a safe place to be," Roy agreed. "You be safe. I'm going to call my sergeant and tell him I'm on my way over to sign my resignation. Gonna hook up the trailer and make tracks for Kalispell."

"It's a safe bet we'll never see each other again, Roy," Mark said slowly, as he stuck his hand out. "You take care of yourself."

"You too," Roy replied as he shook his neighbor's hand firmly. "Make sure you get those kids of yours to safety."

Two hours later, Roy backed under the utility trailer he had stored at a self-storage facility, and cranked the landing gear up. He hooked his wiring harness together and quickly checked his turn signals.

Roy flexed his right hand and winced slightly. It still hurt from the altercation he had with his captain when he turned in his resignation. Captain Jackson had called him a cowardly cracker, and in return Roy had called him an incompetent nigger. His former superior had taken a swing at him and Roy had returned the favor by dropping him with a hard right to the jaw. The captain would probably take a warrant out on him, but with over twenty witnesses, it would never stick.

One thing that neither Roy nor the captain knew, however, was that in less than eighteen hours, every record that ever existed in New Orleans would be destroyed.

Roy merged onto I-10 and headed west, toward I-55. Traffic was heavy, but still moving, and Roy was thankful that he had made the decision to leave when he did. Driving north on I-55, Roy passed between Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas, and looked at them for what would be the last time in his life. By the time Josephine had passed through twenty-four hours later, both of the lakes and the area formerly known as New Orleans, would be part of the Gulf of Mexico, with the Mississippi River jumping its banks and flowing directly into the new bay at Metairie.

September 4th, 2010

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States.”

The president stepped up to the podium and cleared his throat.

“It is with tremendous sadness that I stand here before you tonight and extend my condolences to the family members of the dead and missing in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

“Earlier this afternoon, I flew over New Orleans in Marine One, and I was devastated by what I saw. The city no longer exists. I don’t mean it has been destroyed, I mean there is nothing there. The buildings are gone, and it is now part of the Gulf of Mexico. Outside of the downtown area, the devastation continues in all directions, from as far west as Lafayette, to Pensacola, Florida, and north almost into Tennessee near Memphis.

“Josephine struck land with almost two hundred mile per hour sustained winds, and gusts that topped two hundred, twenty-five miles per hour. Never in the history of this world, has there been a storm of such epic proportions to strike a populated area.

“We will send in help the best that we can, but please understand the enormity of this situation. Due to the astronomical costs of this storm, and those of storms in the past, I have temporarily passed by executive order, the Natural Disasters Act, which I will put before Congress to vote into law as well.

“The Natural Disasters Act states that henceforth, any natural disaster such as a hurricane, flood, tornado, fire, volcanic eruption, earthquake or tsunami that causes the destruction of homes or businesses will be final. Rebuilding will not be allowed in these areas. The costs absorbed by the people of this country because of the carelessness of people who insist on building in flood or lava zones are staggering.

“Some of you have been warned for decades that you live in a dangerous area, yet you still expect help and rescue when it gets you into trouble. This is the last time the federal government will send aid for a natural disaster.

“These areas of destruction will be condemned. After they have dried out, they will be burned to rid the countryside of disease and rubble. Boundaries will then be set and these areas will become part of the Wildlands Project, a new park system designed to restore green space to our overly-citified nation.

“We have been destroying Mother Nature for too long, and she is beginning to fight back. Every time she does from here on out, she will win. It is my hope that through sustainable development - the Wildlands Project and Smart Growth - that we can begin to rebalance our existence on this planet.

“We will begin the construction of seventeen urban areas where people can migrate if their homes are destroyed. These urban areas will be located in regions of the country where the threat of natural catastrophes is minimal and the climate is the most balanced.

Part of sustainable development is the realization that certain modern conveniences are not sustainable to our environment.

“Under the Natural Disasters Act, sustainable development will become mandatory over a ten year period. We will show you how to control your diet and live without such things as air conditioning. Recycling will become mandatory, as it is crucial to sustainable development. Conservation will also be implemented.

“If we are to continue living in harmony on this planet, then we must not be a cancer on this earth. We must leave room for nature.

“No questions; no comments. Good night.”

Roy stared in utter disbelief at the television screen. He was spending the night in Sioux City, Iowa, after having driven all night and all day since his escape from New Orleans. He was exhausted, but wanted to see the destruction for himself. All day long, he had been hearing reports on the radio as he passed through different areas, that the Big Easy was now transformed into the Big Bay, but could not believe it. Now, as he stared at the aerial photos of Metairie, he clearly saw that the only structure remaining was the Superdome, and it was now submerged and located almost a half mile offshore in the new bay.

“How in the hell can he just declare parts of four states to be off limits to rebuildin’?” Roy mused. “Who the hell died and made him God?”

Roy struggled to absorb the enormity of what he had just seen, and worst of all, heard. The concept of the forcible mass relocation of entire cities and towns was astonishing. How could the president be so pompous to declare this so? What was wrong with the people if they actually allowed it to happen? Worse yet, what would happen if they resisted? Roy had a sinking feeling that this was only the beginning of things much worse to come, and that the new urban areas would be nothing short of glorified concentration camps.

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Back in Arizona, in the now Dos Amigos International Peace Park, Fred and Jason had stood their ground when the official park designation was declared. It had been four months, and most of the ranchers had refused to leave. As Jason had speculated atop the pinnacle when he ambushed the Mexicans, no one had come through to enforce an evacuation. Those that stayed were basically on their own, and finding agents brave enough to enter the area to investigate reports of insurrection along the border was nearly impossible.

The Ransons over at the Bar R Ranch had seen a jeep with three such brave agents in the beginning of August, and a shot through the engine block from Billy Ranson’s .50 rifle had stopped the agents cold in their tracks. Their MP5s had no range to them, and three well-aimed shots from Bobby Ranson’s scoped .270 had ensured they never reported the incident. Since then, no other law enforcement of any kind had ventured out. Rather than a park, the area was now a No Man’s Land, where everyone was the law, and no one was safe. Locals had even taken to posting the south side of I-10 with “Rule of Law Ends” signs, as a warning to anyone who might venture off the highway on secondary roads, such as Sybil Road outside of Benson, that had formerly acted as a shortcut down to St. David.

Ranchers had taken to shooting anything that moved on their property, or in the distance if it was identified as Mexican, but still the invaders kept coming. With no border enforcement to stop them, the brown tide flowed along interstates 19 and 10; eastward toward Lordsburg and Las Cruces, and north and west into Tucson, Phoenix, and San Diego.

California, New Mexico, and Texas had all declined participation in the park, and had set up their own border patrols at the state lines, along with Utah and Nevada. For all intents and purposes, Arizona had become a Mexican state with US jurisdiction.

"Be getting dark soon." Jason remarked, as he looked toward the setting sun.

For the first month, things had been rough. Roving gangs of Illegals had swarmed the area, and Jason and Fred had killed no less than two hundred, fifty between them as they attempted to gain entry into their houses or compounds. Word had finally spread for them to use other avenues, and in the past month and a half, they had only had to shoot seven. Most were now simply walking straight up I-19 into Tucson and avoiding the outlying areas altogether.

The ranchers had taken to group supply runs like Matt Cooper and his neighbors had. They would drive into Willcox for fuel and supplies, and to trade beef for those supplies, and sometimes, cash. The new "border towns" were very sympathetic to the ranchers that had stayed, and did whatever they could to help them get by. The law of supply and demand however, was not particularly in the ranchers' favor, and it was only a matter of time before they ran out of stock faster than they could replenish it. At that point, they would have useless land that they had never been reimbursed for to buy more elsewhere. Steve Olson was close to that point, and vowed to pay the governor a visit when he ran out of options.

If that line of thought had been employed fifty years earlier - if every time a politician or judge who had taken away the freedom or liberty from a person or group of people lost his life - the United States would not be in the trouble it now found itself immersed in.

This lesson had been dealt severely to Judge Joan Lefkow after the kangaroo court conviction of alleged White supremacist Matt Hale in 2005, but the message had not been received by the rest of the country, and thus the slide down the slippery slope had continued. Now, it was too late.

June 6th, 2012

Roy Guilbault sat on the deck of his modest log cabin and gazed westward down the valley toward Wolf Mountain and admired the vivid sunset, as the bright red orb sank behind the Bitterroot Range. He was near the Lincoln/Flathead county line, a half mile off a dirt road, and about twenty miles following the dirt road, from Marion. He felt rather secure from the outside world, as he listened to his satellite TV through the screen door. The cabin was powered by a solar array on the roof; silicone cells powered a bank of batteries which in turn powered a few appliances in the house via an inverter, and directly powered 12 volt DC lighting he had salvaged from a camper.

Upon his arrival from New Orleans, Roy had spent six months working feverishly to finish off the inside of the cabin. On a trip into Marion one afternoon, he had stopped at a local diner and struck up a conversation with a waitress there, Betty Sue, who it turned out was originally from Alabama. After an hour of talking, she had promised to try and find

the cabin and pay him a visit. Much to his surprise, she had indeed shown up three days later on an off-road motorcycle and after another six months of weekly dating, had moved into the cabin with him. That had been a year ago, and Roy and Betty Sue now had a one-month-old son, Jules.

Roy had the television tuned to a news channel, as was typical for this time of the evening. As Betty Sue joined him on the deck with Jules nursing her, he was alarmed to hear on the television of a State of the Union address beginning shortly. Roy had learned that in recent years, the state of the Union seemed to degrade exponentially, every time the president addressed it. Tonight would be no exception.

A whippoorwill called loudly as the stars began to manifest themselves in the cool evening of the early summer. Roy was more than happy to have quit NOPD and forfeited his retirement, although after Hurricane Josephine had passed, there were no records or even a municipality left to collect his pension from. Leaving New Orleans ahead of Josephine was the smartest decision that Roy Guilbault could have ever made.

“Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.” the president greeted the television audience. “I am here tonight to speak on behalf of the latest piece of legislation to be signed into law by myself, after passing both the House and Senate. This new law is called Agenda 21, and is the final piece of legislation needed to implement a global government, or as is has been referred to in years past, the New World Order.

“Agenda 21 is a plan under which a concept called sustainable development will be implemented. Sustainable development is broken down into two subparts; Smart Growth and the Wildlands Project.

“As you may remember after Hurricane Josephine struck the Gulf Coast, I implemented the Natural Disasters Act, which forbids the rebuilding of devastated areas after a natural calamity. At that time, I introduced the concept of seventeen Urban Areas and announced that over the following ten years, the general population would begin migrating to these areas.

“As of today, the passing of Agenda 21 not only authorizes this migration, it also authorizes the designation of a vast new park system in this country known as the Wildlands Project. The Wildlands Project will eventually designate fifty percent of the United States as wilderness reserves and corridors. Human contact with these reserves will be forbidden.

“They are strictly for the restoration of plant and animal species, both indigenous and introduced. In addition to restoring herds of bison, we will also bring in other endangered species from around the world, such as the elephant, giraffe, cheetah, and lion. These animals will thrive in the desert southwest, where dwindling water supplies are making sustainable living an unrealistic expectation anyway.

“Eighty percent of the remaining land will be designated as buffer zones and will allow limited human activity. This will mostly consist of commercial agriculture and limited industrial manufacturing. Since the majority of our manufacturing has now been set up in Central and South America due to the Free Trade Area of the Americas, there is not much need for the amount of heavy manufacturing we once had.

“The remaining ten percent of the country will be designated into existing Indian Reservations and Military Installations, and seventeen urban areas. Within the urban areas, a system of efficiency will be instilled. People will live and work in close proximity

to one another, eliminating the need for personal vehicles. In the event one needs to travel to another part of the urban area he or she is domiciled in, public transportation will handle that.

“That is where Smart Growth will be implemented. Under the Smart Growth system, everyone will have a meaningful job. There will be no such thing as wasteful work, such as those who waste precious resources with such silliness as painting, writing, or living off of hobbies.

“Mandatory recycling will ensure that nothing is wasted. Conservation will also become part of day to day living. After years of careful research, it has been proven that no one needs more than ten gallons of water per day, for cooking, washing, and drinking. Anything more is simply wasteful. Water will be allotted from community distribution centers called wells. Each person shall be issued two five-gallon containers, which they will bring back each day and exchange for full ones. Wells will be located no further than a half mile from any individual’s domicile.

“Over the past fifty years, Americans have been taking less and less care of themselves. It is therefore time for us to straighten this matter out as well. All junk food, including snacks and sugary foods, will be eliminated from the diet, as well as the eventual removal of red meat. The only exception to this rule will be on one day a year; the anniversary of the implementation of our new society, a day scheduled for May 14th, 2014; two years from now, to be known from then on out, as Green Day. A diet consisting of protein-rich vegetables and white meat will make us all healthier and better Citizens.

“Currently-mated couples may remain together, but after relocation to your permanent urban area, your mate shall be chosen for you, by biological selection carried out by the Authority. In order to keep the population in check, mates will be limited to two children, after which both mates will be rendered non-reproductive by the tying of conductive vessels. This will prevent any further expansion of the population, and keep all jobs meaningful. Wasteful amenities such as air conditioning and television have no place in our new society either.

“Jurisdiction for implementation of our new society will be carried out by a single Guideline enforcement branch called the Authority. Order will be maintained by Authority agents called enforcers, who will have ultimate authority over any matter of law or regulation, which will come under the new definition of guidelines.

“Since everyone will be equal, and meaningless capitalism will no longer exist, money will also become useless. Everyone will be issued a credit account, and one hundred credits per month shall be issued to your account, with a maximum of one thousand credits allowed. This will ensure that no one person gains more than another. Since most personal amenities are not sustainable anyway, the need for frivolous spending will be eliminated, as will all useless items, such as books, jewelry, firearms, pets, and hobby materials.

“The implementation of the Wildlands Project will begin in the more remote areas of the country, so that relocation of residents and natural reversion may take effect as quickly as possible. The first wilderness corridor will incorporate the states of Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Residents will be notified where to report for relocation. This first wilderness corridor will become effective on May 14th, 2014, the first Green Day. Let’s make this as easy as possible by cooperating with your local enforcers.

“Detailed brochures of the new Guidelines will be available at your local Postal Service. Please be certain to procure a copy, as violations of the Guidelines will result in demeaning punishment. As long as you stay within the Guidelines and remain a Good Citizen, your lives will be more pleasant and meaningful than ever before.

“On behalf of the New Society, I welcome you all to the joys of Green Day. Have a good night, and God bless.”

Roy stared dumbfounded at the television.

“This has to be some kinda joke.” he said to Betty Sue. “That’s communism! How can they instill communism in the USA? Where the hell did this country go wrong?”

“With that Yankee communist in the stovepipe hat that stole the sovereignty from the Southern states and instituted an illegal federal government.” Betty Sue replied. “I hope he’s proud of the mess that he has made of this country. I hope he can look down and see what he has done. And I hope the good Lord boots him in the ass so hard he ends up in a lake of fire for it.”

“Now that’s my girl!” Roy responded enthusiastically. “I don’t know about you, but there’s no way in hell I’m relocating to any urban area, with their guidelines and domiciles and crap.

“The Flathead Indian Reservation is exempt from relocation, and probably those New World Order laws too. I’ll bet we can trade with them for supplies. I wonder what they’re going to do with all the cities.”

“Probably give them back to the buffalo.” Betty Sue snorted sarcastically.

Betty Sue was right about one thing; the cities would indeed be given away, but it wasn’t the bison that were going to benefit from the gesture.

CHAPTER 4

“...current lifestyles and consumption patterns of the affluent middle class involving high meat intake, use of fossil fuels, appliances, home and work air conditioning, and suburban housing are not sustainable.” - Maurice Strong, Secretary General of the UN at the Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, better known as the Rio Earth Summit, where Agenda 21 was unveiled to the world.

October 3rd, 2012

Matt Cooper pulled the starter rope on his chainsaw, and plowed into the shagbark hickory log laid across two 6x6s in the back yard. It was that time of year again when it wasn't too terribly hot to work like this, but it wasn't really cold weather yet either. He would spend the day sawing the hardwood logs into eighteen inch long lengths. Tomorrow would be spent running the lengths through the hydraulic splitter, after which they could be stacked under an open frame covered with metal roofing, to keep the elements from getting to the split firewood.

A steady stream of slash flew from the sharp chain, as Matt sliced through the hickory log, and sprayed his legs with chips. The roar of the saw and smell of the mixed gasoline practically shouted the words “outdoors,” and “autumn.” The scent of the wood smoke issuing from the house made the scene complete, and there wasn't anyplace else that Matt would rather be in the entire world. This was his home and his way of life. He knew that one day soon, he would be forced between dying for his farm or accepting the New Society, but for now, this was all that mattered.

He felt like a cancer patient with six months left to live, and he was savoring every minute that he lived out here, like it was his last. He would fight to the death for his farm, but at the same time, he had a wife and son to think of as well. Perhaps when the time came, they might overlook his farm and he could continue living here undetected, but that was most likely not a reality. Wishful thinking filled the minds of millions of Americans however, as they pondered similar scenarios in their minds.

No one really knew what to expect when the time came, but many expected to put up a fight. Those in control suspected this as well, and were being extremely deliberate in the way they were planning their methods for taking over each area of the country.

Matt paused to wipe the sweat from his brow, and inhaled the smell of the wood smoke once again.

“I'd almost rather they shot me dead right here,” he mused. “That way I wouldn't have to try and remember. This would be the last thing I ever saw.”

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of a fast-approaching, high-pitched roar. A low flying jet aircraft streaked overhead with a deafening blast, shaking the house and making the windows rattle.

“Must be scouting the area already.” Matt thought, as he watched the jet disappear rapidly over the woods across the road. *“But why would they need a fighter to do that? Wouldn’t a high altitude reconnaissance plane be better for that?”*

Over the coming months, the flyovers would continue as Green Day loomed ever closer, increasing in frequency and annoyance. They had no real purpose, other than an intimidation factor. Across the country, similar tactics were being used, but before long a few resourceful citizens would end the aerial bullying, at least in the sense of using low altitude fighters for psychological operations.

Chemtrails began dramatically increasing in volume as well. Few even realized what they were, but for those able to recognize and distinguish them, the increase was an ominous sign.

June 7th, 2013

Charlie Davidson looked at the plans before him for the last time. He had followed the directions explicitly, and had secured the copper tubing, brass filings, fiberglass resin, and even the quartz crystals from the Black Metal Emporium over in Louisville, with relative ease. The result was what the designer had called an “orgone generator;” designed to break up chemtrails and keep the locale free from inter-dimensional anomalies.

While somewhat skeptical, Charlie also believed that somewhere behind the headlines, there was something substantial to the supermarket tabloids. He folded the directions and placed them into the pages of the large dictionary on the bookshelf in the living room before returning to the project at hand. If worse came to worse, he would be out some time and money, but if the generator worked as claimed, it would certainly be worth the time and expense.

Simple to build, an orgone generator was made from a few gallons of polyester fiberglass resin with metal shavings mixed in, six six-foot-long lengths of copper pipe, and some quartz crystals.

He mixed two gallons of the fiberglass resin in a bucket, and added a pail full of the brass shavings and dust he had gotten from a friend who ran a small machine shop behind his house near Freelandville. He then placed a wooden form on top of the bucket to keep the copper pipes that held the crystals, in place.

Charlie pushed the last of the copper pipes into position, and theoretically completed the generator. According to the plans, it would take a few days for the generator to fully charge and realign the molecules in the Earth’s atmosphere. After that, one could be certain to be free from the fallout of chemtrails and the resulting chaos, or so the instructions claimed.

While it appeared to be nothing less than a hippie doohickey, the generator had actually been proven for at least twenty years, to successfully break up chemtrails. While no one really knew the hows or the whys of the machine, no one could argue the fact that it did indeed appear to rid the skies for approximately one hundred miles in all directions, of chemtrails. Had the general populace believed in this even a decade earlier and set up orgone generators every hundred miles or so across the country in a giant grid, they could have seriously impeded the Government’s ability to commit the largest genocide in history, never mind the respiratory ailments that had plagued the country for the past forty years. The cure was there, but no one saw it until it was too late.

By spending less than two hundred dollars for some simple items, Charlie Davidson would effectively save the lives of no less than thirteen thousand people in parts of Knox, Sullivan, Greene, Daviess, Pike, and Gibson Counties in Indiana, and Crawford, Lawrence, Wabash, and Richland Counties in Illinois.

November 30th, 2013

Yet another jet aircraft screeched over Matt's house, and he was more than enraged at the cat and mouse game the Government was playing with the lives of Americans across the country.

"That does it!" he snapped, getting out of bed and donning his clothes. "I'm tired of this crap at all hours of the day and night."

Matt dialed the number of an acquaintance of his in Daviess County.

"Phil, I'm sorry to wake you... oh, you're up too? Damn planes. Listen, do you still have those weather balloons you used to tie to- you do? Awesome, Bud. I'll be there in the morning with an idea. See you then."

Six hours later, Matt was at the home of his friend, Phil Hauser. Phil had been an amateur weather watcher and had several Cold War-era weather balloons which he sometimes tied to a spool of wire some two miles in length.

"How many of these do you have left?" Matt inquired.

"Five," Phil replied, "why?"

"Because I think they're big enough to support some cables and a bunch of livestock fence." Matt answered. "We can make a smaller version of the British blimp system over London, in World War Two. They'll never expect it, and we can put it along the flight path, but nowhere near our location."

Phil nodded.

"I like it. I have more than enough helium for the balloons I have. Each one is twelve feet in diameter and capable of lifting fifty pounds. That means we can balance two hundred, fifty pounds worth of cable and fence. Not a lot, but it's bound to snag one of those sons of bitches sooner or later."

Matt and Phil selected an area adjacent to the Wabash River that was devoid of habitation, yet seemed to be in a line with the flyovers they suspected were originating at Fort Knox, Kentucky. They spent two days anchoring wire rope to fallen trees and fastening livestock fence between the cables. Since the majority of flyovers in the area occurred at night to disrupt sleep patterns, Matt and Phil hoped that a daytime run would not reveal their trap. They didn't have long to wait however.

The first of five balloons lifted from the ground and strained at the weight of the cables and fencing. Within three hours, all five balloons were aloft and so was the network of wire livestock fence and the steel rope anchoring it in place.

"We'll see what happens." Phil remarked, as he and Matt prepared to return home. "Keep your fingers crossed, and may God watch over us on this one."

Seven hours later, an F111 streaked over Knox County from the direction of Fort Knox. Flying at only one hundred, fifty feet, the pilot was in violation of air traffic laws, but he could not have cared any less.

“Fort Knox,” Captain Rick Sellers spoke into his headset, “This is Delta-Foxtrot Seven. All clear out this way. I’m picking up some small objects on radar though. They appear to be several flocks of birds over the river from the size.”

“Roger that, Delta-Foxtrot. Probably some geese. Keep it low, and keep it loud. Those farms are crucial to the New Society. The Authority wants those farmers so pissed off that they’ll beg to be relocated.”

“Roger that, Fort Knox. Approaching the Wabash River now, damn birds. Wait a minute! What the hell are those things?!”

The fighter roared under the balloons and the left wing caught one of the anchoring cables, which sheared through the aluminum wing like a hot knife through butter. The aircraft spun out of control and struck the river, skipping across the surface of the water like a flat stone before careening into the wooded bank on the far side.

From his back yard, Matt looked westward as an orange glow appeared over the dark horizon. A faint explosion, reminiscent of distant thunder, reached his ears several seconds later.

“Federal law is five hundred feet for a reason, Asshole.”

March, 23rd, 2014

“Mornin’, Joseph.” Roy greeted the man in the tan jeep, as he pulled into their driveway and parked beside the house.

“Good morning, Roy Guilbault.” The man returned.

He exited the vehicle and approached the log cabin. Chief Joseph Whitehorse was from the neighboring Flathead reservation, and like many members of the tribe, had known Betty Sue from the Silver Fir Diner. Betty Sue had always been kind to them at the diner, and on more than one occasion made up the difference herself when a few of the poorer Indians had come up a few cents short on their breakfasts.

When she and Roy had approached the tribal elders with a proposition of system-defiance should Green Day come to pass, they had been more than willing to listen. If Roy and Betty Sue could somehow avoid relocation, the tribe would be willing to act as a link to the outside world. Helping with tasks and limited bartering would keep basic essentials available to them.

“Good morning, Betty Sue.”

“Hello, Joseph.” Betty Sue responded. “What brings you out this way?”

“We were contacted by a government agent yesterday.” Joseph explained. “We have found out that we are eligible as native people, to have limited access of the Flathead Wilderness Corridor after the new laws pass.”

“Flathead Wilderness Corridor?” Roy echoed.

“Yes. Apparently around reservations, the lands are named for the reservation they surround, and we are to act as ‘keepers’ or something; acting as lookouts and making certain that no hidens are living out there. They seem to expect that from people, especially in these areas. Imagine, White people don’t want to be sent to a reservation either.

“Funny how for many years, they lied to us for their benefit, now they need us to act as police officers for them. We’re supposed to be the keepers of the country now, because of our ancestry. Well, they broke every promise they ever made to us, except the one to

keep us penned up on these reservations, so I see nothing wrong with ignoring our agreement with them. See nothing, know nothing.

“You have always been kind to us in town, Betty Sue, and we know nothing of you and your family living out here. Green Day will soon be upon us and when that day comes if you cannot find a safe place out here in which to hide, there is room in our home for you until it passes.”

“Thank you very much, Joseph.” Roy replied. “You and your people are very kind to offer this to us, especially to me. You’ve known my wife for a long time, but you don’t know me too well.”

“There will come a time when the new cities will collapse, Roy Guilbault. It is not human nature for Man to live in captivity, as you well know. You were once a police officer. You left when you refused to become part of a society that did not learn from its mistakes.

“There will be pockets of those who refuse to accept the control of the New Society, and they will respect you. Raise your son in the same manner. Perhaps one day, we can *all* have our country back.”

Joseph stepped off the porch.

“You be well now, I will be back when I have more news. May the Spirits bless you.”

*

“What are you doing?” Matt inquired of Charlie, as he entered his friend’s kitchen.

Lisa had answered the door, and pointed the way to the kitchen where her husband was busily preparing his guns and ammunition for burial.

Charlie had several firearms and about a dozen olive drab military ammunition cans, sitting on the kitchen floor. He was feeding a roll of plastic into a machine of some sort that was sitting on the counter.

“I’m going to bury this stuff.” Charlie replied, as Lisa gave him a warm smile. “I don’t trust those bastards any more than I can throw an elephant.”

“Okay,” Matt acknowledged, “but what are you doing?”

“I’m sealing most of my guns and ammo up.” Charlie responded. “We bought this food saver thing about five years ago, for vacuum sealing the vegetables we grew in the garden, and the venison I shot out back after I butchered it.

“This time, it’s not food I’m putting away, it’s all my guns and stuff. Look, this thing turns this roll of plastic into a bag, and then it sucks all the air out of it, creating one of those vacuum sealed packages like you see bacon packed in at the store. You have any idea how long magazines and ammo would last in a vacuum?

“I’m coating all my guns and magazines in rifle grease - inside and out - and sealing them up tight. Same thing with the ammo, except I’m not greasing it or vacuum sealing it; just sealing it to make it airtight. It’s all loaded on stripper clips and it will be just like having it in sealed battle packs. It should stay good like this for a hundred years, Matt.”

Matt nodded in understanding and approval.

“Reminds me of an old saying,” he remarked. “‘I think, therefore I am.’ With you, I’d say it’s more along the lines of, ‘I think, therefore I am, *dangerous*.’”

Charlie chuckled in agreement and continued.

“It’ll be airtight and watertight, and that heavy grease will keep it from rusting. I’ll put it someplace those Stormtroopers will never find it; under the old outhouse. Then in a

few years, when everything calms down and people are ready, we'll come back and dig it up. I'll have ten battle rifles and over eight thousand rounds of ammo to do something about their Galactic Empire. We'll show them what proud Americans can do, by God!

May 14th, 2014 - Green Day

"My fellow Americans," President Zimmerman began, "It is with tremendous pride that I announce that today, we embark on a wonderful new journey in the advancement of our civilization. We have achieved oneness with our planet and the way that it functions. We have learned to harness the energy that surrounds us, and use it to better our lives. No longer shall we poison Mother Earth; we shall preserve her.

"Today is Green Day, the most important day in our nation's - no - the *world's* history, for today we begin the transition into the New Society. This will be a world where there is no crime, no need for excessive personal belongings, or any unnecessary items. You will be taken care of by the Authority; all we ask in return is that you do your jobs and respect the Authority. There will be no more joblessness, homelessness, or welfare. There will be no more excessively wealthy people to take advantage of those who may be less fortunate. We are all equal and we will all be treated as equals in the New Society.

"There will no longer be a need for meaningless, wasteful elections, as the Authority knows what is best for you. We will feed and house you, care for your medical problems, and see that order is maintained. Any detour from the Guidelines won't be tolerated, and will result in swift and demeaning punishment. This way, you know that you will always be safe, and free from crime.

"As you are relocated to your new places of domicile, you will be instructed of your new meaningful job. You will be domiciled near your workplace so that you may easily commute to and from your place of work and your domicile.

"The first area of relocation will be Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. This will begin within two weeks. You will be notified of your date of departure and where to report for relocation. You will be given a list of what belongings are acceptable for your new domicile. Each person shall be allowed five pieces of luggage and one piece of furniture. This way, everything will be kept simple. In the New Society, you will learn that material possessions are not only meaningless; they are harmful to society as a whole. Material possessions serve only to create want and jealousy; this is unacceptable in our new world. We are all equal, and the only way to maintain equality is to limit the promotion of one's individual standard of living. Love your friends and neighbors for who, not what, they are.

"That is all for now. You will be notified of future implementations of Agenda 21, as they are readied for integration into our New Society. Good day."

Roy and Betty Sue stared at the television.

"This is all in the Book of Revelations!" Roy burst out. "This is the end of the world as we know it and no one sees it. Armageddon can't be far away. What have we done?"

*

Fred Corbin looked at the strange pattern of contrails in the sky above him. He had seen them occasionally over the years, as they looked odd when he put his sunglasses on. They would almost appear to take on a rainbow hue, but it was only certain ones. This time, the sky was full of them, and they were crisscrossing to form a grid pattern. He drove over to Jason's house and beeped the horn.

“What is it?” Jason inquired, as he stepped onto the front porch, clutching an AR15 rifle.

Fred pointed toward the sky.

“Look.”

“Those are weird-looking,” Jason commented. “It looks like an aerial version of a ground patrol of some kind, like you’d see to flush the enemy from a holdout in the jungle or something. Any idea what it is?”

“Look through these.” Fred instructed, handing Jason his sunglasses.

“Chemtrails!” Jason burst out.

“What?”

“Chemtrails. They must be. I’ve never really seen one for real that I know of, but I’ve heard of them. This is what they described.”

“What are they?” Fred inquired.

“No one really knows.” Jason replied. “Chemicals of some kind; liquid and powders that contain polymers and barium salts and stuff. I’ve heard it’s to screen out UV because of the depletion of the ozone layer, and that they’re holding ground heat in and contributing to the greenhouse effect and global warming. Sounds to me like one medicine that makes you require another one to counter its negative effects. They’re supposed to make everyone sick though, I know that much.”

“I’ve seen these before,” Fred commented, “but never this many, or this precise.”

Jason paled visibly.

“Fred, today is the deadline for all that Green Day, New Society BS to go through. I’ve heard of these things before, that they were testing chemical or biological agents or something. You said you’ve never seen them like this before?”

“No. A few; sometimes crisscrossed, but never this many or so geometric. This is almost a perfect grid, Jason. Something’s wrong.”

“We need to get out of here now!” Jason urged. “Damn straight, something’s wrong. Grab some basic survival stuff for a couple weeks and get back here. We’ll head for Karchner Caverns. There’s enough air in there to keep us going, but it’s sealed from the outside. If they dump anything on us, we should be okay. Hurry Fred! I’ve got a bad feeling. I’ll grab the shortwave, in case this is happening in other places too.”

Fifteen minutes later, they had enough gear stowed in Fred’s pickup to last for several weeks. Fred and Jason raced westward through the open desert of Cochise County, toward Karchner Caverns State Park, which was one of the top ten show caves in the world; at least before the world had gone wild, anyway. Since the inclusion of the caverns into the Dos Amigos International Peace Park, the park rangers had abandoned it for fear of their lives. The Mexicans were afraid to venture into the caverns however, due to the fact that the rangers had set up a solar powered security system that broadcast the shriek of a screech owl when motion sensors were set off near the visitor’s center.

The Mexicans had spread word that the caverns were home to the devil, and they gave the area a wide berth. As Fred and Jason approached, the same recording echoed across the open desert.

“What the-?” Jason exclaimed. “That sounded like a pterodactyl.”

Fred laughed.

“I think that’s the point. That’s the call of a screech owl, Jason. I haven’t heard one since I was a kid. They used to use that scream for a sound effect in the movies. It sounds like a banshee. The rangers must have set that up when they left to scare the Beaners; damn superstitious fools.”

The pair made their way cautiously toward the visitor’s center. The screams continued, as they investigated the plywood that covered the windows.

Jason pried a sheet of the plywood from its resting place, revealing the main entrance to the gift shop.

“Here we go.” he said jubilantly. “Let’s get our stuff. Those chemtrails are starting to sink.”

“Jesus!” Fred exclaimed, as he glanced at the grid of chemtrails. “I’ve never seen them do that before. They *are* sinking! They always floated and turned into a hazy sort of cloud before. These are turning *orange*, Jason! What in the world is going on? It looks like they’re mixing and turning orange; like a chemical reaction. What are they doing to us, and why?”

The friends scrambled to get their supplies from the truck and deposit them inside the gift shop of the visitor’s center. Outside, the landscape took on a purplish hue; reminiscent of the effects of a dust storm, but the day was otherwise clear.

“Get in the cave!” Fred exclaimed.

They dragged their supplies through the door of the gift shop, and into the cavern. Jason closed the airtight door and snapped a chemical light stick. The area became bathed in a pale, surreal green light, as the friends looked at the strange rock formations.

“Too bad we didn’t pay for the tour.” Jason quipped.

“We can look later.” Fred advised. “For now, let’s consider ourselves lucky we made it here. God only knows what will happen to everyone else. I’ve got a sickening feeling in my stomach, Jason.”

*

Matt Cooper eyed the skies uneasily. Ever since President Zimmerman’s speech, he had felt anything but ease. Charlie’s orgone generator was working, that was obvious, but what did that mean, exactly? He still had no idea why the chemtrails had increased, or why they were forming on a regular basis over his farm. Today was different however. These chemtrails were clearly visible without polarized lenses, as they were distinctly orange in color. As they began to spread from the jets high above, the sky began to take on a purplish cast, almost like sunrise, when ultraviolet light prevails. The entire landscape was becoming otherworldly in appearance.

The chemtrails continued to spread, and the gap over Knox County widened. By the time the biological agents reached the ground, they were more than fifteen miles in any given direction from Matt’s farm. Matt Cooper would never fully understand how lucky he was to have Charlie Davidson for a neighbor.

“Look Charlie!” Matt exclaimed, as he pointed to the sky. “They’re breaking up; just like you said they would. Jesus, that purple and orange crap looks weird.”

Charlie looked at his friend and neighbor.

“I told you, Brother.” he said quietly. “I knew this thing would work. They probably know we have it, because it shows up on Doppler radar as a bright blue area, but they’ll

probably just chalk it up to a few that somehow made it through. I doubt they'll bother us personally."

All day long, they had been listening via Charlie's shortwave radio, to reports of people succumbing to a strange illness around the world. All had accompanied a strange crisscross pattern of orange contrails across the sky, which Charlie and Matt both felt were chemtrails of some sort. The question was, why was today different? Why were the sickening chemtrails suddenly so toxic, and more so, why were they orange?

Charlie's orgone generator, although technically a cloud buster, had successfully broken up the basis of the deadly chemtrails as well, and left a sort of hole in the sky above. All around this curious hole however, the sky seemed to have taken on a surreal purple tint.

"I think we should stay inside, just to be on the safe side." Matt suggested. "I don't know what that is, but I sure don't trust it."

"I think you are correct, my friend." Charlie replied. "Even though the generator seems to be working, whatever that crap is, it will probably still make it down here in some miniscule form."

The pair shook hands and went their separate ways, at least for the time being. Sealing themselves in their houses was a pointless gesture however, as the orgone generator that Charlie Davidson had built, was a successful weapon in the fight against chemtrails and the diseases they carried. Broken up on a molecular level, the biological agents simply drifted on the wind and reverted to individual compounds. For the most part, Knox County, Indiana, would be spared the horrors of the Biosickness that would soon descend on the majority of the country and envelop it in a scene of death never before seen in the history of the world. This was Armageddon, and it spelled disaster and death for 9/10 of the world's population, a number that would eventually total four billion, five hundred million, seven hundred fifty-three thousand, and thirty-seven lives.

This was the *real* Holocaust, and it had been perpetrated by some of the very people that claimed to have suffered in the original. The final battle had not been fought by the major armies of the world meeting in combat, but instead joining forces to eliminate their own citizens and create a utopia for a select few at the expense of everyone else. Such a plan was not new; in fact history had shown time and again, that this sort of manipulation was commonplace. All the ancient empires; Greece, Egypt, and Rome, had been built upon slave labor, and any survivor of the Biosickness with half a brain, was in for a rude awakening. The only consolation was that all of those ancient empires had eventually been overthrown by the very people they had enslaved.

June 1st, 2014

Fred and Jason cautiously removed the plywood covering the door to the visitor's center and gift shop, and peered into the desert. It took several seconds to get used to the bright light. They had been able to pick up a few shortwave transmissions on Jason's portable radio. While they couldn't broadcast out like Fred's setup, what they heard had been frightening.

The chemtrail attacks had occurred almost simultaneously all around the world and had lasted for two days. Some areas appeared to have been spared altogether, while a few pockets here and there, mostly around Indian reservations, had avoided attacks as well.

For the areas that hadn't been so fortunate, there were almost no survivors. Whatever the chemical or biological agents had been, they only seemed to affect people; animals did not seem to be harmed in the least. Many survivors were pointing to this as evidence of a carefully planned biological attack on human genetics, an attack that went all the way to the DNA level; proof of the rumored "G bombs" or genetically-targeting biological weapons our government was rumored to have.

"Sky looks okay." Jason commented as he stepped outside. "No chemtrails. Not even a cloud of any kind. It's like I remember when I was a kid."

"Truck's right where we left it." Fred noted as he joined his friend in the outdoors. "Doesn't look like anyone's been by. Let's get her loaded up."

In thirty minutes, they had what was left of their supplies packed back into the bed of the pickup truck.

"We should take a trip into Tucson." Fred suggested. "If what we heard is really true, we need to know for certain."

Jason nodded.

"If it *is* true, it's not going to be pretty."

*

"Roy Guilbault!" Joseph called.

Roy opened the door and his Indian friend grabbed him.

"You must come with me!" Joseph almost shouted. "Get Betty Sue and young Jules and come with me now."

"What's wrong?" Roy inquired.

"The Government was by this morning. They asked if we had seen anyone other than townspeople. He said they will be flying over with infrared imaging. You must turn off all things in the house and come with me. You can stay on the Reservation. I will explain that when we get there."

An hour later, the Guilbaults arrived at the Flathead Reservation behind their friend. Joseph finally pulled into the driveway of a small, single story house and parked his jeep. Roy and Betty Sue exited their own vehicle as Joseph approached them.

"This is where you will be staying for a while." Joseph explained. "This house belonged to Nancy Graywolf; my niece. She was in Los Angeles visiting Hollywood when the Biosickness came through. She will not be back."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Betty Sue said quietly.

"We heard over our shortwave set, news about that." Roy added. "It looks like most of the world's population had been destroyed. No one seems to know what happened. Most of the cities are decimated."

"Not one Indian reservation has suffered so much as a single loss of life," Joseph observed, "except for those who were not on the reservations when it happened. The White Man's world has been poisoned."

"I wonder how many died." Roy mused.

"In this country, millions; if not tens of millions. Around the world, probably billions." Joseph answered. "You and Nancy are fortunate to be members of the Flathead tribe of the Sioux Nation."

Roy and Betty Sue looked confused.

"You mean Betty Sue?" Roy inquired.

“No,” Joseph replied. “You married Nancy Graywolf. That makes you a member of the Flathead people.”

It dawned on Roy, what his friend was saying.

“Thank you, Joseph Whitehorse.”

“You are welcome, Roy Guilbault. Enjoy your stay with us.”

*

“Jesus Fred!” Jason exclaimed, as they exited I-10 onto Palo Verde Road and headed north into Tucson.

“I smell it.” Fred answered tersely.

It had been almost three weeks since the Biosickness as it became to be called, had been unleashed on the population. The sidewalks were strewn with mostly-rotted corpses, and although most of the decay was complete in the hot desert sun, a remainder of the stench still hung in the air and would continue to do so for months.

The pair drove silently through town, passing empty vehicles; some with remains in them, still standing where they had stopped after their occupants had died.

“I wonder how long it took.” Fred muttered.

“Not long, I don’t think.” Jason replied. “They’re still in their cars and on the streets. They must have died on their way home or looking for help, but those on the sidewalk must not have even had time to get back inside. Jesus, what the hell was it?”

They were somewhat accustomed to the bitter odor now, and Fred parked the truck on East Speedway Boulevard. The pair exited the truck cautiously, with rifles in hand; their sidearms strapped firmly in place.

Tucson was eerily quiet; not a sound stirred, except for the hot breeze that blew almost continually.

Jason suddenly whirled around.

“What was that?” he asked quietly, leveling his AR15 in the direction of a drug store.

“It came from over there.” Fred responded.

They listened, and a faint cry could be heard. Fred and Jason advanced, their rifles pointed in front of them, resting firmly against their shoulders. It suddenly became louder and more pronounced.

“*Meow!*”

“Damn,” Fred muttered, dropping the rifle from his shoulder as a young black cat emerged from under a car, “you don’t know how close you came, Cat.”

The feline approached them, meowing loudly.

“Must be hungry.” Fred observed. “You’ve come a long ways, Kitty. Residential neighborhood’s about three miles away. May as well go in the store and get some cat food for you.”

The cat followed him as he walked toward the store. To his surprise, the automatic door slid open, and the lights were still on.

“Power’s still on!” Jason exclaimed.

“Computers run everything now.” Fred remarked. “Apparently the power station is no exception. It’ll probably stay on until they run out of fuel.”

“It’s a nuke plant, Fred. It won’t run out of fuel for a few thousand years. Let’s hope it shuts itself down if there’s a problem. Eventually something will fail in the cooling system and the core will melt down. Hopefully there’s enough technicians left alive to

work on these things. There are hundreds of them across the country. Can you imagine a couple hundred China Syndromes?"

"I don't want to." Fred responded.

He found the pet food aisle and hoisted a bag of dry food over his shoulder. He dumped it on the ground in front of the store for the hungry cat, and the two returned to the truck. They spent several minutes discussing the situation at hand.

"Let's head up toward Mt. Lemmon." Jason suggested. "I could stand a change of scenery. Besides, I want a bird's eye view of the city. We've got the binoculars; we can do a thorough scan."

Fred nodded and they proceeded down Speedway toward Catalina Highway; the road that led into the Coronado National Forest. Higher into the mountains lay the town of Summerhaven and the accompanying ski resort at Mt. Lemmon.

"Here's a pullout." Jason said, motioning to an area on the right-hand side of the road. "Oh yeah, this is the one I remember. You can see the entire valley from here. Let's have a look-see."

Fred pulled the truck off the road, and they gazed out over the expanse of Tucson. The view extended from Tucson Mountain Park to the west, and faded into the haze to the south and east. Jason scanned the city; searching for any signs of life or movement. He trained the binoculars on Davis-Monthan Air Force Base to the south and started to move them again, when something caught his eye.

"I saw something!" Jason relayed.

"Where?" Fred inquired.

"D-M." Jason replied, using the military nickname for the air base.

He zoomed the powerful binoculars in on the base, steadying the image by resting his elbows on the guardrail. D-M was located about twelve miles to the south, and at forty power, the optics made the images the equivalent of a third of a mile with the naked eye.



Fred and Jason could see the entire city of Tucson from the overlook

“There’s people there!” Jason exclaimed. “Holy cow, Fred, there’s people!”

“Let me see.” Fred suggested.

Jason handed him the binoculars and Fred stared at the base for a few minutes.

“Military personnel.” Fred observed. “All wearing black. That doesn’t look like any of ours. They’d be in digital camo. Wait- that’s not one of our planes either. What the hell? I don’t recognize it. It’s on the far end of the runway.”

He returned the binoculars to Jason.

“I see it. I don’t know what it is, but like you said, it’s not ours. That symbol looks vaguely familiar though. I know I’ve seen it somewhere before.”

“We’d better move.” Fred suddenly stated. “They may not be looking for anyone, but if we can see them, they may have someone that can see us. I don’t like this one bit. Let’s go.”

As they wound higher into the Santa Catalina Mountains, the saguaro-studded landscape gave way to piñon pines, and eventually to soaring Douglas firs. Fred parked the truck in the main lot of the General Hitchcock Campground, and the friends exited the vehicle with rifles in hand. The wind changed direction and the pair caught the odor of death.

“Here too.” Fred whispered. “I wonder how they made it through down there at the base. That was right in the middle of it.”

“They probably evacuated.” Jason replied “They could have sealed themselves in somewhere, I’m sure, but since those didn’t appear to be our troops, my guess is that they went somewhere else.”

“What if they didn’t?”

“Huh?”

“What if they didn’t know about it? Those weren’t US troops.”

“It’s an *air* base. I’m sure the local planes came from there. Phoenix probably got hit with planes from Luke. I’m starting to wonder about Army posts though.”

The friends circled the campground, coming across the partially eaten remains of a camper.

“Jesus!” Jason exclaimed. “Whatever ate him must have survived without any ill effects, except maybe a big appetite.”

“Probably a bear from the looks of it. This stuff didn’t seem to affect any animals, remember?”

“A Green-friendly weapon of mass destruction.” Jason pondered. “Kill off all the humans and leave behind all the wildlife and plants. No radiation; no cities reduced to rubble. Save Mother Nature by killing off her attackers.”

“Who the hell was behind it?” Fred gasped. “Who on this Earth could be so evil as to eliminate ninety percent of the people living on it, on a whim?”

“Not a whim; a strategy. I’d like to know across the board, who was targeted and who is still alive. I’m willing to bet eugenics was involved.”

They were startled by the sound of something approaching from the woods. A large black bear suddenly burst into view and stopped. It was testing the air and arose on its haunches. Fred and Jason wasted no time in seizing the opportunity to open fire on the bruin. Once a man-eater, a bear often preferred to dine on humans from that point on.

While neither man was certain this was the same bear that had eaten the camper, they were not willing to take any chances either.

The bear dropped to the ground with sixteen bullets in his chest, and the pair of friends retreated to the truck.

“Let’s get the hell out of here!” Fred exclaimed, as he jumped into the driver’s seat.

“Brother, I concur one hundred percent!” Jason responded, as he shoved his AR15 into the rifle rack in the rear window. “The further we go up the mountain; it seems like the worse trouble we’re getting ourselves into!”

“Let’s head up toward Mt. Lemmon’.” Fred mocked Jason good-naturedly, as he pulled out of the campground and accelerated around the curve. ““I could stand to use a change of scenery.’ That was a change, alright.”

The small town of Summerhaven appeared fifteen minutes later, and Fred brought the truck to a stop. Summerhaven, Arizona was a small resort town of quaint little shops built in the 1940’s as a refuge for Tucsonians from the desert heat in the valley below. The entire town had burned during a huge wildfire in 2003, but had been rebuilt to a degree in the years that followed.

Jason breathed in deeply through his nose.

“Smell that clean mountain air!”

Fred nodded.

“Doesn’t that strike you as odd?”

“It does.”

They each retrieved their rifles and scanned the street. There were no bodies and no odor of death, although there were cars parked along the street.

“Hello!” Jason yelled through cupped hands. “Is there anybody here?”

“Who are you?” a deep male voice bellowed through the stillness. “And what do you want?”

“My god! Survivors!” Fred exclaimed.

“We’re border ranchers from Cochise County.” Jason called. “We mean you no harm. We’re searching for others who made it too.”

“Keep your weapons lowered.” the voice instructed. “I’m coming out and I am armed as well.”

A bearded man in a plaid shirt appeared from the door of one of the shops, carrying a lever action Winchester rifle.

“Anyone else with you?” he inquired.

“No Sir.” Jason replied. “Just us. We saw some activity in Tucson though.”

“What kind of activity?” a young female voice inquired.

“I told you to stay put, Jenny.” the man reprimanded, as a young woman in her early twenties appeared.

“Personnel at D-M.” Jason continued. “They weren’t ours though. Something isn’t right.”

“That’s for certain.” the man replied, lowering the rifle to his side. “My name is Steven Shaw. This is my niece, Jenny Mason.”

“I’m Jason St. John. This is Fred Corbin. We’re from down near Douglas.”

“Did everyone down that way make it through okay, then?”

Fred shook his head.

“Nothing did. We holed up in Karchner Caverns when they started dusting. How did you survive? Everyone down in the campgrounds is dead. Where are the rest of the townspeople?”

“Dead.” Steven answered. “When I saw those orange clouds, I knew something was wrong. I tried to get everyone else to listen, but they thought they were so pretty; they just *had* to stay and watch them. I took Jenny down to the wine cellar. No one else would come until it was too late. We wouldn’t open the doors then. Dumb bastards all died out here, screaming and begging us to let them in. It was like something out of a horror movie. After thirty minutes or so, everything went quiet. We stayed down there for over a week, until we were certain everything was okay. We heard coyotes howling and figured it was safe to come out. What we saw, I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy.”

“Where are they now?” Fred inquired. “We haven’t seen anyone.”

“After we came out, Jenny and I took them all down to the cellar and sealed it. They’re all buried now. We found one hundred and seventeen people, Mr. Corbin. It took us three days to get them all down there. It was awful. Most of them were our friends.”

“Why did you stay?” Jason inquired, his gaze drifting to Jenny’s pretty face.

“Where else would we go?” Jenny replied, returning his gaze. “We figured everyone else was dead too, and they seem to be.”

“All except those troops in Tucson.” Fred responded.

“No idea who they are?” Steven inquired.

“Nope. They looked like they were commandeering the place though; like they were the first ones in and readying it for others.”

“We tried looking around with those green tourist binocular-things on the mountain,” Jenny said, “but they weren’t powerful enough. We can see the lights in Tucson at night, so we thought everything was okay down there.”

“The power’s still on;” Fred replied, “everything’s still intact. No bombs, no destruction. Just millions of dead people. Everything still works. You can walk into a gas station and turn the pumps on, or go through the car wash. It’s surreal.”

“I’d like to go up there with our binoculars, Jenny.” Jason said. “Ours are probably a lot more powerful than the ones up there. Not as good as a telescope, but we might be able to see something in Phoenix.”

“It’s about eighty miles away or so.” Steven observed. “They’d have to be pretty strong.”

“They’re forty power.” Jason replied. At eighty miles, that would make Phoenix look like it was only two miles away. There will be a lot of distortion because of the ground temperature, but it’s worth a try.”

“I’ll take you up there.” Jenny offered. “You can see Mt. Graham and some of the other sky islands. It’s a nice view even without binoculars.”

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“Agent Reuben, this is Roy Guilbault and his wife Nancy Graywolf Guilbault.” Joseph introduced his friends to the government agent in charge of the Flathead Wilderness Corridor.

“David Reuben.” the agent said in return, as he shook Roy’s hand. “Guilbault; sounds French.”

“Transplanted Cajun.” Roy replied. “I met Nancy here, about five years ago when I came out here for vacation. I never went back.”

Agent Reuben nodded.

“Well, as the spouse of a Native American, you are allowed under Agenda 21, to remain on the reservation. Any children?”

“Jules Graywolf Guilbault.” Roy answered. “Chief Whitehorse said you’re looking for scouts or something, to patrol the corridor?”

“That is correct.”

“Well, we’d be more than willing to set up in one of the houses out near the national forest.” Roy offered. “I was a cop for twenty-one years down in N’awlins. It wouldn’t be a problem to be a forest ranger.”

“I don’t see that that would be a problem.” the agent responded. “What we’re looking for, are people who are trying to avoid relocation.”

“Understood.” Roy replied. “If I find anyone, where do I bring ‘em?”

“You bring them into Kalispell and contact me. I’ll be working out of Billings. Kalispell will be the territorial center. Phone lines and other communication will remain open there.”

“Yes Sir.” Roy responded. “That won’t be a problem at all. I’ll send you a report once a month, whether I find anything or not. Would that be okay?”

David nodded.

“It certainly will be. Being a former police officer, you understand protocol. Perfect, Ranger Guilbault. It was nice meeting you.”

“Same here.” Roy replied, as the agent departed the house.

He looked at Betty Sue.

“Something ain’t right with this here picture.”

“What do you mean?” his wife inquired.

“Keeping power and phone service up. He’s in Billings. They’re taking people out alright, but they’re leaving an entire network behind. You don’t do that unless you’re keeping an entire society. There’s more to this than we can see. Hear no evil, speak no evil. We keep our mouths shut and see what happens. We’re missing something, that’s for sure. It’s almost as though there’s a second-”

Roy broke off in mid sentence.

“What is it?” Betty Sue inquired.

“You know what a secret society is?”

“Yes.”

“I think that’s what we’ve got, only on a nationwide scale. Free Trade Area of the Americas, Law of the Seas Treaty, now everyone is forced to relocate. What about those rumors of that Biosickness we heard about?”

“This may be the cop in me, but what if this is some sort of science fiction terraforming? I stopped at a place on the way back to N’awlins from Charlotte one time. Out in the sticks of Georgia. Bunch of stones with some mumbo jumbo laws carved into ‘em. I only remember one; world population of five hundred million. What if someone’s playing God and decided to start over?”

“But who would do that?” Betty Sue asked in apprehension.

Roy’s eyes widened.

“Who controls the banks, the politics, and the business in this country? Holy crap, this whole thing was a business deal. Power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely. It all makes sense now. Survival of the fittest, except this wasn’t natural; it was manmade. That equals eugenics, Betty Sue. Somehow, we’ve managed to survive the second Holocaust.

“We survived the human equivalent of the dinosaurs going extinct, but this time it wasn’t a meteor or an ice age, it was our own people doing it to ourselves! Jesus palomino, it all makes sense now. Those that survived, are there to support those that created this whole thing. Picking cotton was nothing compared to this. We’re all slaves now, whether we realize it or not.

“My god, Betty Sue! This is what the New World Order was *really* about; it wasn’t the United Nations dictating over all the countries; it was about someone using the UN to do their dirty work for them! Somewhere, there is an entire group of people waiting to come here and live off of everything we created; a country within a country; and the saps that allowed it to happen are going to be part of the very machine that has imprisoned them.

“They thought they were so smart, taking away our liberties, and now they’ve been bitten by their own rattlesnake. Whoever takes over from here is behind it all. I’m willing to bet these new wilderness reserves are nothing more than getaway parks for the elite of the New Society.”

CHAPTER 5

“We cannot be so fixated on our desire to preserve the rights of ordinary Americans.” – President Bill Clinton, March 11th, 1993; USA Today article.

“Phoenix is alive!” Jason breathlessly reported to Fred and Steven.

He and Jenny had run all the way back from the overlook atop Mt. Lemmon.

“What do you mean, alive?” Fred inquired.

“There’s movement. But all we saw were what appeared to be military vehicles and trains; lots and lots of trains.”

“Trains?”

“Miles long. Heading east. We could see them all the way over toward Safford. I counted thirteen of them, Fred. Thirteen! And none of them had tank cars; they were all boxcars. It looked like something right out of a Nazi war movie.

“For some reason, Phoenix was spared and the survivors are being moved by the thousands, crammed into boxcars.”

“Supposition.” Fred responded. “Did you actually see people being loaded into these things?”

“Of course not. It was too far away, but there were masses of people filling the rail yards. Fred, I’m telling you, we need to get back to the ranch and get on your shortwave set. We have to tell others about this. Maybe someone knows where they’re going.”

Fred jogged over to his truck and retrieved an Arizona state map from behind the seat. He unfolded it and looked over the area.

“Okay, let’s see what is so important about Phoenix.” he said emphatically. “Tucson has the air base, but it looks like it was either abandoned or commandeered, or both. Phoenix has an air base too. What’s the difference?”

“They both have parks.” Steven observed. “And airports. What *don’t* they have?”

“Indian reservations.” Jenny interjected. “Phoenix has two. Tucson has none; well that little one out past the movie studios. Then there’s the Papago Reservation further to the west. If they’ve been spared too, then chances are so has Casa Grande. If reservations are being left alone, then we might be able to locate more survivors in and around them. There’s a huge one north of here. It’s east of Phoenix. It’s about a hundred miles square, I think. That’s certainly big enough to have been left alone.”

“Why would they leave the reservations alone?” Steven mused. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“Because they were here first.” Fred replied. “They’re the original Green Party. Whoever did this understands that Indians will not abuse the land that’s left. Anyone outside the reservations that happened to be in an area where the chemtrails didn’t come down will probably be taken to those urban areas the president has been yapping about. I wondered how they were going to fit the entire population of the United States into seventeen cities. Now we know. Genocide.

"If those trains are heading east, then chances are California didn't survive either. I'm willing to bet that all seventeen of those living areas are back East. That'll leave the entire heartland and West wide open except for the Indians."

"But for what purpose?" Jenny inquired in a bewildered voice. "I thought the West was going to be protected."

"Well, the Midwest is where most of the grain is produced." Fred postulated. "And aside from Alaska and the Gulf, most of our domestic oil comes from Texas, Oklahoma, and California."

"That leaves just about everything west of Interstate 25 and the Dakotas." Steven observed, noting the looks on Fred and Jason's faces. "Sorry, I used to drive a truck over the road."

"This is on a road that they will probably check out eventually," Fred said, "even if they didn't see us watching them. We should head back to the ranches. No one will be looking out there."

"Sounds reasonable." Steven agreed. "Nothing much for us here anyway, except memories. We can probably find a good sized truck in Tucson and load up with enough supplies to last for years; maybe we can even find a tanker somewhere and fill it with gasoline. Once we get back to your ranch, maybe we can talk to others on your radio and see if there is someplace the survivors are going."

"If there is," Jason interjected, "we don't want to go there."

"Why not?" Jenny inquired.

"Because if we can pick it up, so can whoever did this, and they'll be waiting. If anyone's dumb enough to rendezvous, they'll either end up dead, or in one of those prisons they call an urban area."

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"Dad, I'm scared." George confided in his father.

Leaflets lay scattered about the farm; dropped the previous night from the air, and all were identical.

They gave evacuation orders and where and when to report for relocation. Those that were unaccounted for at the depot locations, were subject to removal from their homes and possible arrest. Matt was furious at being told to leave his home and vowed to stay "as long as possible."

"It'll be okay, Georgie." his father reassured the boy. "It's just a show of force. They're trying to intimidate us. Remember, no matter what, they cannot take from you, your memories of this farm or the times we have spent here. Remember them always, and you will always have a place to go when you need to get away."

Matt looked at the sheet of paper in his hand. It instructed everyone to report in one week's time, to Vincennes for rail transportation to Chicago.

Chicago and New York were the only northern urban areas in the country. The rest were in milder areas to the south. New York housed those from the Northeast, while Chicago absorbed those from the upper Midwest. With air conditioning forbidden in the New Society, those in the two northern Areas had a slightly easier time of getting through the hot summer months. Winter was the same everywhere, as the heat was regulated at fifty-eight degrees.

Matt and his family, like most others in the area, had survived the Biosickness with no ill effects, thanks to Charlie's orgone generator. As he looked at the instruction sheet, Matt began to wonder if perhaps the lucky ones had not already perished. The survivors were condemned to life in prison for crimes that the globalists and their crooked politicians - not they - had committed.

June 4th, 2014

"We're packed up." Steven called to Fred. "Follow us down the mountain into Tucson. I'll take you out to the tank farm. Perhaps we can find a loaded fuel tanker there."

"Sounds like a plan." Fred called back. "We can find a box truck and load up with as much dried food and supplies as we can too. May as well make the best of it. You and I can drive the big trucks, and Jenny and Jason can drive these."

The pair of vehicles headed back down the winding road toward Tucson, about fourteen miles in a straight line, but almost twenty-five via the pavement.

"Shoot!" Fred exclaimed a few minutes later.

"What's wrong?" Jason inquired.

"Brakes got spongy all of a sudden. The damn master cylinder must have gone bad."

"Um, this isn't exactly the best time for that to happen." Jason observed.

"I know that, but I at least have some. I'll just have to ride them, that's all. No real biggie unless we need to stop all of a sudden. Shouldn't be a problem."

He backed off from Steven's SUV as they passed the overlook, to allow for greater braking distance when they got to the hairpin curves halfway down the mountain. Up ahead, Steven saw something that made his heart jump. Two curves below, he could see a blue military vehicle ascending the road. He slammed on the brakes, unaware that Fred did not have the same luxury.

Fred saw Steven stop, and immediately pressed his foot to the floor. The truck slowed but would not stop. Steven waved his arms frantically, as Fred and Jason sailed past.

"Stop; Jesus, stop!" he exclaimed.

Not understanding why his new friends had not stopped, he immediately made a U-turn and headed back up the hill to the overlook and shot up the side road. Far below, he could see the white pickup approaching the other vehicle, with only one curve between them. He retrieved his scoped .30-06 from the SUV and trained the optics on the scene below.

Fred suddenly spied the vehicle rounding the curve ahead, and stood on the brake pedal as hard as he could. The pickup continued however, unable to slow to less than ten miles per hour due to the grade.

"Crap!" Jason spat, as they approached the oncoming truck. "That's what Steven was trying to tell us. He must have seen it coming up the road from further down."

The blue vehicle flashed its lights in warning, but there was no way to stop. A burst of automatic gunfire sprayed from the truck as they passed it, striking the pickup and the occupants inside. Fred desperately fought to maintain control of the truck and turned the wheel to the left, running off the road and sideswiping the rocky cliff. The pickup came to a rest nose first against the mountain, and the blue truck made a three point turn to come back.

From overhead, Steven chambered a round and sighted in on the driver of the truck as the occupants jumped out and dashed toward his friends' truck. He applied pressure to the trigger and the driver slumped forward. Steven trained the crosshairs on a second figure as it paused for a moment and it too, dropped. The other two began running back to their vehicle, and Steven fired yet another round, striking a third soldier who fell but continued to move. The fourth reached the truck and pulled the dead driver from his seat, dumping him to the asphalt. The truck lurched forward and Steven pulled the trigger again. The bullet struck the driver in the neck and severed his spinal cord, turning him limp as a rag, as the truck gained momentum. Five seconds later, it crashed through the guardrail and sailed off the edge of the mountain, bouncing and flipping end over end like a toy. It took over a minute for the truck to reach the bottom of the draw, and the leaking fuel ignited on the hot manifold.

A dark cloud of black smoke wafted up the mountain as Steven reached Fred's truck. He ran to the pickup to find Jason struggling to free himself from the seatbelt. He had been grazed by one of the bullets but was not seriously injured.

"What happened?" Steven called out. "Why didn't you stop?"

"Master cylinder went out." Jason replied, as he managed to unfasten the seatbelt and exit the truck. "We tried. The Lord only knows how we tried."

He and Steven opened the driver's door. Fred was slumped over the steering wheel, and as Jason gently pulled him back, it was evident that his friend and neighbor of seventeen years, was dead.

Jason caught movement out of his peripheral vision and turned to see the third soldier that Steven had shot. He was not dead, but his right leg was almost severed below the knee from the impact of the bullet.

"You son of a bitch!" Jason screamed at him. "I'm gonna kill you, you bastard!"

He drew his 1911 and pointed it at the man's head.

"Wait!" Steven hollered. "Don't! We need to find out what the hell is going on. These men aren't American soldiers, Jason. Look at the uniforms."

"Who are you?" Jason demanded. "Why have you killed everyone? Where the hell are all the personnel from D-M?"

The man spoke with a thick accent that Jason was not familiar with.

"I will tell you nothing," he said defiantly.

"Who are you?" Jason demanded again.

"Your new masters."

He spat at Jason, who responded by pulling the trigger and shooting the man in his other leg. The soldier screamed in agony, then clenched his teeth.

"We're not going to get anywhere with him." Steven said, picking up the soldier's rifle. "Galil; definitely not ours. We've got to get out of here. They'll see that smoke before too long and come looking."

Jason kicked the soldier in his right leg as hard as he could. There was a tearing noise that Jason was not certain was either the man's pants or his leg muscle. He was greeted with another guttural scream of pain. Jason smiled evilly.

"I'm going to leave you here to die, you son of a bitch," he snarled. "Just like you left our entire country, whoever you are. I hope it takes days for you to die out here, with infections eating your legs up."

He looked at Steven.

"I'll follow you back up to Summerhaven. I think the truck will still run okay."

He eased his friend into the passenger's seat and backed the pickup around, before accelerating up the mountain. When they got back to town, Steven helped Jason carry Fred from the truck.

"We'll have to put him down with the others." Steven said. "We don't have time to bury him."

Jason nodded. His throat had a lump the size of an orange in it, and it wouldn't go away. After Fred was placed into the wine cellar, Steven headed for the hardware store.

"What are you doing?" Jason called. "We need to get out of here."

"Old Jack kept dynamite for the rangers." Steven replied. "They needed it sometimes for rocks. We need to block that road off and buy ourselves some time. We'll take the dirt road over the top and come out in Oracle. We can head north from there and find someplace to hide out for a while, while we find a replacement truck and transfer your stuff."

He returned ten minutes later with a case of dynamite and blasting caps, and a spool of wire.

"Let's go." he said to Jason. "Jenny, you wait here. We'll be back soon. You see anyone besides us, you shoot until you're out of ammo."

"Okay Uncle Steve. Be careful."

"We can blow that big overhang by the parking area." Steven said, as he pulled off the road. "It'll come down just above where you ran into the mountain. Should block the entire road."

Steven and Jason inserted the blasting caps into the sticks of explosive, and Steven duct taped them together. He twisted the leads of the caps and the ends of the spool of wire together, weighted them down with a rock, and began unwinding wire from the spool as he retreated to his SUV.

"I'll get on the back and hold it while you drive around the bend." Jason offered. "Keep it slow, but it will be faster and easier than walking."

Steven nodded.

"Good thinking."

He slowly accelerated out of the parking lot and up the road, stopping one thousand feet and around a curve, from the explosives.

"You judged that pretty well." Jason commented. "I think there's only about one hundred feet of wire left."

Steven opened the hood and Jason touched one of the wires to the negative terminal on the battery.

"Here goes." he said, as he touched the second wire to the hot terminal.

A deafening explosion reached their ears, and the ground shook, as an entire case of dynamite discharged simultaneously. Yoram Rabine looked over his head as rocks and dirt rained down around him. A basketball-sized boulder smashed onto his left arm and partially severed it.

"Please God," he prayed, "please don't let me suffer anymore."

The huge boulder was shorn from the rock, and it tumbled down the steep hill, dislodging other rocks and debris along the way. The size of a bus, the giant rock

ploughed straight through the road, and an entire section of the highway disappeared with it. Debris piled up on what was left of the road, and a round boulder the size of a washing machine began tumbling down the asphalt. Yoram looked up in horror, at the five-ton boulder rolling erratically toward him, and closed his eyes in terror. There was a slight popping sound as the rock rolled over him and continued down the road.

“We did it!” Jason yelled exuberantly.

He raced around the curve and stared at the missing section of highway.

“You know,” Steven commented, “We could have blown a section right out of the highway itself with that much dynamite. I didn’t even stop to think about that. Oh well, it’s too late now.”

“This did the job just fine!” Jason exclaimed. “Lemme have the binoculars would you?”

Steven handed him the pair of binoculars that Jason had retrieved from Fred’s truck and focused on the slide. Something else caught his attention and he trained the binoculars on a section of roadway beyond the landslide.

“Eww,” he commented, as he saw the flattened remains of Yoram on the asphalt, “that’s gross.”

He followed Steven back to Summerhaven, where Jenny was awaiting them.

“Come on, Jenny!” Steven called. “Time to go.”

“I heard it up here!” she exclaimed as she opened the passenger’s door. “Sounded like thunder. Did it work?”

“Like a charm.” her uncle replied.

His niece slid into the seat next to him, and Jason followed his new friends down the back side of the mountains and arrived just outside of Oracle, on Highway 77. There did not appear to be any signs of life in Oracle, either. Jason pulled alongside Steven’s SUV and rolled the window down.

“Reservation’s this way,” Steven indicated, pointing to the right, “but I don’t want to go all the way into Globe. It’ll be getting too close to Phoenix and I’m sure they have patrols. Just past Winkleman, we’ll cut through the open desert toward Coolidge Dam. We’ll pick up the road there and head into San Carlos. Hopefully we’ll find some people.”

“We can head south through Reddington, down into Benson.” Jason suggested. “We can still make it back to my ranch.”

“Be a waste of fuel.” Steven advised. “There’s no one else alive down your way. There may be others up this way. We know Phoenix made it. Which reminds me, we should top our tanks in Winkleman if the pumps still work there. You must be running low, yourself.”

“Getting there.” Jason replied. “Phoenix made it yeah, but the survivors are all going the way of the cattle car. We’ll see what we find up there, but if it’s iffy, I’m heading home, with or without you. I’m already set up to keep going.”

“Fair enough.” Steven replied. “If it doesn’t look good, I’ll be right behind you all the way down, too. We’ve both lost friends, Jason. Let’s try and keep together if we can. I don’t know about you, but I don’t have any family left, other than Jenny. If she hadn’t come to spend her summer vacation from college with me, I’d have no one.”

“The world’s a big place, and it’s a hell of a lot bigger when it’s empty and you’re in it all alone.” Jason replied. “We stick together then, no matter what. We’ll head toward

the San Carlos Reservation and see what we find. We may never find what we're looking for though, Steven. We may just end up being Gypsies; spending the rest of our lives like a fox on the run."

*

"Home, sweet home!" Roy exclaimed, as he and Betty Sue carried Jules through the front door of their own house. "Damn it feels good to be back home again."

"How does it feel to be a cop again?" Betty Sue inquired, referring to their false position as Indian "rangers."

"Shitty." Roy replied. "In N'awlins I was a real cop. I enforced the law. Here, I'm nothing but a goddamn Stormtrooper enforcing some kind of New World Order trespassing bullshit. I wish I had a time machine."

"At least we're alive and we're *together*." his wife said encouragingly. "Thank God we didn't end up like everyone else, shipped off in railcars like cattle; like something out of the Holocaust."

"Those poor people, Roy! I'll never forget the sound of those crying children as long as I live. I can't get it out of my mind. That could have been us. It's like this isn't real; like it's a dream or something. This is America! How can this be happening? Thank God we have a friend in Joseph and his people. They put their own safety in jeopardy to help us."

"I can't help but wonder why." Roy mused. "We weren't his only friends in town. What made him pick us?"

"Because you are a warrior." a voice behind them explained.

Roy whirled around to see Joseph Whitehorse standing in his doorway.

"I did not mean to startle you, Roy Guilbault, but I felt it was time to talk. You see, I know who and what is behind all this, and why. Over the years, we as a people were lied to and forced from our lands. We blamed the White Man and his government, but it was neither. The same people that forced your own government to kill us are the same ones who instructed them to kill you."

"You left your city because what they wanted you to do was wrong. You wanted to stay here because what your government has done is wrong. They are putting you all in reservations, just as they did us, and just as you will be forced to stay within those reservations, the ones that put you there will remain free."

"Your people will be forced to work in the reservations - the urban areas - to provide for the new Great Fathers. As chief of this tribe, I have been told of these things. This is why we were spared, Roy Guilbault, to patrol the wilderness reserves and capture any Whites that escape and venture out here. It is our chance to do to you what many of us feel was done to us."

"Then why help us?" Roy asked in a puzzled tone.

"Because I do not seek revenge. I see the bigger picture, and just as they blamed you before, they were still responsible. Once we have served a purpose, we too, shall join you in the great cities of rule. There will one day become a third - and final - Battle of Wounded Knee, where we will once and for all, triumph over the evil that has enslaved both our peoples."

"We need you, Roy Guilbault, just as you need us. While we are indeed friends, this goes beyond friendship; it is survival. A new society will indeed flourish in this country,

but not in the overcrowded cities. Out here, a country within a country will exist. The beautiful areas that are to be preserved will still be enjoyed; just not by everyone. Your country; our country, has been stolen from us. And not just this country. This has happened all over the world. Most countries are desolate now; the survivors moved to a few cities and resort communities.”

“Resort communities?” Roy echoed.

“The ski areas below the reservation are to remain operational.”

“What?” Roy asked incredulously. “Who the hell’s gonna use them?”

“You will see for yourself soon enough.” Joseph replied. “Look at the back of the dollar bill and you will have your answer. The pyramid and the all-seeing eye will tell you all you need to know.”

*

Matt Cooper and his family watched the horizon, as the wall of smoke drew increasingly closer. For the past week they had seen smoke in the distance, and not from just one direction, either. Rumors had been spreading through the farming network that as each family was forcibly removed from their farm, it was being burned behind them so even if families refused to turn themselves in, they would have nowhere to go.

It was a horrifying thought; his farm being burned to the ground. This was the sort of thing that Sherman had done under Lincoln’s War of Northern Aggression or something a Third World country would do to its own people, but modern-day America! What was wrong with our country; what was wrong with our world?

Gunshots could be heard faintly in the distance, or at least what sounded like them, and Matt could only wonder their significance. If they were burning the farms, could they be killing the livestock as well? Such a thought was horrifying, but not as horrifying as the other possibility; could this be the punishment for not turning themselves in?

Charlie suddenly burst into their yard on Hellion, and stopped the stallion next to Matt.

“They’re at Johnny Bartlett’s place now!” he exclaimed. “They’ve got Johnny and Melissa out in the front yard and they’re shooting his livestock!”

“What?” Matt burst out.

“I saw it, Matt! I rode over there and they were already there. I watched from the woods across the way. They were shooting every one of his cows.”

“This can’t be happening.” Matt said, sinking back against the fence. “This is America, not some communist country! This can’t be happening, Charlie!”

“Matt, they tried to kill us all with that aerosol stuff. Do you think they’re going to have any qualms about killing our animals or torching our farms?”

“They’re not taking mine without a fight. Lisa and I made a pact a long time ago, that should we ever find ourselves in a situation like this that we would fight to the death. If one of us gets hit, the other will finish it.”

“But the baby, Charlie!”

“They won’t get him either, Matt. We love him that much. May the Lord forgive us, but those bastards won’t get our son!”

Matt put his hand to his forehead.

“This can’t be happening. Maybe we can hide out somewhere.”

“They have the area surrounded, Matt. This is being done by the quadrant, and everything inside of it is being torched. They’re starting from ground zero; scorched Earth policy. They’ll replant it with whatever they’re going to raise in our place.

“They may kill us, but we’re going down fighting. I don’t want to live in a world where my country has been imprisoned; where I’m a slave for the rest of my life. I’m going to die like a man, Matt! I’m going to take as many of them with me as I can before they get us.”

“God bless you, Charlie.” Gayle said quietly, tears in her eyes. “We have to do what we need to for George, but we understand what you have to do. You’ll be in our prayers.”

“Thank you Gayle.” Charlie responded. “I’ve got to go. It won’t be long before they’re here.”

“Godspeed, my friend.” Matt said softly, as his friend brought the horse around and rode off at a gallop. “Why aren’t we all out there fighting together?”

“Because they’d just kill us all together.” Gayle replied.

The family watched an hour later, as Charlie’s barns began to burn. Gunshots were ringing out from both the house and the yard, as Charlie and Lisa engaged the enforcers of the New World Order in a vicious firefight. Charlie was a gun nut and had stockpiled well over the years, and he was doing well holding his own against the heavily-armed agents, but they weren’t about to let Charlie get the best of them.

The sound of crashing glass caught Charlie’s attention and an incendiary grenade landed in the dining room, igniting the floorboards. He grabbed a fire extinguisher but a second grenade landed in the back bedroom. Flames began to spread across the carpet and ignited the curtains.

“Come out with your hands up or we will burn you alive!” a voice barked through a bullhorn.”



Charlie and Lisa’s farm is set ablaze by agents of the New World Order

“Screw you, you Commie sons of bitches!” Charlie yelled back. “This is *my* house and *my* farm, you blue-bereted agents of Hades!”

He suddenly appeared in the doorway and opened fire with a modified AK47 loaded with thirty-year-old Chinese steel core ammunition. Several agents dropped, as the projectiles punctured their vests, but return fire cut Charlie down like a duck in a shooting gallery. He fell back into the kitchen and managed to crawl toward Lisa.

“Oh my god!” she screamed, picking up his rifle and firing back at the black-clad agents through the window.

Return fire struck her as well, and she was knocked from her feet. Young Charles was screaming hysterically, and Lisa crawled toward him, bleeding heavily. She cradled the baby in her arms and dragged herself to her husband, who smiled faintly.

“I can’t move, Baby,” he said weakly. “You’re going to have to do it for me.” Flames licked into the room as Lisa took the .45 from her waistband and cocked the hammer. In the distance, Matt heard three deliberate pistol shots from inside the house, and then nothing more. He watched helplessly, as his neighbor’s house and barns became a raging inferno.

“Stay where you are!” the voice barked through the bullhorn at Matt, Gayle, and George. “We are here to relocate you. Do *not* make our jobs difficult.”

George clutched Cootie tightly, as a dozen heavily-armed agents approached him and his parents.

“Do you have your belongings?” a black-clad agent questioned roughly.

Matt nodded.

“On the porch,” he replied.

“Get them and come with us,” the agent responded.

He turned to the others.

“Okay, take care of the livestock and torch the barn.”

Matt cringed, as shots rang out in the direction of the barn, and he knew his horses and goats were being murdered by the enforcers of the New Society. He could not bear to look over his shoulder, as he reached the porch, where several suitcases were stacked.

“Pick ‘em up and let’s go,” the agent in charge said gruffly. “No pets, Kid. The cat stays behind.”

“No!” George cried, shrinking back and clutching the terrified tuxedo cat in his arms.

“I said the goddamn cat stays!” the man snarled, reaching out and tearing the small cat from the boy’s arms. “I also said not to make our jobs difficult.”

Cootie reflexively raked his arms with her small, razor-sharp claws, and he let out a yowl, dropping her. She ran across the yard toward the maturing corn plants as the agent drew his pistol on the fleeing cat.

“No!” Matt yelled; lunging at the agent and knocking the gun from his hand before it could discharge.

The small cat disappeared into the corn, as another agent slammed his rifle butt into the side of Matt’s face. Matt dropped to the ground stunned, and Gayle knelt down beside him.

“Run Georgie!” Matt shouted in a daze. “Run as fast as you can and don’t ever look back! Don’t you ever look back, Georgie!”

The boy tried his best, but was caught within a few seconds. He kicked and screamed as he was lifted from his feet and carried roughly to a transport vehicle and thrown in. Two gunshots reached the boy's ears, as the tailgate on the truck slammed shut behind him. As the truck lurched forward, smoke began billowing from the sturdy oak barn that had withstood the elements for over one hundred years. Minutes later, the accompanying farmhouse and cornfield followed suit.

Cootie darted into the woods at the far end of the cornfield and looked back as George was tossed into the truck. She hid behind a stump and watched as the truck drove away. She would never see her young friend again, and when the cat came out of hiding the next day, all she found were the smoldering remains of the house and barn, and a familiar scent from two lifeless forms in the yard.

For years, certain Americans had been warning of the consequences of a strengthening centralized government, but now there was nothing that could be done. Too late, the general population had finally understood that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Part II

After the Rain

CHAPTER 6

“Possessions, outward success, publicity, luxury - to me these have always been contemptible. I believe that a simple and unassuming manner of life is best for everyone, best for both the body and the mind.” - Albert Einstein

January 23rd, 2037; twenty-three years later

George Cooper rolled over in bed to turn off his alarm clock. 5:00 AM came early every morning, and George frequently wished he had been assigned to Shift Number Two instead. The only problem with that was that his mate, Brooke, was already assigned to Shift Number Two.

Mates were not allowed to share the same work shift if they had dependents, as there were no facilities for watching minors; at least not anymore. Thousands of children had been raised in education centers after the Biosickness, as there had been many whose parents died, either during the sickness itself or in the barbaric aftermath of the relocations that followed, but after the initial generation had matured, daycare was considered to be a waste of time and resources. Waste was not permitted in the New Society, therefore, neither was daycare.

George shook off the chill as he slid the warm covers back. The heat was limited to fifteen degrees (centigrade) in the cold months, and it was always so cold when he got up in the mornings.

“I wish it was summer again.” he remarked softly. “I hate the cold.”

Brooke stirred, and rose up on one elbow.

“Then it will be too hot.” she responded sleepily. “And then you’ll be complaining that it’s thirty-five, and wish it was fall again. Honestly George, why can’t you forget about the past?”

Brooke had been too young when the Biosickness happened, to even remember comfortable heat and air conditioning. She had no concept of indoor plumbing, except for the community toilets at the end of the halls on each floor of the domiciles, and with the exception of the cooking machines, appliances were only a fleeting memory. At twenty-seven years of age, Brooke Cooper was one of the first generation of New Society citizens to have no memories of the Old World.

Clothes were taken to the cleaners once a week for refurbishing, and food - like water - was dispensed daily, so there was no need for refrigeration machines. Food was allowed to be cooked or baked, and this was accomplished by using the cooking machines that the Authority provided each domicile. These were the only appliances that were still legal for use by ordinary citizens, as appliances were a tremendous source of energy consumption and waste.

Water was allotted at the dispersion sites known as “wells,” for each citizen and dependent, twenty liters every day. With this water, each citizen was expected to use it for consumption, washing dishes, and for personal hygiene.

George was now thirty-one years old, and remembered quite well, the conveniences of modern civilization. He missed refrigerators, and washers and dryers, electric blankets, and riding in his father's pickup truck, but most of all, he missed showers and air conditioning during the summer. He even remembered the time his father had taken him behind the barn and set up a target for him to shoot with one of the weapons his father had owned. He seemed to remember his father calling it a twenty-one or a twenty-three, or some other odd number that made no sense. It didn't really matter anyway, for after the Biosickness, all weapons had been declared as unlawful items to own or even possess.

"I was eight when the Biosickness happened, Brooke," George replied. "Enforcers killed my parents. I can't forget that, ever. I know you don't remember; you were only four when it happened, but I do!

"I still remember cars and guns, and computers and video games, Brooke. I even had a cat."

"What's a cat," Brooke inquired sleepily, and in a somewhat bored tone, "some kind of a tool?"

"No! It wasn't a tool Brooke, for Green's sake. It was a pet. I had a cat named Cootie, and she was very smart. She used to move the lids from our dinner pans on the stove and eat the food. Then she'd put them back, and Mom wouldn't know any different until she went to put the leftovers away. She used to get so mad! She'd grab the broom and swat at her."

"A pet," Brooke echoed. "George, what's a pet? You know I don't understand half of these archaic words you use, sometimes."

"An animal, Brooke;" George said in exasperation, "a small animal that I had for a friend. We used to have animals that lived with us and we would call them pets. I guess because they were furry and we would pet them. Anyway, I need to get ready for work. I'll see you later on, okay?"

"Okay, Honey," Brooke replied. "Have a good day at work. Knock 'em dead, George."

She snuggled under the covers and drifted off to sleep again, as her mate dressed himself and ate a bowl of dry cereal in the dining area.

George worked Shift Number One, which ran from 6:00 AM to 12:00 PM. Brooke worked from 12:00 to 6:00 PM, which was Shift Number Two. Both mates had Shifts Three and Four to spend together six days a week, and all day on Sunday. Off times were very special to Brooke and George, who were very much in love.

In the New Society, citizens worked for six hours a day, six days a week. This broke work time down into manageable shifts, and allowed the society to run nonstop, six days a week. Everyone was off on Sunday, and nothing was open; no stores, utilities, or anything. If something broke down or failed on Sunday, it would simply have to wait until Monday. The only exception was the enforcers. They were always on duty; seven days a week, three hundred, sixty-five days a year. Enforcers even worked on Green Day.

Sundays were a time for rest and relaxation. There were no rules as to what Citizens could do on Sundays, but travel was openly discouraged. It was better to be at home with one's mate or family, than to be out wasting one's time wandering around and accomplishing nothing productive. The New Society was based on productive principles, and to do something unproductive went against the fundamentals of the Guidelines.

George left the domicile and walked three blocks west to his workplace; the people mover station. People movers were very important, as they moved citizens from one side of the area to the other. George's job was to ensure that citizens were placed on the correct people mover to get to whichever quadrant they intended to travel to. He was also responsible for placing incoming citizens on the proper gridcar to get to their destinations within Quadrant 47 when they arrived, and for scheduling outgoing citizens the proper gridcar once they arrived to their destination quadrant.

The urban area that George and Brooke domiciled in was called "Eleven." George had also heard it referred to by a few old-timers as Chicago, but he had no idea what that name meant, or where it had been derived from. Perhaps it had something to do with the era before the Biosickness, when anarchy ruled, and people had no respect for the Guidelines.

There was a great body of water to the east of the area, that some called "Mish Again," but George knew it only as the ocean. What lay beyond the ocean, no one knew, but those that called it Mish Again, said there was a land by the same name somewhere far beyond the horizon. Others called it Canada, or some other silly name that sounded to George like Aunt Tario. That made no sense, and whoever Aunt Tario was, George supposed she must have been Italian, but he could see no reason that a fabled land would be named for her.

George found all this hard to believe, as everyone knew two things about the Earth. The first was that it was flat, and the second was that the ocean spilled over the edge in a giant spectacular waterfall, so there was no way that there could be land beyond the horizon, which was where the ocean tumbled over the edge of the Earth into space. Such notions were ridiculous, and usually the result of some old-timer spouting off at the mouth for sake of causing strife within the community.

George had seen sound-pictures of this in his education center, when he was a teenager. The instructor had called the edge of the Earth, Niagara, and George remembered the sound of the ocean as it thundered over the horizon. Citizens must have been very ignorant to doubt what the instructors taught, and to think that there was land beyond the horizon was simply unfathomable.

George looked out over the ocean, as the rising sun reflected in its waters. He vaguely remembered the sun rising over fields near his father's house, before the Biosickness. There was no reflection, and his father had called the fields, "corn." George seemed to remember something about corn, but from what he remembered, it looked an awful lot like the yellow foodstuff the Authority called maize.

Maize was a staple of the New Society. It was ground into maize meal, for baking bread and other carbohydrate dishes. Sometimes wheat meal was substituted for maize meal, and George preferred it. His neighbor, Frank O'Reilly, called wheat meal "flour," but George could never understand why. Wheat meal had a smoother texture, and the bread that Brooke made with it tasted much better than that made from maize.

George looked into the retinal clock at the people mover station, as he reported for his work duties. A green light indicated that it was permissible for him to enter the work area of the station, and he proceeded through the turnstile.

"Good morning, Citizen Cooper." his overseer greeted him warmly.

“Good morning, Supervisor Klein.” George responded politely, as he removed his overcoat and hung it on the wall in the office.

He of course, needed to keep his sweater on, as the temperature in the workplaces was the same as the domiciles - fifteen degrees - or as the old-timers called it, “fifty-eight degrees, Fahrenheit.” Old-timers certainly had strange names for common things, George had decided a long time ago. They even referred to the people movers as trains! It was like they spoke a foreign language sometimes.

George, like all the other learners in his education center, had learned to accept the fact that old-timers had been damaged during the Biosickness, and that their thoughts were random and meaningless, and could never be relied upon as truth. It was common knowledge that anyone over the age of forty was senile, and that their thoughts were erratic and misaligned. Because of this, George was not looking forward to his fortieth birthday in less than ten years. How would he survive the next forty years of his life as a brain-fogged old-timer?

Advances were being made on a quantum scale however, that seemed to keep the age of senility at an advancing rate. If this kept up, George would never become senile and revert to the meaningless behavior of those ten years his senior. The marvels of science and medicine were incredible, and only a fool could not see what an advanced society they lived in. George was glad that he had been born on the eve of the Biosickness, when the country awakened to the vast new resources of knowledge that the world had to offer. Still, he listened to Frank O'Reilly on occasion, and seemed in awe, when Frank spoke of things that he had never heard of before.

He chalked the flying machines, sound machines, and picture machines up to the rants of senile old fools, but somehow, somewhere in the back of his mind, these stories seemed to make sense. George vaguely remembered something his father had called a “seede,” where it seemed as though an entire orchestra had filled the small farmhouse in Indiana with music and song.

George struggled to sift the past from the present, as he strove to be a good citizen and not violate any of the Guidelines. He had no desire to become a violator and inflict the wrath of the Authority upon himself. The urban director was a harsh man who ruled the area with an iron fist. He tolerated no violation of the Guidelines without inflicting serious punishment upon the transgressors, lest others be tempted to make the same mistake.

He had witnessed the “demeaning punishment” of a female citizen who had violated the Guidelines simply by being outside during Shift Number 4, when all those who were not working, were to be in their domiciles and in bed.

The poor woman had been forced to spend a week and a half in the public stocks at Soldiers Field, in Grant Park; one of the few public places that had remained after the Biosickness had passed. Citizens had been encouraged to humiliate her by throwing rocks, mud, and foodstuffs, and a few had even resorted to pulling off her clothes and beating her to increase her humiliation. It appeared that fear of having the punishment inflicted upon oneself only encouraged the same behavior against others, but so was human nature. By the time her sentence was over, the poor woman was bruised from head to toe, and sunburned so badly that her skin had turned red and begun to blister. George had no intentions of ever doing anything that would cause him to end up in *that* situation himself.

George sat down in his workspace and began his work shift as a people mover coordinator. His shifts usually weren't too bad; dealing with people for six hours was similar to going to grammar school back in Indiana.

Supervisor Klein, like all the other overseers, enforcers, and directors, lived in Quadrant 1, a wooded area to the northwest, just outside of Quadrant 3 and Elgingrid. Unlike the crowded multistory row houses that ordinary citizens lived in, these special good citizens were rumored to live in separate domiciles! No one could prove this however, as ordinary citizens were forbidden from entering Quadrant 1. One needed a special permit to enter, just like going into the buffer zones.

George sometimes wished he could be an overseer, but it was impossible, as they were all given their positions by birthright. Most were snobbish and some were downright mean, but Supervisor Klein was always friendly to simple citizen, George Cooper.

Things could have been worse; his neighbor Frank had to unload ships at the ocean docks for his work shift. Darryl Jones from the far end of the hall, unloaded shipments at the rail yards for his work. From his conversations with Darryl, George had learned that there were sixteen other urban areas located away from the ocean, so they would not slide off the edge of the world. Apparently, Eleven was close to the edge, but the ships that traded with Eleven from the other ocean areas, skirted the treacherous edge at Niagara. The inland areas traded by railcar and were in no danger of the deadly falls at Niagara, but had to be wary of the opposite edge of the Earth past Urban Area Six, also known as Dallasfortworth by the old-timers, where the planet turned into a dry and desolate beach before ending abruptly at the edge of the planet.

George often wondered why he couldn't see the other urban areas, like Dallasfortworth, or Deecee and Alanna, but assumed they were simply too far way, and lay past mountains that blocked the view. Since the Earth was flat, they would show up otherwise, he reasoned.

George's daydreaming was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a shrill female voice.

"Quadrant 53, not 43." she emphasized. "I need to get to Auroragrid, not Oakparkgrid."

"I'm sorry, Citizen Bertolini." George apologized. "I misunderstood you. You will need people mover 29, and then take Gridcar 6 when you disembark. It will take you directly to Quadrant 53. Ride safely, and thank you for using the Area Eleven people mover."

George closed his eyes and his thoughts drifted back to his father's farm in Indiana so many years ago. This was happening more and more frequently as his son Josh, approached his second birthday. The words of his father remained emblazoned in his mind, like a recording. He could hear his voice as clearly as though it were being spoken in his ear.

"Remember Georgie, no matter what, they cannot take from you, your memories of this farm or the times we have spent here. Remember them always, and you will always have a place to go when you need to get away."

The sound of his father's voice was always there in his dreams. Sometimes George would awaken in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, convinced he was still eight years old and living in Knox County, Indiana. Only the soft touch of Brooke's hand could

convince him that he was really thirty-one years old, and living in an overcrowded megalopolis called Urban Area Eleven.

He retreated here often, and the farm was just as he remembered it; row after row of shining corn stalks waving in the breeze, and the sound of a billygoat balking behind the barn. Sometimes he could hear the sound of a chainsaw, and smell the scent of hardwood smoke wafting across the yard from the silver potbellied stove in the living room.

His father was always there; smiling and giving a word of advice or just nodding encouragingly. George had milked the goats, saddled the horses, and picked the acres of Silver Queen corn ten thousand times in his mind over the years, yet he never tired of this place. One day he would return - and he would bring his wife and son with him - to see the house and barn, and for young Josh to play with Cootie as he had done so many years before.

“Coordinator Cooper!” a voice rang out, startling him from the warmth of the wood fire and the purring of Cootie in his lap. “I’m in a hurry! Route me to Quadrant 13 please.”

“Yes, Citizen.” George replied politely, as he ticked away on the keyboard of the people mover station’s computer.

“How convenient it would be to have one of these in my domicile.” George thought. *“I’ll bet our lives would be so much easier if everyone had a computer in their domicile too. Too bad they’re only for official Society workplaces.”*

February 14th, Mates Day

“George, Honey, would you come here please?” Brooke inquired of her mate.

“What is it, Sweetie?” he inquired gently.

Brooke held up a plastic wand with a pink swab on the end.

“I just tested positive for another dependent.” she replied.

“What?” George burst out. “So soon? But Joshua is only two.”

“I know, George, but it says I’m positive for another dependent.” Brooke responded. “I’m scared George. I don’t want my conductive vessels tied any more than you do, but we can only have two dependents. I wish there was some way to prevent us from having dependents when we don’t want them. With all the advances in science, maybe one day there will be a way to have Happiness without making dependents, and without having our vessels tied.”

“I don’t know,” George responded, “that’s asking an awful lot of science. Besides, even if they do, it will be too late for us.”

“George,” Brooke said plaintively, “I want more dependents.”

“Brooke, I know you do and so do I, but we can’t. The Guidelines say we can only have two, unless you have twins the second time around. Having more than two would increase the population, and society can’t handle that. The planet can’t take any more citizens than we already have, without destroying itself. The instructors taught us all this in Education, Brooke.

“The Biosickness was the Green Man’s way of helping us stay healthy. Before that, the world was sick and dying. Citizens wasted the resources and burned trees for heat. Imagine, burning the trees, Brooke! I remember my father doing that when I was little. We used to eat red meat too. If only I’d realized then what I know now.”

“George,” Brooke repeated, slightly impatient this time, “I want *more* dependents.”

George looked at his mate and saw the love in her eyes. Like all mates, they had been chosen for one another due to biological compatibilities, but unlike most couples, they were truly in love. Chosen mates usually bickered and rarely had dependents so close together. In fact, many mates ended up having to go to extraction clinics to be able to have any dependents at all.

“We *can’t*, Brooke.” George replied. “Even if we wanted to, there is no way. The Guidelines clearly state that mates can only have two dependents, except in the case of twins in the second expectancy. As citizens of Eleven, we can’t violate the Guidelines.”

“Then let’s leave.” Brooke said suddenly.

George was taken completely aback. Never in his years as a citizen had he heard such blasphemy. He was required by the Guidelines to report his mate for such thoughts of disobedience, yet he loved her deeply and knew he could never bring himself to commit such an act.

“Brooke, don’t say such things!” he burst out in a harsh whisper. “There could be enforcers outside the door. What in Green’s name is wrong with you?”

“I want more dependents!” Brooke whispered fiercely. “I want to be free. I want to be free with you and I want to have more of your dependents.”

She gazed into George’s eyes.

“We can escape to the wilderness.” she said quietly. “We can take Josh and go.”

“Entering the wilderness is punishable by death!” George whispered back. “Brooke, what has gotten into you?”

“I don’t know, but it’s getting stronger, George. The more the days go by, the more I want more dependents, and I can’t have them here!”

She took her mate’s hands in hers.

“You remember what it was like, don’t you George? You were eight when the Biosickness came through. How many times have you told me about your parents and the domicile in the country? About machines that I have no idea of what you are talking about, animals that had their own domicile, animals you kept as friends, and how you grew maize in open fields that reached as far as the eye could see.”

Brooke squeezed George’s hands even tighter.

“Everywhere I go, there are people. No matter where we look, there are domiciles as far as the eye can see. Blue domiciles, red domiciles, yellow domiciles. The only place where there aren’t any, is Grant Park and the ocean. Do you know how many times I’ve looked across the ocean and was awed by the fact there are no domiciles in it?”

“George, what if there were no domiciles? What if there was no Eleven? Do you remember what you used to do before the Biosickness?”

“A little, I think.” George responded. “We farmed the corn, I mean maize, and we had horses and goats. We got milk from the goats, and from Mr. Bartlett’s cows.”

“Milk?” Brooke inquired. “What did you do with milk?”

“We drank it.” George replied. “And Mom used it for cooking, sometimes.”

“Your parents drank milk?” Brooke inquired in a horrified voice. “That is so gross. It’s fine for Josh, but I wouldn’t drink it, especially coming from the breast of an animal. Green Man, that is so sickening.”

“Anyway,” George continued in a slightly irritated tone, “you asked me about the farm and I was telling you. Would you like me to continue?”

“I’m sorry, Honey.” Brooke apologized.

“We traded with Mr. Bartlett for firewood and beef. Dad used to cut the wood with a loud thing he called a chainsaw and then we would split it on a machine so we could burn it in the wintertime to help heat the house. I remember sitting in front of the potbelly stove, with Cootie in my lap, just soaking the heat in, on a chilly day.

“Dad taught me how to start a fire!” George suddenly burst out. “I just now remembered that.”

“What happened to your parents?” Brooke inquired. “You’ve never told me.”

“I don’t know.” George replied. “The enforcers came to the farm and I had Cootie. They tried to take her and Dad grabbed at them or something. They knocked him down and he told me to run, but I didn’t get very far. I never saw them again. I seem to remember shots from Charlie’s farm, but I don’t know. Things are so fuzzy.”

“What are shots?” Brooke asked in a puzzled tone.

“Gunshots.” George explained. “From a weapon. They sound like thunder when they go off.”

“That would scare me.” Brooke confided.

“It’s different when you fire one.” George mused. “I remember shooting Dad’s twenty-three or something like that.”

“You fired a weapon?” Brooke exclaimed, as though it were an act reserved only for the gods. “What was it like?”

“It was like someone punched me in the shoulder.” George recounted. “The noise was like a bolt of lightning had landed next to me. Two-twenty-three; that’s what Dad said it was. You just pulled the trigger and it kept shooting. It was fun. You looked through a circle in the back and whatever you saw in the circle, the weapon would hit. It’s been so long though. I’d forgotten, really. I fired one that fit in one hand too. Colt, I think he called it.”

“What else?” Brooke urged. “What else do you remember?”

“TV, the radio, news, weather, the refrigerator–”

“What’s a refrigerator?” Brooke interrupted. “And what’s teevee?”

“A refrigerator kept the food cold,” George explained, “and the TV showed moving pictures and stories. I don’t know how to explain it, but you watched stories on the TV.”

“I want to see teevee.” Brooke stated. “Maybe there’s teevee in the wilderness.”

“I doubt it.” George replied. “I don’t think there’s TV anywhere anymore, much less the wilderness.”

He looked intently at his mate.

“I miss those things, Brooke. But they’re gone; never to be again.”

“You miss them because they were right.” his mate coaxed. “What was better, that or this?”

George thought intently, but did not answer her.

“What was better, George? Tell me; I want to know. If you think that was better than this, I have a right to know.”

“It was.” he finally admitted. “I miss those things, and I sure do miss my mom and dad. I miss Cootie too. I wish Josh could have known her. I used to go for walks along the

road in front of our house, and through the fields. It was so peaceful and quiet; not like all the noise and lights, and all the people we have here.”

Brooke placed her hands over his.

“Then let’s have more dependents, George. Let’s escape to the wilderness. You said you knew how to start a fire. We can do it. Let’s have more dependents, and let’s try and find a... cat for Joshua.”

“Children.” George responded.

“What?” Brooke inquired. “What is that?”

“They aren’t called dependents, at least they weren’t then. When we were young, we were called children.”

“Then let’s get out of Eleven,” Brooke urged, “so you and I can have as many children as we want.”

“You’re speaking heresy.” George replied. “For all I know, you could be an enforcer trying to get me to escape.”

“Are you that paranoid, George Cooper?” Brooke demanded. “How dare you accuse me of being an enforcer! I confided in you! I trusted you with my life, and you have the audacity to accuse me of being an enforcer?”

“Keep your voice down!” George cautioned. “Look Honey, I know you’re not an enforcer, but what you’re talking about is the only crime that still carries the death penalty. Escape is a serious offense. If we go to the buffer zones, we’ll be in trouble, but the most they’ll do is flog us in public or put us in the stocks. If we go into the wilderness, they’ll execute us, Brooke! They’ll take us to Grant Park and cut our heads off!

“Remember four years ago when that man escaped? He made it just inside the wilderness but he got caught. They knew where he was, somehow. The Authority knows everything; it’s like magic. They brought him back here and they cut his head off in front of everyone with a big knife. I still remember the sounds of his screaming, and choking on his blood as it filled his lungs. I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. It was horrible! Do you want to risk that?”

Brooke stared intently at her mate for several seconds before replying.

“I want more children, George. I want a family and I want to be free. If I can’t be free, then I would rather die; so to answer your question, yes. Come with me to the wilderness. Help me raise our son as a free man.”

“Brooke,” George said slowly, “I love you so much. I love you more than life itself. If you left me here all alone, I would certainly die. You are my mate; wait, there was a word that Dad used to use for my mother... you are my *wife*, and I am your husband. We will escape together, but we must plan it carefully if we are to be successful.”

“How?” Brooke asked in a whisper.

“I don’t know yet.” George replied. “I’ll ask Darryl about the railcars. They come in from other areas and the buffer zones. He said something once about seeing a map with the buffer zones and the other areas in his overseer’s office. I’ll have to ask him what he remembers.”

“Well, be careful.” Brooke cautioned. “I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“You don’t have to tell me that!” George exclaimed. “This was your idea, not mine. Darn right I’m going to be careful! I don’t want to end up being publicly flogged or put in the stocks, Brooke. Remember that poor woman that was caught out during Shift Number

Four that time? I felt so bad for her. I heard she went insane and they put her in the hospital to make her better.

"I love you and I want to be with you for the rest of my life. If you want to leave, then I will leave with you, but we need to research this, Brooke. I need to find out what I can, so that we can do this right. If we're caught, we'll never see each other again, and our son will end up an orphan. Do you want that? Be patient, Honey. Let me ask a few questions, and look into the people mover computer. Perhaps I can find some information that will help us."

"I shouldn't have said anything," Brooke replied. "The last thing I want is for you to get into trouble because of me. I just want to have more children with you so badly, George. I just want to leave this place and start over with you and the children."

"I know," George replied gently, "but you need to remember that what you have suggested is a major violation of the Guidelines."

He paused for a few seconds, pondering something in his mind.

"What is it?" Brooke inquired.

"I was just thinking about something that man said before that knife cut into his throat. He said, 'they heard me walking! Don't walk into the wilderness. They can hear you! They know you're there!' Then they sliced his head off. Green Man, that was awful, Brooke. The noise he made before he died! We can do this, but we need to do it right. We can't just leave without a plan."

"I know, but the baby is due in September, George. It doesn't leave us much time."

"No it doesn't," he replied. "Our window of opportunity isn't very big, either. I've toyed with this off and on over the years, Brooke. Just in the event that if something ever happened, I would make a plan. I guess it comes from my dad. He was always telling me to be prepared. He said it was a motto for some organization they used to have, but I never knew what it was, or what he meant."

"I understand though, that he was right about that. If we live each day without preparing for tomorrow, we can never be expected to be ready. We need to plan for things. If we can get into the buffer zones, we'll be halfway there, but I need to know what to expect when we go into the wilderness. I have no idea what it is, Brooke. I don't know what is there or how we can survive. I know this; you have awakened in me, thoughts I have harbored for many years. I miss my old life so much sometimes, Brooke! I can still see, hear, and smell things from so long ago."

"I'll look into this, but you must trust me to make the right decision, and you must trust me implicitly. If you want to escape then you'll have to listen to me and not question a single thing I tell you, okay?"

"Okay," Brooke agreed, snuggling tightly against him. "Do what you need to and I will do whatever you say. I am your wife, and I am here to make you happy. We just have to do it before September, somehow."

"We will," George promised. "I'll find a way for us to escape, and then we'll be free. We only have one opportunity to make this work though, Brooke. There is only one day a year when our movements are not monitored. There is only one day when we can go into the buffer zone and not attract attention to ourselves. If we miss it, we will never have the opportunity again before our vessels are tied. We *must* make our escape on Green Day."

CHAPTER 7

“In the old world that is passing, in the new world that is coming, national efficiency has been and will be a controlling factor in national safety and welfare.” - Gifford Pinchot

February 17th

“Hi Darryl.” George greeted his neighbor, as he opened the door and motioned for him to enter.

“Hey there, George.” his neighbor replied. “Haven’t seen you in a while. What have you been doing?”

“Oh, not much.” George replied. “Just making sure everyone gets the right people mover. Can’t help but wonder sometimes though, what the difference is between the people mover, and the one they get freight in on.”

“Well, ours are all shipment cars. We call them boxcars. They’re pulled by the same kind of a power source, and they both use the same rails, but the freight goes to different places. Why?”

“Oh, I was just wondering.” George responded. “I get bored sometimes. You how bored minds get; they tend to wander.”

“Oh yes.” Darryl replied, as his wife Anna appeared from down the hall. “Six hours a day, my mind wanders right back here.”

He grabbed his mate and tickled her. She let out a laughing shriek and pulled loose.

“Darryl,” George said seriously, “you remember last year when that gridcar almost hit you, right?”

“Of course.” he replied in a serious tone, his voice changing and the silly grin disappearing from his face. “What’s up, George?”

“That map you told me about that time, that was in you overseer’s office; is it still there?”

“What do you want to know that for?” he inquired. “It’s just a map.”

“Yes,” George whispered, “and if you can copy it for me, we’ll be even.”

Darryl didn’t answer for a few seconds, and then nodded.

“I can look at each part every time I go in.” he replied. “It would take me a month or so, but I could do it. I’ll just draw a different part each time.

“I do this for you and we’re even though. They catch me, and they’ll put me in the stocks sure enough.”

“You do this for me, and we’ll be even, Darryl.” George assured him. “Will you come through for me?”

“Yeah, I’ll do it for you. I owe you my life. Anna would have ended up without a mate. I’m sorry, George. You risked your life to knock me out of the way of that gridcar. If you need something, I’ll do it for you, no questions asked. Even time in the stocks is still time alive. I’ll copy that map for you.”

“Thanks, Darryl.” George replied. “If you get that information for me, we’ll be even. I’ll never mention it again.”

“I’ve got a feeling that if I get you that information, it won’t make a difference.” Darryl answered. “Just be careful with it.”

George winked.

“Of course I’ll be careful. Possession of a map is a violation of the Guidelines. I want to be a good citizen.”

George returned to his domicile to retrieve his water allotment containers, so that he could make the daily trip to the block well for filling. Fortunately he didn’t have too far to travel; it was only about a five hundred foot walk to the well. Some citizens he worked with had almost a full klom to walk, to get their ten gallons of water every day. He filled his containers and returned with Brooke’s a half hour later. George couldn’t begin to imagine having to travel a klom in each direction for water, let alone twice! He understood how difficult it must be for those citizens to get their allotments every day.

George had once counted his steps to go a klom, and he had counted eight hundred, fifty-seven. That was much too far to have to walk for water, but the Authority clearly stated it was an acceptable distance, and the citizens therefore understood and accepted that.

The word klom had never made much sense to him, but he had once heard that it had been shortened from a much longer - and therefore unnecessary - word called a kilometer. As usual, the old-timers had another word for it, and referred to a klom as a half mile, whatever in Green’s name a mile could have been.

Two hours after his departure from Darryl’s domicile, George finally sat down to read the daily events. The Daily Events were deposited on the threshold of every domicile within Eleven, and citizens were able to read about the previous day’s events, if they happened to be of interest.

George had barely begun reading the events, when it was time for the trip down to the block market.

“Where does the time go?” he mused, as he folded the events and placed them on the small table in the family area of the domicile.

He picked up the insulated bag that each family was given to store their daily rations of food and to keep them from spoiling, particularly during the summer months when the fish and white meat rations could spoil quickly. An allotment of ice was placed into a portion of the bag, and the food was packed around it before being rolled into a carrying bag.

George proceeded down the four flights of stairs to the ground level shops, and turned right, heading for the corner of 55th Street and Kedzie Avenue. This was where his entire block and three more, received their food rations for the day. Today being Saturday, was a meat day; and George looked forward to getting some real protein and a filling meal into both his and Brooke’s stomachs - especially Brooke’s - as it stretched tighter and tighter, requiring more nourishment for the baby.

Meat was not always on the menu, however. The Authority had banned red meat from citizens’ diets in 2015; only a year after Green Day had become a reality. This was for the benefit of the citizens, the Authority pointed out. After all, they knew what was best for the citizens. That is why the citizens simply existed, and the Authority enforced.

How quick the Authority was to step in and control the population for the better good of their lives! Individual thought was almost always incorrect, and certainly not for the better of the New Society.

Other meats, such as fish, poultry, and pork, were allowed into the diet, but not on a daily basis. Basing their menu on World War II rationing principles, Tuesdays were always meatless, Wednesdays were for poultry, Thursdays featured fish of some sort, be it salmon, bluefish, or shark, Fridays were once again meatless, Saturday was pork night, and Sunday was what they called “ground round”, although the round was what remained of all the other meat throughout the week. This was usually baked into some sort of pie or mixed with rice to create a casserole of some sort.

Citizens were issued ration coupons that allowed them a variety of canned and boxed goods as well. In this manner, one could mix ground round, rice, mushrooms and vegetables to create a sort of potluck dish.

Occasionally, neighbors would collaborate by saving meats and vegetables for a collective feast on Sunday. Breads, rice, vegetables, meat and mushrooms would all combine to make enough food to fill everyone to the gills, and there were usually leftovers to provide some extra sustenance throughout the week to come.

Most if not all, of the leftovers were usually consumed on Monday; dubbed Gloomy Monday by the citizens, for it was foodless altogether. Monday was a day of fasting, ordered by the Authority as food conservation. Food was still relatively scarce, and keeping one day a week without food helped keep weight down, as well as making the citizens appreciate the food they received on the other six days, even more.

Obesity had been a major battle among the world’s population prior to the Biosickness, and was one of the major focal points of the New Society, if the population were to remain as healthy as possible.

All junk food and desserts had been removed from the diet as well. This reduced the propensity of obesity, as well as removing non nutritional food from the diet of the citizens. By concentration on high-protein diets, but without the risk of heart and circulatory problems from a red meat intake, the Authority had determined that the maximum amount of diet efficiency and monetary efficiency had finally met in the middle. The result was a high vegetable protein intake, with a subsidiary diet of some healthy meats, to allow maximum human output while keeping costs to a minimum. Such systems were quite reminiscent of the Old World ways of capitalism and the end result; cheating and manipulation of genetics, to create a more useful drone. Such policies were taken right out of the Nazi handbook, but it was far from Nazis who were benefiting from this type of Godlike and demeaning behavior. This time, the New Society’s “Gestapo” operated under the umbrella of enforcers, with odd-sounding names like Menahem, Arial, and Itzhac.

George finally resumed his position on the couch when Brooke entered the domicile.

“Just in time, Honey.” her husband commented, as he placed his feet on the table and opened the daily events once again. “I just got back with the water and food for today.”

“Give me a couple of minutes to clean up, and then I’ll get dinner going.” Brooke called to him as she dumped two gallons of water into a large pan and removed her clothes to wash herself.

Citizens had two options when it came to washing. One could either take a sponge bath in one's domicile, or use one of the community showers located on each floor. The "showers" consisted of nothing more than a gravity-fed sprinkler system where one had about three minutes to soap, rinse and wash hair before he or she ran out of water. Still it was the only real way to thoroughly wash one's hair, so every other day or so, Brooke and George would use the shower facilities instead. It was chilly; as the water was cold and the temperature throughout every domicile and business complex remained an even fourteen degrees.

George had discovered a way to raise the daytime temperatures in the domicile during the cold months however, by placing some black steel drums he had found along the railcar complex in front of the windows. They were fortunate enough to have a domicile that faced south, so they received plenty of winter sun. The drums were filled with rainwater that George had collected outside and brought in a gallon or so at a time. The black drums soaked the heat of the sun in during the day which raised the water temperature. At night, the heat radiated back out into the room, and kept the temperature at a more manageable temperature of eighteen degrees.

Such conveniences were prohibited by the Guidelines, but since they rarely had visitors and could cover the drums with sheets to appear to be tables of some sort, George and Brooke were content to take the extra heat and risk a public lashing or stock session. It was this type of resourcefulness that Brooke loved about her mate.

Brooke stepped from the kitchen, wringing the water from her light brown hair and flicking some of it at her husband. George looked up in amusement, and pulled his wife on top of himself. She dropped to her knees and straddled his legs as he teased her hair and stroked her back. The wrestled for a few seconds more, before the sound of Josh's crying interrupted their foreplay.

"Of all the times!" George muttered, as Brooke stood and wrapped the towel around herself to check on the youngster. "We have tomorrow off though, so we can sleep in. We'll make up for it later."

Brooke glanced over her shoulder as she entered the bedroom to check on young Joshua, and stuck her tongue out playfully. She returned a few minutes later and removed the towel again.

"Time to start dinner," she remarked, as she pulled her clothes back on, "how about pork and gravy, with rice and maize?"

"Sounds good to me." George replied. "But then again, anything you make is really good. I'll never know where you learned how to cook like that."

"Home economics, whatever that means," she responded. "They taught us girls how to cook and clean, and sew and things like that. That's how I got my job as a seamstress; I did so well at sewing. They should have called it 'domicile chores' or something like that though. What in the world is a home, anyway?"

"I remember that word from before the Biosickness." George mused. "A house and a home were the same thing. Nowadays we call everything domiciles, but back then you could own your own house and it was by itself. What we call domiciles were called apartments and you didn't own them, you rented them."

"Rented?"

“You paid someone to live there, and it wasn’t yours. When you owned a house, you could do whatever you wanted, and no one else shared it or complained if you left a bicycle outside or something.

“Speaking of bicycles, we’d better start riding at least twenty miles a day to get in shape. We’ll need them. There’s no way we can walk to the wilderness. We need to start a regimen and stay with it. When we get up tomorrow, we’ll put Josh on the back of mine and ride out to Lombardgrid and back. If we ride that much everyday, we should be able to build up our endurance between now and Green Day. Then, we can take a people mover to Elgingrid. That’s as far as we can go by rail. From there on out, it’s bicycles all the way.”

“But all the way to where?” Brooke inquired.

“I don’t know yet.” George admitted. “I know all the grids in Eleven, but I need to know what lies beyond. The buffer zones start past Elgingrid, so we can plan on going that way.”

“They had maps on the wall at the learning center when I was growing up.” Brooke mused. “I wonder if they’re still there.”

“One way to find out.” George replied. “Be dark soon.”

*

“Do you know what you’re doing?” Brooke whispered, as they skulked through the shadows to one of the learning centers.

George removed his ID card from his wallet and slipped it into the space between the door and the frame. He slid it in and felt the catch release.

“Come on,” he whispered, as he slid the door open.

“Where did you learn that?” Brooke asked in amazement.

“One of the old-timers showed me one time when I left my card in my jacket.” George explained. “Came in handy, didn’t it?”

He looked around.

“We need to find a classroom where they have maps, like pre-Society history, or something.”

Brooke peeked through the window of a door.

“Looks like the archives room.” she whispered. “It looks like I see a lot of books in there.”

George jimmied the door open and they entered the archives of the learning center.

“Over here.” George whispered, pointing to a section that said, “Travel” over it. “Might be something there.”

It was difficult to see much in the darkness of the building, but George didn’t dare use the inspection light he had liberated from work to light things up. A spiral bound volume caught his attention and he removed it from the shelf.

“An atlas!” he whispered. “That’s exactly what we need. Let’s go!”

They exited the archives and headed for the entrance. As they rounded a corner, they were horrified to walk almost head-on, into a hulking figure.

“Enforcer!” a deep voice barked. “Don’t move or I will stun you.”

George raised the inspection light up and clicked it on. The powerful beam shone directly into the enforcer’s eyes, blinding and disorienting him long enough for George to raise the heavy aluminum light and bring it down forcefully against the man’s forehead.

The enforcer dropped like a stone, and George grabbed Brooke by the arm and yanked her after him, as they fled the building into the night.

Several blocks later, George hailed a passing gridcar.

"Other end of the grid," he instructed the operator, who nodded as they found a seat about halfway back.

George clutched the book as though it was a treasure, and in actuality to the pair, it was. They returned to their domicile at 4:00 AM, well into the forbidden time to be outside, and George dropped to the couch. He rifled through the plastic-coated pages excitedly, not really understanding what he was looking at, but one of the pages caught his attention.

"Look!" he said excitedly, as he recognized a word. "Indiana! That's where I'm from! I'm from Indiana, Brooke! We managed to get the right book. Now, we just need to figure out where in Green's name we're going."

"Where is Eleven in regard to Indiana?" Brooke inquired.

"I don't know. I have no idea where Eleven even is." George replied. "There were two pages with a lot of areas on it near the front. Let me look. Here we go; it says 'Map of the United States'. Look, here are more oceans! One called Atlantic and one called Pacific. Eleven is on the ocean, so it must be on one side or the other."

He studied the map for several minutes but could find no place called Eleven, anywhere.

"Wait," George suddenly realized, "this is an old book. What is that word the old-timers call Eleven?"

"Frank O'Reilly could probably tell us." Brook suggested. "He could probably even show us where we are."

"Yes, but I don't want to attract any suspicion, especially if there is a story in tomorrow's daily events about this book having been stolen. Chicago! That's what they call it, sometimes. Now we just need to look along the ocean for Chicago."

George pored over the map for another thirty minutes but still could not find it. He sighed.

"I don't know, Brooke," he said, beginning to rifle through the pages.

"Maybe we aren't that far from Indiana." Brooke suggested. "I remember being from someplace called Iowa."

"Well, let me look at the Indiana page again," George said. "Here it is. Look at all these names, Brooke. I wonder what they all mean."

"Maybe that's what they used to call towns." Brooke suggested.

"Or people's names." George added. "Here's one called Gary. Hey look! Here's Chicago!"

"Where?" Brooke inquired, leaning forward to see.

"At the top of Indiana. And this must be the ocean, but they're calling it Lake Michigan; that's that funny name I've heard the old-timers use for it sometimes, and there's supposed to be a place on the other side with that name too. It says to 'see map on page 30.'"

George flipped back a few pages and stared. There was Chicago, but a lot of other names looked familiar as well, they just didn't say, "grid" after them. There was Aurora, Oak Park, Wheaton, and even Elgin.

"This must be it," he whispered, "before they changed all the names."

He flipped the page back and saw Chicago in the upper right-hand corner. Elgin was still visible, but so was an entire area called Illinois.

"I recognize that name too!" George said excitedly. "Indiana and Illinois were areas called states. Let me find the page again that showed all the states together. You were right about those other names, Brooke. I think those were called towns.

"Here's Indiana and Illinois, and look; here's Iowa, Brooke! It's right next to Illinois. Where were you from?"

"Carroll, I think." Brooke replied.

"This is like looking into our past." George remarked, as he scanned the page. "Here it is."

He flipped back to the map of the country and looked it over.

"I wish I knew where the other urban areas were, and where the buffer zones and wilderness areas are," he said wistfully. "This map doesn't do us much good if we don't know where to go."

"George," Brooke said carefully, "you deal with hundreds of people every day. I'm sure you know some of them more than just by 'good morning.' Find out what they do and maybe you can find out a little bit here and there. We can put all the pieces together and maybe begin to understand where some of these boundaries are.

"If you know someone in food processing, maybe they know where it comes from. That would be a buffer zone. I'll bet those that live in the buffer zones know where the wilderness reserves are."

"Maybe." George agreed. "I'll talk to some of the old-timers too. They like to talk about the old days. Who knows what they could tell me? Maybe they could even tell me how to read this map. I don't know what all these lines are for, or why they have numbers, or what these symbols mean."

"I still think Frank could tell you." Brooke responded. "He's never had anything good to say about the Authority. I think he hates it."

"Maybe, but for now I don't trust anyone." George replied. "I trust you, myself, and Green Man, and that's it."

February 21st

Frank O'Reilly answered the quiet knock on his door and was pleasantly surprised to see Brooke standing in his doorway.

"Why Miss Brooke!" he exclaimed. "What a pleasant surprise for an old man's eyes! Won't you come in?"

"Thank you." Brooke responded, stepping into Frank's domicile.

"What can I do for you, Miss Brooke?" Frank inquired. "It's been a long time since I had a pretty lassie in me apartment."

"I was wondering if you could tell me about the times before the Biosickness." Brooke explained.

"Sure," Frank replied, "But why the sudden interest?"

He gazed at an unnatural fullness to her stomach and suspected, but kept his suspicions to himself.

"I was wondering what it was like when the whole country was inhabitable." Brooke began. "I know there are places where they grow food that people can go, but some other places no one had ever been. I was wondering why."

"You're taking a big chance asking me these questions, Lassie." Frank replied. "You've got another baby in your belly and you want it raised free, don't you?"

Brooke said nothing, but could feel the fire burning in her cheeks that was giving her secret away.

"Lassie," Frank said gently, "if they catch you, they'll kill you; and your baby too. I won't say anything Brooke, but you can't say anything to anyone else, you hear me?"

"You can level with me; I promise to the Good Lord above I won't turn you in, but if you want to do this, then you need to do it right. You need to know where to go and how to get there. Without a map of some sort, you'll be traveling blind."

"Do you know how to read a map?" Brooke inquired bluntly, throwing all caution to the wind.

"Aye. Ain't seen one in nigh onto twenty-five years though."

"Would you teach me?" Brooke asked. "If I brought you one, would you show me how to read it?"

Frank leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

"Lassie, I'll show you how to read it, but you need to take me with you. I know that book's missing from the learning center. I read about it in the daily events today. I won't say anything regardless, but if you want to learn how to get out of here, you're going to have to take me with you."

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"You're going to be mad at me." Brooke confessed, as George returned from his workplace.

She had had her shift cancelled, due to a sickness going around. Since her work as a seamstress was not overly important, her overseer had felt it safer to refrain from coming in for three work shifts in a row.

"Why?" George inquired, looking her in the eyes. "I don't like that look, Brooke. That's a 'you're going to kill me when I tell you what I have to say' look. What'd you do?"

"I talked to Frank O'Reilly today," she confessed.

"Don't tell me." George guessed. "You asked him about maps or something didn't you?"

Brooke nodded.

"He said he'll show us how to read the book, George."

"What? You told him we had it? What in Green's name is wrong with you, Brooke Cooper? This could put us in the stocks or get us publicly flogged."

"He won't tell." Brooke responded.

"How can you be so sure?"

"He wants to come with us."

"No way." George spat. "Absolutely not."

"He won't turn us in, but the only way he'll show us how to read the book, is if we take him with us."

“Brooke!” George said through clenched teeth. “I’ve half a mind to spank you within an inch of your life! Do you have any idea what this could have done?”

“He wants to help!” Brooke protested. “Besides, I did this because I love you so much. I did this for us, George. I did it for our children, and I did it for you. I would have had Happiness with him, if it meant getting the information we need to be free. This is so important George. I would do anything to be free with you, even if it meant selling myself to gain the information we need. Do you understand that? I love you that much, George Cooper!”

George ran his fingers through his light brown hair.

“What now?” he muttered.

As if on cue, there was a knock at the door.

“It must be Frank.” Brooke said quietly, sensing her husband’s angst. “I’ll get it.”

“Hello, Miss Brooke.” Frank said politely to Brooke, and nodded at George. “Mr. George.”

“Hi Frank.”

“Don’t be upset with your wife.” Frank said soothingly to George. “She did what she thought was right, and it is. She took a big chance, aye; but she came to the right person. Lady Luck was on her side. Now, show me that atlas and I’ll show you how to read it.

“This is called a legend.” Frank explained, as he pointed to several symbols on the page. “It tells you what all these symbols mean, and how far your distance is on each page. See here, one inch equals fifteen miles.”

“What’s a mile?” George interrupted.

“About two kloms.” Frank replied. “A klom is short for kilometer. In the days before the Biosickness, the United Nations was trying to change our system of measurements into theirs. We used standard measures, but they all used the Metric System.

“The Metric System used a measurement that was based on geometric portions, hence its name. There was a country called France, sons of bitches, which measured the distance from the North Pole to the Equator, and divided it by ten thousand. The resulting fraction was called a kilometer. It equaled a little over a half of our long-distance measurement of a mile.

“A kilometer or klom, as it’s now called, was broken down into a thousand parts, each one called a meter. Kilo meant one thousand, so one thousand meters was a kilometer. A meter was almost identical to our measurement of a yard, just a few inches longer. One yard was three feet; a foot is actually about the length of your own foot there George. There are five thousand, two hundred, and eighty feet in a mile. Now I realize I’ve probably lost you, but it’s not important. For some stupid reason, the Authority combined both systems after the Biosickness, and we use one for distance, and the other for volume. It’s stupid.

“This map book, or atlas, is listed in both miles and kloms, so you don’t need to guess. The ‘Km’ in the legend here, stands for kilometers. With me so far?”

George nodded.

“What are the lines and numbers for?” he inquired.

“Those are called highways.” Frank explained. “That’s how people traveled before the Biosickness in cars and trucks. The number shows they are either a state road, or if they have this blue shield, an interstate. Even numbers go east to west, and odd numbers

run north to south. Secondary roads don't really show up on here too well, until you get to the western states where things were pretty remote."

"Interstate?" Brooke echoed. "What's an interstate?"

"It was a super highway, with many lanes in each direction, for traveling." Frank explained. "They were built by the federal government and went from state to state. You could go faster on them, than regular roads. Most speed limits were sixty-five to seventy. Some out West were even seventy-five."

"Sixty-five to seventy what?" George asked in a puzzled tone.

"Miles an hour." Frank explained. "In a car or truck you could go that fast. Some sports cars would do over a hundred."

"A hundred miles in an hour?" George said incredulously. "You're crazy! A gridcar takes thirty minutes to go five kloms, and you're saying these things would go two hundred kloms in an hour?"

"Yup. Had flying machines called planes too, that would take people around the world, that went way over a thousand kloms an hour. The military had special planes that went almost twelve thousand kloms an hour."

"You're a crazy old fool!" George burst out. "Nothing can go faster than a people mover, and it only goes about forty-five kloms an hour."

"The Authority would have you believe that, Lad," Frank responded, ignoring his younger neighbor's insult, "but the truth of the matter is that they've been lying to us for a long time. We never believed them before the Biosickness, and we certainly haven't believed them since."

"Now, the rest of the symbols on the legend are pretty much no longer of any use to you. They show rest areas and state parks, but they're long gone, I'm sure."

"What are these green lines?" George asked.

"Counties. You see a name in green letters? That's the name of the county. Only other thing you really need to know is that north is always up on a map. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. East is always on the right, and west is always on the left. North is always up, and south is always down. Remember that, and you'll always know which way you're heading when you look at a map."

"Now, all these names that you see are individual towns. Roads led from one town to another. By knowing what town you're in, and what road you're on, you can always know where on the map you are. That's pretty straightforward."

"But where are the buffer zones and wildernesses?" Brooke interrupted. "That's what we really want to know. Do you have any idea where they are on these maps? I don't see them shown anywhere."

"This atlas was made before the buffer zones and wildernesses were implemented." Frank responded. "It was probably printed a few years before the Biosickness. I'm amazed you even found it at all. Someone didn't do their job properly. This kind of information should have been destroyed twenty-five years ago."

"Locally, the buffer zones are outside of Chicago, or Eleven, as you call it, but I don't know how far they go before they turn into wilderness reserves or corridors. It would have helped immensely, if you had stolen one of those maps too."

George ignored the comment, and studied the book of state maps lying on the table in front of him.

“Do you know of any safe areas?” Brooke persisted.

“I’m not really sure.” Frank replied. “Information got so muddled up after the Biosickness that no one knew *what* to believe after a while. As far as I know, there are seventeen urban areas, and then the buffer zones and wildernesses. Part of the desert Southwest was turned into a safari land too.”

“A what?” George inquired.

“A safari land.” Frank repeated. “They brought all kinds of animals over from Africa and turned them loose. It was supposed to be some kind of conservation reintroduction or something. The buffalo and grizzly bears were supposed to come back, and they brought in endangered animals from other deserts as well. There’s lions, elephants, cheetahs, and giraffes running around the Sonoran Desert now. I heard that from a captain at the docks. He apparently talked to someone in Area Twelve - what used to be called New York - who had talked to another shipper from Dallas/Fort Worth. Heard all kinds of weird stuff like that.”

“Like what?” George asked curiously. “What else?”

“Like there’s a land beyond our own.” Frank said quietly, as though some invisible force were listening in. “In case you didn’t know it, the Earth isn’t flat, Lad. It doesn’t end at Niagara Falls. The world is a big place. Rumor has it that there are other civilizations besides our own that made it through the Biosickness too. Trouble is; no one knows who or where they are, or whose side they’re on.”

March 7th

“I got you an early Holiday present.” Darryl said enthusiastically.

“How’s that?” George inquired. “Holiday isn’t for another nine months yet. Were you able to get some of the drawings for me?”

“I did better than that!” his neighbor exclaimed proudly. “Here!”

He handed George a thickly-folded sheet of paper. From the size and thickness, it was obviously a large sheet once it was unfolded.

“What’s this?” George asked, although he suspected what the paper was. “You didn’t steal the map did you?”

“No, I didn’t steal the map!” Darryl retorted. “What do you take me for, a Violator? I have more sense than to steal something that will be missed.”

George started to unfold the paper, but was stopped by Darryl placing his hands over his own.

“Don’t open it here.” Darryl cautioned. “Get it back to your own domicile and look at it there. I don’t want to know what happened to it. I never saw it, and you didn’t get it from me, understand?”

George looked at his neighbor quizzically.

“Okay.”

“The overseer was out sick yesterday.” Darryl said quietly. “Since I’m over the other loaders on my shift, they had me fill in. I’m familiar with how the shift should be run, so they had me do it. I’m not familiar with the machines in the office though, so I asked one of the suit guys to show me how to use the copier for lading bills, and when no one was around, I locked the door and took the map down and copied all the sections. Then I put the map back up on the wall and taped all the pages together with packing tape. This is

better than anything I could have ever drawn for you from memory, George. This is the real thing! It's just in black and white instead of color."

"Green Man bless you, my friend." George answered. "It doesn't matter what color it is, so long as it shows the rail lines and buffer zones, and most importantly, all the wildernesses."

"It shows all seventeen of the urban areas and it names them, the buffer zones, the wilderness reserves and corridors, rail lines, *and* it even looks like a few roads are still open too."

"Damn." George murmured. "I wonder why they would keep roads open. Nothing can use them anymore. All the vehicles stopped running when the fuel ran out right after the Biosickness."

"There's more." Darryl continued.

"Huh?"

"Inside the wilderness reserves is *another zone*." Darryl whispered. "There are actually seven areas that are connected by the wilderness corridors. The buffer zones are mostly agricultural, from what I've heard over the years. That's where all our vegetables, grain, pork, and poultry come from. There's also some light manufacturing of consumable goods as well, like our clothing and paper. Those items seem to be regional though. Fabric comes from the southern part of the country, and paper from the eastern part. Either way, it's where all our stuff comes from, but here's the thing; we aren't the only ones getting it!"

"What?" George exclaimed. "What are you trying to say, Darryl? Other areas are getting it too? I expected that; we aren't special. The Authority divides everything equally. After all, that's what the New Society is all about; equality. No one has any more than anyone one else. It's only fair. That's what keeps us all the same."

"You're missing the point, my friend." Darryl said, somewhat blandly. "There are rail lines going from the same areas inside the buffer zones that come here, but go into the heart of the wilderness instead. It's like an island. You'll see for yourself when you look at that map."

"Does it have a name?" George inquired.

His neighbor nodded silently.

"What's it called?"

"Zion." Darryl replied, almost in a whisper. "They call it Zion."

CHAPTER 8

“A cow will not cross a cattle guard because it will fall through. Once it learns this, one only need paint lines on the road to keep the bovine herds from crossing it. People are like cattle. Once they believe that walls surround them, whether they exist or not, they will stay put. The only problem is that there is always one bull that insists on testing the lines. These bulls are known in certain circles as ‘Patriots’.” - D.A. Hänks

March 13th

“The buffer zone lies about three miles beyond Elgin.” George pointed out, as he compared the two maps before him.

He had since learned from looking at the older maps in the atlas, that all the areas in Chicago had had the word “grid” added to them. In reality, Oakparkgrid had been called Oak Park - and Skokiegrid, Skokie - before the Biosickness had changed the world in which he and Brooke now lived.

“There’s a rail line that goes from Chicago, through Elgin, and all the way to Sioux Falls before it hits another hub.” he continued. “Then, one heads to Seattle, one to Denver, and one to Omaha, before they hit more hubs. It still looks like a fairly sophisticated network.”

“It does.” Brooke agreed. “Sioux Falls looks like a quick route out, but also one into a pretty remote area.”

“That’s the most logical way to go,” Frank agreed, “unless we head toward Denver. Anything south and east of here is out of the question; that’s where all the other urban areas are. Any buffer zones in between won’t be that secure, and there are no wilderness reserves at all. They all seem to be west of the Missouri River.”

“Aside from the one that extends into upper Minnesota, you’re correct.” George noted. “That appears to be more of a corridor than a reserve though. It looks like it hooks up with something north of the border in Canada. The biggest area seems to be from the Rocky Mountains and west. It’s like they sliced off the entire western portion of the country. There’s almost no buffer zones beyond the Great Plains; only wilderness, and all points beyond carry the death penalty.”

“I wonder why.” Brooke mused. “Nature is important, but keeping people out of it by threat of death? We are supposed to enjoy nature; that’s what they taught us in the educational centers, anyway.”

“Darryl showed me a place on the map inside the Wilderness.” George interjected. “It’s called Zion.”

“I’ve never heard of that before,” Frank said, with a puzzled look on his face, “except for Zion National Park, in Utah. Maybe that’s what it’s about. I think Zion was the promised land in the Bible.

“So what is this ‘Zion’ then, and why are there operational rail lines into the Wildernesses if entering them carries the death penalty, and what about the Indian reservations? I seem to remember something about them being exempt from the urban areas, before everything went sour and they stuck us in these damn urban reservations.”

“I don’t know, but I can’t say I’ve ever seen an Indian, have you?” George reflected.

“No.” Brooke replied. “All I know is what they told us in the Education Centers; that they had all died in the Biosickness because their immune systems were different from ours.”

“Not since the Biosickness.” Frank added. “See, that’s my point. Either they’re all dead like Brooke says she was taught, or they’re all alive and well on reservations inside the wilderness reserves.”

“Would they need that many railroads to service them?” George inquired aloud.

“Hard to say.” Frank responded. “Maybe, but I guess the way to know if they’re really for them or not would be to have a look at the tracks.”

“Why?” Brooke asked in a puzzled tone.

“Because if they’re dull, it means they haven’t been used in a while.” Frank replied. “Rusty tracks are either abandoned or hardly used. Now, if they’re shiny, it means they’re being used on a regular basis, even once a day, and no Indian is going to be needing a railcar of supplies every other day. Our own government dropped chemicals to kill most of us off. Any government that would do that to its own people could be up to anything. There’s no telling what they’re hiding in there.”

“But the Authority is here to help us!” Brooke exclaimed. “Why would they have killed us off?”

“Here to help us?” Frank snorted. “By packing us into five-story row houses like sardines, taking away our appliances and running water, and threatening us with death if we venture out into the woods?”

“They murdered almost three hundred million people in this country, Brooke. Do you understand that? What they taught you in school is a bunch of garbage. George probably remembers a little bit about what it was like.”

George nodded.

“He’s told me about some of the things he remembers.” Brooke said defensively. “But it doesn’t mean it was the Authority that did it.”

“There’s one thing I never told you.” George responded quietly. “I know for a fact that our own government murdered our own people.”

“And how do you know that, Lad?” Frank inquired keenly.

“It was the last time I saw my parents.” George replied. “I never really thought about it until now. I guess I’d blocked it out. I knew they killed them, but I never remembered how or why.”

“Maybe it’s time you started remembering.” Frank prodded. “What is it, George?”

“After the Biosickness, were supposed to go into town for relocation.” George recalled. “None of the farmers would go. We all stayed at our farms, and they came through, killing us and burning the farms.

“I remember a shootout at the Davidson’s place. Then they set the house on fire with them in it. Then they came for us. They set the barn on fire and started shooting at the animals. I wouldn’t let go of my cat and this guy yanked her out of my arms. She

scratched him and he was going to shoot her too. Dad grabbed his arm and someone hit him. He told me to run, so I did, but someone caught me and threw me into the back of a truck with a bunch of other kids. I heard two shots and never saw my mother or father again.”

George looked at the floor for several seconds.

“They killed my parents,” he breathed. “I finally remember the whole thing now; what really happened that day. The Authority killed my parents. They killed them in cold blood because my dad tried to save my cat. What kind of sick animals would do that to a little boy’s parents? If not before, there is definitely no way I’d stay here now.

“We have to leave Brooke, not just because of our children, but to find out what really happened. The answer lies beyond Eleven, and it lies someplace beyond the buffer zones too. The truth lies somewhere in the wilderness; in some place the new map calls Zion.”

March 20th

Brooke and George stopped their bicycles and gazed at the rail line stretching out toward the horizon. They were on the west side of Elgin, and the outskirts of Eleven. One hundred feet in front of them, a bright yellowish-green sign was clearly visible that denoted the line of demarcation between Eleven and the invisible buffer zone. There were no walls, no barbed wire, not even a fence to keep citizens from entering the area. Only brainwashing and fear kept the masses from evacuating the urban area that kept them prisoners within their own city.

“We could just walk across right now.” Brooke said quietly.

“With what, Brooke?” George inquired. “We have no supplies, no food, no water, no map; no plan. We came here to look around and scout the area; nothing more, nothing less. We made a plan and we’ll stick with it.”

He dropped the kickstand on the bicycle and removed little Josh from the seat that was mounted on the back of his bicycle for dependents to ride around in. He picked his young son up and walked toward the signs. Beyond them lay a relatively young forest that stretched as far as the eye could see. It was really strange; one side of the road was densely packed with colorful domiciles, while the other was an open green area approximately one hundred feet wide before the woods started.

“Look at the trees!” Brooke exclaimed, catching up to him. “I’ve never seen so many before!”

“It’s called the woods.” George replied. “We had some on our farm when I was little.”

They reached the edge of the tree line and George read the words printed on the fluorescent sign to himself.

“Buffer Zone. No entry beyond this point without permit, by order of the Authority.”

“It’s kind of spooky.” Brooke whispered. “Let’s go.”

“We can bring supplies out here and put them in the woods.” George said in a subdued tone. “That way, we won’t draw any attention to ourselves when we leave. We’ll get everything together so we know what we can carry, and then we can take a people mover here and put the stuff out there over several weeks.”

“What if someone finds it or someone sees us go out there?” Brooke asked. “We’ll be caught.”

“We have to find another location where it blocks the view, and then we’ll have to hide everything.” George stated. “We’ll have to figure some way to keep everything dry and out of the weather too. Let’s get back to the bikes and ride around some more.”

They returned to the bicycles and were startled by an approaching enforcer’s patrol vehicle. Two enforcers stopped, and one of them addressed George and Brooke.

“What were you doing near the buffer zone?” he barked authoritatively.

Brooke began to tremble at the sight of the two enforcers dressed in bright red uniforms with some sort of weapons strapped to their sides. Their blue and gold badges shone brightly in the sunlight and added to their air of authority.

George was nervous but managed to speak coherently.

“My mate and I were out enjoying the day, Enforcer Abrams.” he replied, glancing at the man’s nametag. “She had never seen so many trees before, and wanted to take a closer look. We meant no harm. We don’t wish to be in any trouble.”

The man looked at the pair disdainfully.

“Let me see your Citizen Identification Cards.” he instructed.

George and Brooke removed their identification cards from their lanyards and handed them to the enforcer. George glanced at the man’s weapon and was startled to recognize it as a firearm quite similar to the handheld one his father had let him shoot as a child. These were called death scepters by the Authority, but it resembled the one his father had called a Colt. It had another name too, what had he called it, a semi? George wasn’t certain, but was suddenly brought back to reality by the sound of the enforcer’s deep voice addressing him.

“You’re from Quadrant 47.” the enforcer noted. “What are you doing over here in Quadrant 3?”

“We decided to get up early and take our bicycles for a ride.” George explained rather convincingly. “I wanted to spend some time with my mate and our dependent. It was such a nice day for this time of year. Before we knew it we were all the way over here.”

“It’s twenty kloms from 47 to 3.” the enforcer responded, without as much as a hint of emotion to his voice. “That’s a long ride.”

He eyed George and Josh, and then his gaze drifted to Brooke.

“The urban director frowns on unnecessary traveling,” he stated finally, returning their identification cards, “but I agree, it is a nice day. Don’t stay too long, or you won’t be back to Quadrant 47 before nightfall, and being out unnecessarily during Shift 4 is a violation of the Guidelines.”

“Yes, Enforcer Abrams.” George responded politely. “We have no wish to violate the Guidelines. Thank you, and have a good day.”

“You too, Citizen Cooper and mate.”

The patrol vehicle accelerated down the street, leaving Brooke and George behind and very much relieved.

“Let’s continue toward the rail line.” George suggested. “Whew.”

He was vaguely aware of a deep rumble that was growing increasingly louder. He paid it no attention however, and Brooke nodded, following him as he pedaled in the

direction of the tracks. He stopped and looked at the rails beyond the edge of the road, and noticed they were shiny.

"They use these tracks all the time," he said, pointing. "Look, they're silver; not the least bit rusty. That's what Frank was talking about."

A loud tone suddenly emanated from behind them, and George turned to see an approaching locomotive. He had never seen anything like it before, and stared transfixed for a moment before the air horns blasted again.

"Let's go!" he shouted, as Joshua began wailing at the noise of the horns.

They pedaled across the tracks before stopping and turning back. The huge locomotive passed by, followed by enclosed brown railcars that rocked back and forth, and clanged through the crossing. It wasn't traveling much faster than a man could sprint, due to the congestion of the urban area, but as it cleared the perimeter of Eleven, it began increasing in speed.

After several minutes, the train passed and George returned to the tracks. He stared in fascination at the last car, as it gained momentum and grew smaller in the distance. Josh had since ceased crying.

"What kind of a people mover was that?" Brooke exclaimed. "I've never seen anything like that before!"

"I think," George replied, as his pulse began to slow from the startle of the train's deafening air horns, "that's what Frank referred to as a freight train. Those things behind the engine must be what they call railcars."

"But this is Sunday," Brooke observed. "No one except enforcers are supposed to be working on Sundays."

"That *is* odd," George agreed.

He caught his breath and began pedaling once again.

"C'mon, let's see what's on down this way."

He and Brooke continued down the road for another mile or so, when something caught his attention. One of the cross roads went underneath the road they were on and continued past the perimeter of Eleven and into the forest beyond. It was blocked off with a barricade, but nothing that would stop a pedestrian from walking around it and proceeding.

This was the first road of this type they had come upon, as all the others had been bulldozed for a half mile beyond the perimeter roads after the Biosickness, and had all grown up as woods. They were impossible to see, even with the leaves down for the winter. Unknown to Brooke and George, the Fox River lay beyond. Even if someone managed to sneak into the woods, they had no way to cross the river, save for swimming, and no one had been taught how to swim since the Biosickness. No one was allowed in the ocean, and swimming pools were wasteful luxuries that had been eliminated from citizens. Therefore, no one had a need to learn how to swim.

George stopped his bicycle once again.

"Look," he said, pointing, "a road."

"I wonder where it goes," Brooke mused.

"I don't know," George replied, "but when we get back to the domicile, I'll look on the map. It looks like this was a big road. Look how wide it is. It must show up on the old atlas."

“And there is a bridge over it.” Brooke added. “That must have been a busy road at one time.”

George nodded. He squinted into the distance but the road just disappeared from view. Off to the left, a small grove of evergreen trees grew between the road and the woods, apparently for local use as a recreation area. He made a mental note of their location in regard to the road and woods. It was less than twenty-five feet from the last tree to the thick woods, which was no distance at all to travel without attracting any attention, and being in the grove wouldn’t arouse any suspicion from anyone. The only problem would be if someone happened to be in the grove when they wanted to either enter or exit the thick woods of the buffer zone.

“Let’s head back,” he suggested. “We’ll be cutting it close, and I’ll be so tired in the morning. At least we have an idea what’s out here and where to go. There’s a rail line and a road that lead into the buffer zone, so either one should get us toward the wilderness.”

“Okay,” Brooke agreed, “I’m tired too, and we have a long ride back. Too bad we couldn’t get a ride on the people mover.”

“Well, since the enforcers already know we’re here, we could if it wasn’t Sunday, but normally we would have to suffer anyway. I don’t want any records of us coming out this way or of us being anywhere near here. I don’t want anyone the least bit suspicious that we’re traveling around on our day off. We’re too close now to have anything happen, Brooke. I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” his wife replied, putting her arms around his neck. “Now let’s get back to the domicile so I can show you how much.”

“Hmm,” George responded, raising his eyebrows in a mock look of intrigue, “now that certainly sounds like a plan to me.”

March 23^d

“How are the backpacks coming along?” George inquired, as he looked over Brooke’s shoulder.

He had found a picture in the public archives of some hikers from before the Biosickness, and they were all wearing what the article referred to as backpacks, for carrying their supplies while being out in the wilderness.

Curiously, the people in the article did not seem to have been put to death for being out in it. Since it was before the Biosickness, George assumed that people had been free to enter it at some point. Perhaps there were still people living in it, somewhere.

The wilderness in the old book was beautiful; George stared spellbound at the photographs of mountains and meadows filled with wildflowers. He couldn’t get the images from his mind, and understood why the Authority would want them protected. He remembered the name of one of the wildernesses in the pictures; Bitterroot, and it stood out in his mind. He decided to look for Bitterroot in the map book when he returned to the domicile, and after days of looking had finally located something called Bitterroot Range in a state called Montana.

George had made some detailed drawings of the packs and shown them to Brooke, who was attempting to stitch some together from scraps of canvas, and two colorful, heavy cotton New Society flags that had never been picked up from the repair shop. Brooke had been able to use the machines at work to do some of the work before she

brought the pieces home, however, so she didn't have to do everything by hand. While the seamstresses used sewing machines for most of their work, there were still items that needed to be sewn by hand, and Brooke had managed to pocket some heavy gauge needles and an entire machine spool of industrial thread from the shop. She was using these to construct the remainder of the work on the packs by hand on her off shifts.

"They're coming along fine, Honey." Brooke replied, looking up from her task. "I was able to get most of the really heavy stitching done at work during slow times before I brought them home. Adding loops and pockets and fasteners here won't be too bad. I wish I had one of those sewing machines like they have at work though. It would be so much easier than doing this all by hand. This one should be done by tomorrow though, I think. The rest should go a little faster, now that I know what I'm doing. They're going to look odd though, with two of them made out of New Society flags."

"They'll certainly be colorful," George agreed, "and I can't say that I saw any of the backpacks in the old pictures that had the Unification Star on them either. They'll definitely be unique."

"Well, I put them on the back side, so they won't show." Brooke responded. "All you'll see are the red and white stripes, with maybe a little bit of the blue field that the Unification Star is in around the edges. That shouldn't be too bad; red and white backpacks."

"No." George agreed.

He was still searching for something from which to fashion the frameworks for the packs, but was as of yet, still unsuccessful in his quest. He turned his gaze toward the window and was suddenly struck with an idea.

"What are you doing?" Brooke inquired, as her husband pulled the curtains back and examined the curtain rod.

George ignored her for a moment and removed the rod from the brackets on the wall. He flexed it and was satisfied with the strength of the thin steel tubing. He turned to Brooke and grinned broadly.

"Looks like we just found the framework for our packs." he replied. "If I can find something that's a little heavier for the two outside pieces, we're all set. I'll just have to figure out how to bore holes through them."

"Maybe Frank has some ideas." Brooke offered, looking up from her sewing.

"Maybe." George said. "I'll go talk to him."

He pulled the expandable rod apart and headed for the door.

"Maybe he's not so senile after all."

*

"Whatcha doing with the curtain rod there, George?" Frank inquired, as he invited his neighbor in. "Been keeping that wife o' yours in line?"

"N-no." George replied, somewhat taken aback.

"Spare the rod, and spoil the wifey." Frank said with a grin.

Noticing George's look of bewilderment, he clapped him on the shoulder.

"Never mind, Lad. 'Tis a joke you wouldn't understand anyway. What's up?"

"I thought maybe we could use these for the framework of the backpacks," George explained, holding the rod aloft, "but I think they need to have something heavier on the sides."

“Most likely.” Frank replied, looking at the rod.

He held his hand out and George placed the thin tubing in his palm.

“This’ll work well for the cross pieces alright,” Frank agreed, “But you’re right, you need something heavier for the outside frame.”

“Do you know how to make one then?” George inquired.

Frank nodded his head.

“I was a Boy Scout when I was a wee lad,” he explained. “Me daddy brought me and my mum over here from the ‘Derry when I was ten. I made Eagle Scout, George.”

Noticing the blank look on his friend’s face he continued.

“That was quite an accomplishment, George. Not many scouts made Eagle. It was the highest rank in scouting. Anyway, we had to learn all sorts of survival skills; knot tying, building a fire in the rain, making a shelter out of branches, and we did plenty of hiking in the Daniel Boone National Forest. I’ve seen my share of backpacks.

“They’re curved a little around your back. This tubing’s soft enough, it should bend. The vertical pieces on the outside that you’re talking about are sort of “S” shaped, and kick out on the bottom, like this.”

Franks picked up a pencil and a piece of paper, and made a quick sketch.

“I see.” George observed. “It curves around your back, and the bottom curves out so it doesn’t hit you in the butt.”

“Very observant, my boy.” Frank replied with an approving smile. “Back then, we called it, ‘ergonomics.’ It meant the shape fit well with whatever part of your body it was contacting.”

“Ergonomics, huh?” George repeated. “Another one of those ‘senile words.’ I’m starting to understand that old-timers aren’t senile old fools like we were taught in the education centers. You remember stuff from the old times, back when everyone was different. Your words aren’t meaningless. It’s a different language almost; like when I tell Brooke I had a cat and she doesn’t know what it means. She thought a cat was a tool, for Green’s sake.”

“Aye, Laddie!” Frank exclaimed. “Now you’re getting it! The Authority changed the names of everything to confuse the new generations. The easiest way to poison the mind of a child is to tell him that all that is good is evil. Telling you that we are senile because we speak the truth, is the oldest game in the book, me boy! It’s nothing but Marxism. You’re starting to see the bigger picture now. Don’t you ever forget it!

“Now as to what you can use for the outside frame; that’s going to take some thinking. No one has a workshop or common stuff anymore. No need for personal items. Trying to find some sort of tubing for the outside frame; I dunno George; things aren’t what they used to be. I’m surprised as hell you thought about using the curtain rods for crying out loud.

“Something that’s tubing of some sort, that’s easily found; Jesus, George! Why couldn’t you be designing a scooter or something?”

Frank suddenly bit his lower lip.

“That’s it!”

“What’s a scooter?” George inquired.

“Never you mind about a scooter!” Frank responded. “I’ve got the answer to your problem.”

“What?”

“Bicycles!” Frank replied. “There’s all kinds of tubing on bicycles, and the lower part of the frame has the ‘S’ curve you’ll need for the pack frame. A ladies’ bicycle even has two curved frames so they can just step through. Drilling and cutting it’s going to be a blue bitch though. I don’t suppose you’ve considered that problem yet?”

“No,” George answered, “but one thing at a time. Locating the materials for the frame was the first problem. Machining it is the next. I’ll need two bicycles for each pack though, unless I can find some of those ladies’ bikes you were talking about. That means I’ll need to cut up six of them. That’s going to take a while. I need to steal six bicycles on someone. That’s not right, Frank.”

“Neither is living in slavery.” his neighbor retorted. “That wife of yours has nail files, right? You can buy a few more with your weekly allowance for small items. They’ll work to cut your tubing. Not really well, but they’ll work. You’ll get some blisters, that’s for certain, but they’ll cut through. They’ll work for filing grooves for your cross members to fit in too. You can wire ‘em into place with some coat hangers. It won’t be as light as an all-aluminum frame by any means, but it’ll do the trick. At least the bicycles are some sort of alloy though. When I was a lad they were mostly all steel, except for the expensive racing bikes. Talk about heavy. These won’t be super light, but they’ll work just fine.”

“Frank,” George responded with a bit of admiration in his voice, “you’re a genius.”

March 24th

George eyed the bicycle rack carefully. There were several bicycles parked in it, and all but one were locked into place. It was the better kind, a ladies’ bike, and it had two of the sweeping lower frame pieces that he needed, but he felt strangely guilty about stealing someone else’s bicycle, especially one that belonged to a woman. Bicycles weren’t cheap, and the fifty kudos each citizen had deposited into their account by the Authority every week didn’t go very far.

Taking a deep breath, he approached the rack, removed the bicycle, and mounted it. He pedaled quickly away from the scene, heart pounding madly, and returned to his block. George wheeled the bike up the stairs to the domicile and closed the door. He sat on the couch for several minutes, catching his breath from the episode.

Aside from taking the atlas, George had never deliberately violated the Guidelines before, and he was extremely nervous with the whole concept of being in violation. It was something he knew he had better get used to however, if he and Brooke were going to make their escape. He turned the bicycle upside down and began sawing at the frame with Brooke’s nail file. Progress was slow, and George soon found his fingers getting extremely sore. After an hour or so, the metal gave way and George moved to the other end of the section. His fingers were blistered by the time the section was separated from the bicycle and in his hands, and he was almost in tears by the time the second section came loose.

George set it on the floor next to him and soaked his hands in a pan of cool water for several minutes to cool the burning, before taking one of Brooke’s needles and piercing the blisters on his fingers and palms.

“Only four more to go.” he said in mock cheerfulness. “Swell. Frank can do the next two.”

George blotted his hands on his pants, and gingerly scooped the bicycle tubing and curtain rods up. He knocked on Frank's door with his elbow, and the Irishman let him into his domicile.

"Damn, that was quick work!" Frank exclaimed. "You got 'em today! Two bicycles is pushing it though."

"I only took one." George explained. "I found a woman's bicycle."

"Then you'll need to get another one before we can start making frames." Frank responded.

"But why?" George burst out. "These are the same."

"No they're not. They look the same when they're on the bike because it's an optical illusion. The curves are different. Here, look."

Frank placed the pieces one over the other as they appeared on the bike, then reversed the positions. It was clear that the two pieces looked nothing like each other.

"When you put them together like we'll need for the packs," he continued, "they won't be the same shape and they won't fit right. They'll shift the weight of the load and put more strain on one side than the other. It'll pull one shoulder more and your hip will start to bother you as well."

"We need another bike like this one, and then we'll have two sets. They'll be a little different from each other, but each pair will be the same."

"I was hoping you could start filing the notches on these so we'd at least have one." George grumbled. "I just spent four hours cutting these."

"And none of it wasted either." Frank replied. "I'll do these, and when you get the next ones, we'll do them too. Then we'll have two sets and only one to go. Let me see your hands."

George held them out and Frank winced.

"Ouch. I'll get some ointment and put on there, for you. Next time, don't be in such a rush, my boy. We'll get these done, but it's going to take you a few days to where you can grab a file again, and that'll slow our schedule down a bit now."

George looked at his hands, as his neighbor applied ointment to the sores. It felt cool, and helped soothe the burning a bit.

"Haste makes waste George. Pace yourself. Keep draining the blisters and they'll heal quicker."

George nodded.

"I guess I got excited and overdid it." he admitted.

"Well now, you'll know not to overdo it again, now don't you?" Frank inquired. "By the way, you said you found a big road near the tracks, where you're thinking about caching the stuff?"

George nodded.

"Yeah, it was like two wide roads put together." he replied.

"Sounds like an interstate." Frank observed. "They were what we called divided highways. All the lanes on one side went in the same direction. It was so a lot of traffic could move at one time. Go get the atlas and we'll have a look."

George returned with the book and Frank thumbed through until he found the page with Chicago on it.

“Let’s see, here’s Elgin... this must be it; I-90. That’ll take us all the way into Montana, straight through Sioux Falls, just like the rail line. Even if the highway is gone, we can still follow the railroad tracks; maybe even catch a ride on a freight train. You sure picked a good location, George.”

March 29th

“Okay, this time we’ll file a bit and take breaks, okay?” Frank inquired. “That way, neither one of us will blister up.”

George nodded. The blisters on his hands had pretty much healed and he was ready for the second bicycle to be cut up. Between the two men and taking breaks, they had the frame cut up in a little over two hours and the pieces notched in another two hours. By the end of the evening, two complete frames were sitting on the floor of Frank’s apartment. Each one sported a red and green vertical frame piece, and white cross members. Coupled with the flag backpacks Brooke had already completed, the pair would indeed be very colorful. All that remained were the two remaining vertical frames, and the last pack that Brooke was working on.

Frank set the pair of pliers he had liberated from the rail yards down, and flexed his fingers.

“There’s no way, we could have twisted those hangers that tight without these.” he commented. “Those frames are tight as hell. They shouldn’t flex or move at all; especially with the lateral bracing I was able to get by running a hanger from one corner to the other on both sides. That ‘X’ made it almost as strong as if it were welded. Only one to go, George.”

George smiled. Things were indeed getting closer to completion, and he was beginning to get excited. More and more, he wished that Green Day would hurry up and arrive, so he and Brooke could take their son and escape with Frank into the buffer zone and eventually, the wilderness that lay beyond.

Green Day was still six weeks away however, and the trio really needed every available day to ready themselves for the peregrination that lay ahead. Daily bicycle rides to strengthen their leg muscles for the arduous journey were very important, and every day spent working on the packs was one less day to train.

A knock on the door interrupted George’s train of thought, and Frank got up to answer it.

“Good, they’re ready!” Brooke exclaimed as Frank shut the door and she spied the frames on the floor. “Josh is lying down, so I have a few minutes. I brought the packs over. Let’s see how they fit.”

She stretched the canvas loops over the tops of the frames from which the packs hung, and tied the straps to the bottom of the lower portion of the frames. Frank and George hoisted a pack and inspected their combined handiwork.

“Damn, looks good to me!” George burst out.

Frank nodded.

“They sure do.” he agreed. “Now they just need the shoulder straps and some kind of padding across the frame to make them more comfortable. If there is any way to make a belt to go around your waist, that will help take some of the load off of our shoulders as well.

“I know that wasn’t in your pictures George, but it’s important if Brooke can add these things. Padding the shoulder straps is important too. You won’t believe how much these packs are going to cramp your shoulders from the weight. You’ll discover muscles you never knew you had. If you can make a padded section about an inch thick and three inches wide, with a loop near each end for the shoulder strap to go through, that will be perfect.”

“I’ll see what I can come up with.” Brooke answered. “We can always add the luxuries later. For now, we at least have the basic pack together.”

“Aye, you’re right there.” Frank agreed. “She’s learning, George. You’ve got a fine wife there. Don’t you dare ever let anything happen to her.”

CHAPTER 9

“Where would we be, without the ability to let our minds wander... and where could we go, if our emotions were submerged down under our souls? The Master Control Plan will fail - as the young minds prevail - in pure... genetic... wisdom.” - Parramore McCarty

April 3rd

“Okay,” George said quietly, “let’s go.”

He placed his right foot on the pedal of his bicycle and pushed down. Frank and Brooke followed close behind as they headed toward Elgin with the completed packs wrapped neatly in sheets and tied onto carrying racks on the rear of Brooke’s and Frank’s bicycles. Joshua was bundled up tightly against the chilly April morning, and securely strapped into the seat over George’s rear fender.

The trio had been practicing long, local rides every day - although not all at once due to conflicting work schedules - and today was the first time all three were leaving together.

Pedaling steadily for two hours, they soon arrived in the vicinity of the bridge George and Brooke had found two weeks earlier in their initial excursion to survey the area. George spied the group of trees along the border zone that he had noticed the last time, and pointed them out to Frank.

“We can wheel the bikes over there,” he commented. “It won’t attract attention, especially with little Josh here. From there, we can slip into the woods and have a look around.”

Frank nodded in approval.

“Sounds reasonable enough,” he concurred, “as long as no enforcers come by and decide to get nose-y.”

“Let’s hope we’re all alone on the way in and out, too.” George added. “If any other citizens decided today was a nice day to go for a picnic, we’ll be stuck for a long while.”

They pushed their bicycles into the grove of hemlocks, and George was surprised at how much cover they afforded the area from the domiciles nearby. He hadn’t even stopped to think about a pair of inquisitive eyes noticing their ingress or egress of the woods from a window. The leafless forest provided a little cover once inside, but nothing like summer foliage would. One report to an enforcer and the entire plan would be in jeopardy.

“No one here,” Frank observed. “It’s perfect.”

They quickly pushed the bicycles across the short open area and into the forbidding jurisdiction of the woods.

“Sweet Lord o’ mercy!” Frank exclaimed softly. “It’s been nigh unto thirty years since I’ve been out into the forest. I’d forgotten just how beautiful it was, even if there isn’t a single leaf on these trees this time of year!”

"It's kind of spooky though." Brooke whispered, clinging to her husband. "George, I'm scared."

"Nothing to be scared of, Brooke." Frank assured her. "There's nothing out here to hurt you. Out here you can think for yourself. Reminds me of an old saying, 'I think, therefore I am.'"

"In this day and age, it's more like, 'I think, therefore I am... dangerous.'" George responded.

Frank nodded and glanced around.

"Let's leave the bicycles here." he suggested. "We'll take the stuff with us and look for a good hiding spot. Let's pray the little lad doesn't open his mouth and start crying while we're out here."

They proceeded through the light understory of the chilly northern forest, Frank and George both counting their footsteps, until they came to a large, white-trunked birch tree.

"Now there's a landmark!" Frank exclaimed. "I counted a hundred and fifty steps, what about you?"

"One hundred, fifty three." George responded.

"Close enough." Frank replied. "I don't see any more white birches out here anyway. Now, we need to find a good spot to cache this stuff."

They looked around and Brooke spied a downed tree, apparently struck by lightning and cleaved down the middle. Its branches were still intact and had allowed the previous fall's leaves to accumulate in volume.

"How about over there?" she suggested, pointing at the fallen tree.

They walked in the direction of the tree, and George examined the area. The leaves were still over a foot deep and afforded enough protection to keep the packs hidden. They had brought plastic garbage bags in which to keep the packs covered from the elements and Brooke removed them from the pack she carried.

They placed two bags over each pack; the first from the bottom up, and the second over the top. Brooke then used some of the tape she had smuggled from the alteration place to seal them. This would keep rain and snow from entering the packs and causing them to mold. Each pack contained clothing, bedding, and basic utensils. Additional trips would add to the stash, so that on their final trip, no suspicions would be aroused.

This had been the hardest trip; getting the colorful packs and most important items out here, and finding a place to hide everything. Two more trips would still be needed to get the rest of the supplies out, however. Aside from the packs, additional cargo could be transported on the fender racks on the back of each bicycle, and that could be reserved for the heaviest items, such as pots and other eating utensils. The bulky but lightweight, bedding and clothes could be more comfortably carried in the backpacks. The less weight they had to carry on themselves, the better.

George and Frank pulled the leaves apart, creating a space for the packs to fit into, and then raked them back over the plastic-wrapped bundles with their hands. A few scattered branches over the top completed the cache, and it was impossible to tell that under the leaves lay their futures.

"Hardest part's done now." George said quietly. "Let's get out of here while the getting's good."

They returned to the bicycles and scouted the area before venturing back across the open “no man’s land” between the woods and the stand of hemlocks. No one was visible; apparently everyone was following the area director’s recommendation of staying inside their domiciles with their families on this chilly Sunday.

George stood his bicycle up and strapped Joshua back into the seat, before pushing it out into the open. Brooke and Frank followed suit, and in a minute all were under the cover of the hemlocks once again.

“Thank Green Man we did it!” George exclaimed. “I think my pulse is back down under one-fifty now.”

“Thank *the Lord*.” Frank corrected.

“Huh?” George inquired.

“There’s no such thing as Green Man.” Frank explained. “All this green crap came about after the Biosickness, trying to change us; make us forget who we really are and owe our thanks to.”

“I don’t understand.” Brooke said in a puzzled tone. “They taught us in the education centers all about Green Man, and how he protects the world from pollution and sickness.”

“Education centers.” Frank snorted. “You mean brainwashing facilities. There’s no such thing as Green Man, Brooke. He’s no more real than Santa Claus, or the Easter Bunny, or Kwanzaa.

“Green Man; sounds like some kind of stupid comic book hero. ‘And out of the ashes of civilization comes the superhero who can eat pollution and end all sickness; Green Man.’ Gimme a break, for Christ’s sake.

“The one that watches over all of us; that gives us hopes and dreams, that keeps us all alive and gives people like you and me the strength to leave this place, is the Lord. Every year, we celebrated the birth of his son on a day called Christmas, and a week later to the day, we celebrated New Year’s. Now, they take the whole week and call it ‘Holiday.’ They’ve twisted our history to fit their, sick and twisted fantasy of a new, Green world. If you want to give thanks for all this, give it to someone that’ll really hear it, my boy. Give your thanks to *God*.”

May 1st

“There must have been something wrong with that fish they gave me yesterday.” Frank lamented. “I’ve been back and forth to the toilets seven times since 4:30. There’s no way I can ride out to Elgin with you today; I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Brooke replied. “It’ll cut down on how much we can carry though. Maybe we can leave Josh here with you and use his seat to carry more stuff.”

“I wouldn’t mind watching the little lad for ya, Brooke,” Frank responded, “but I’m honestly not in any shape to be looking after him. Oh crap, be right back!”

He dashed out of the domicile, leaving Brooke and George looking at each other. George raised his eyebrows.

“We’ll just have to strap it all on yours.” he remarked to Brooke. “You take my bike with Josh on it, and I’ll take yours with the added weight. I just hope it doesn’t attract any attention. We’ve really been pushing the envelope with these trips.”

“Well, this is the last one, anyway.” Brooke responded. “After today, we’ll just play it cool. In another two weeks we’ll be free, George. Free!”

"I know. I can hardly wait myself." her husband replied, kissing her on the cheek as Frank returned.

"I'm sorry about that." Frank apologized.

"It's okay." George assured him. "We'll just have to try and strap everything on Brooke's bike, that's all."

"No need to be doing that. That might attract extra attention, and you sure don't need that. It's mostly the canned food we've been hoarding, and a few pots. You take those today, and then we can easily get the rest divided up amongst us when we leave on Green Day. No big deal. It's only one bag of stuff. Everybody'll be so busy celebrating and eating junk food, that they'll never even notice us carrying a few items."

"You sure?" George inquired. "I don't want to attract any attention on Green Day."

"Go on, enjoy the day." Frank insisted. "Damn, it's a nice out there too. Must be close to sixty degrees."

He noticed the puzzled looks on the faces of his friends.

"That's sixteen, of your damned Green degrees."

George and Brooke enjoyed the sun on their backs, as they pedaled toward Elgin. The blue sky stretched overhead and an occasional cumulous cloud dotted the sky. George still remembered how hazy the skies had been when he was little; due to the aluminum powder the government had dispersed into the atmosphere for years, trying to counteract the mythological global warming.

After the Biosickness, there had no longer been a need to perpetuate the lies on global warming, as the people responsible for the effect were now in charge. The aluminum dust used to reflect the sun's heat back into space, and the barium powder that altered the weather were no longer sprayed from military tankers to fill the skies with crisscrossing grids of chemtrails. Occasional contrails could still be seen from time to time, as jets high in the atmosphere left vapor trails, and George often wondered what was causing them. He knew better than to question the Authority's explanation of low-flying stars, but somehow suspected they had something to do with the flying machines the old-timers sometimes spoke of, called planes or jets.

George's thoughts were interrupted by the sound of an approaching enforcer patrol vehicle, and his heart leapt into his throat. The vehicle sped past them however, leaving George's hands somewhat tingly and numb as the circulation gradually restored the blood flow to his head.

"That was too close!" he exclaimed to Brooke. "I thought for sure they were after us."

"Let's just hurry up and get this done with." she replied. "I'm starting to get nervous, coming out here all the time. Someone's bound to recognize us before too much longer and want to know who we are and why they've seen us here before."

Citizens tended to know everyone within their domicile blocks, and strangers often stood out to them. As Brooke and George approached the now-familiar grove of hemlocks, they were dismayed to see a group of people already there. It was a beautiful day, and George was not really surprised to see local citizens enjoying the spot for themselves.

Brooke and George wheeled their bicycles into the shade of the hemlocks, and were greeted by stares from the citizens already there.

“Hello.” George said in a friendly voice.

“Hello.” someone responded.

“It’s such a beautiful day.” Brooke added.

“Yes it is.” the same voice replied. “I’ve not seen you before. Are you relocated?”

George was about to reply with a simple ‘yes,’ when another voice suddenly added to the conversation.

“Aren’t you the people mover coordinator from Quadrant 47?”

George looked over in surprise and dismay at being recognized. The man didn’t look familiar to him but then again, he dealt with hundreds of citizens every day.

“Yes.” he replied. “My mate and I decided to take our son for a bicycle ride. It’s such a nice day, that we decided to visit this section of the area. We like to travel around and see new places sometimes. I hope we aren’t intruding.”

“Not at all.” the man replied. “Glad to have some visitors. This place is too pretty to not be seen by others. There are no woods near your quadrant, Coordinator. This must be a sight for you.”

“George.” George responded. “My name is George Cooper. This is my mate, Brooke, and yes, it is quite a sight indeed.”

“Bill Haynes.” the man introduced himself. “I thought that was you, but I wasn’t sure, being so far away from Quadrant 47 and all.”

The group engaged in lively conversation for an hour or so, discussing newsworthy events from across the area and the recent rash of bicycle thefts in Quadrant 47 over the past month. All in all, George had stolen four bicycles; two ladies’ and two men’s, for the pack frames that were hidden less than five hundred feet away from their current location. Enforcers were at a loss to explain the thefts, which had ended as abruptly as they had begun.

“Well,” Bill said, arising and stretching, “I think it’s time we headed back. You’ve got a long ride back too, George.”

“Yes.” George agreed. “I think we’ll sit here and enjoy the afternoon a little bit more though; make it worth the long ride out here. It’s really peaceful.”

“Okay George.” Bill replied. “It was nice bumping into you; you too, Brooke.”

“Thank you.” she answered.

They watched the family disappear from view and waited a few minutes before unstrapping the bundles on Brooke’s rack.

“We lost a lot of time.” George lamented. “I’ll run this stuff in real quick. You keep an eye out. I can always say I had to pee.”

He grabbed the packs and hurried into the woods. In less than a minute he was at the fallen tree, and added the two parcels to the cache. He pulled the leaves over and raked them with his hands. George felt a strange sensation in the back of his head and suddenly felt a slight urgency to leave. He stood up and quickly returned to the edge of the woods. Brooke was still waiting as he exited the trees and returned.

“Let’s go.” he urged. “I’m starting to get a bad feeling.”

“What’s wrong?” Brooke inquired, as they wheeled their bicycles back toward the street.

“I don’t know.” George replied. “I got the weirdest feeling in there this time, like I was being watched. I felt something in the back of my head, like prickles. It was the

weirdest thing I've ever felt. I'm glad this is the last time we're coming out here. I'm starting to get spooked."

"That's how I felt the first time we came out here with Frank," Brooke explained. "Like we weren't alone; like something in there was alive."

"Probably just our imaginations," George assured her, although he wasn't doing nearly as good of a job at reassuring himself. "We're just getting jittery."

He mounted his bicycle and gave Josh a quick look before pedaling. Brooke followed him as they headed back in the direction of Quadrant 47. Back inside the woods, a pair of eyes watched from within the confines of the trees as Brooke and George disappeared from view.

The eyes retreated into the depth of the woods and headed toward the Coopers' cache of supplies. This was the third time that people had been to this area, and the owner of the eyes was extremely interested in the fallen tree now. He poked around the branches but found nothing of interest, except a strange odor that reminded him of the busy area outside the woods.

Sometimes at night, he would venture across the grassy area and into the forest of towering structures. Occasionally, the same smell reached his nostrils as he passed certain structures in the area. Puzzled as to why people kept returning to this area, he gave the fallen tree one last look and disappeared into the depths of the forest in the direction of the Fox River.

May 14th; Green Day

"This is it," George observed quietly, as he looked around the domicile one last time. "Once we leave today, there's no turning back."

"We *have* to go," Brooke stated emphatically. "I'm four months along now, George. I don't want this baby born into slavery, and this is our only chance. I'll be too far along before too much longer to be able to ride a bicycle. I really don't know what we'll do then. Even after I have the baby, I can't put it on the back of the bicycle. We have to get somewhere quickly, and find someplace to stay for a while."

"Easier said than done," George muttered, as a slight feeling of apprehension overcame him.

Was getting up at 5:00 AM every morning really such a bad thing after all? They both had jobs and a place to live, and food. That was really all one needed in life, wasn't it? A sudden realization hit George like a blow from a sledgehammer: This was exactly what the Authority wanted him to believe; that he needed coddling and daily handouts to survive. It was up to him to prove them wrong or die trying. Charlie Davidson had once said that it was better to die a free man than to live a prisoner. For the first time in his life, George Cooper finally understood what his neighbor had meant on that fateful day so long ago.

"Let's go," he said tautly.

"You ready?" Frank inquired, as Brooke answered his knock and let him in. "I've got the last of the stuff. People will be out soon; it's time to go."

"Time to go," George repeated. "Time to go."

He gave the family area one last glance before he locked the door and pulled it shut behind him. George clenched his jaw grimly, as he remembered the words his father had

said so many years before; just before he had been murdered by agents of the Authority. The words echoed inside his head as he wheeled his bicycle toward the stairs; *“Run Georgie! Run as fast as you can and don’t ever look back! Don’t you ever look back, Georgie!”*

People were already milling about the streets, as the group of escapees headed to the people mover to take them to Elgin. Since this was Green Day, most people were off, including those that worked for the people mover. Only a skeleton crew was there, and it was a few unfortunate souls who had either been recently reprimanded or were randomly selected to work on the celebration.

Vendors selling junk food milled through the crowd, hawking chocolate and hot dogs to the citizens with a few extra kudos in their personal accounts. These citizens were not required to be here; it was their personal choice, and junk food permits were only issued to upstanding citizens as a reward for aiding the Authority above and beyond the call of citizenry. Most of these upstanding citizens were also overseers, and George spied a familiar face alongside a hotdog cart.

“Hello Supervisor Klein.” George greeted his overseer from work. “Happy Green Day.”

“Well Happy Green Day to you as well, Citizen Cooper!” Harvey Klein greeted him in return. “Would you and your family like a hotdog?”

George had fourteen kudos left in his account from all the items he and Brooke had been purchasing, and they would certainly do him no good in the buffer zone and wilderness reserves.

“Sure!” he replied enthusiastically. “We’ll all have one. In fact, we’ll take as many as fourteen kudos will get. We’ll have the rest later.”

“Alright,” Harvey responded, “at 2.5 kudos apiece, that will get you five hotdogs; almost six. Aw, it’s Green Day! What the heck? Six hotdogs, you’ll each get two.”

“Thank you, Supervisor Klein.” George said politely. “That is very nice of you.”

“You’re a good worker, George. My treat today. You citizens enjoy the day now. See you on Monday, George.”

“Yes Sir.” George replied.

He really would miss his friends and coworkers from the people mover station, but the lives of his wife and children were much more important. Come Monday morning, George hoped to be beyond Rockford - maybe even into Wisconsin - and far away from his desk at the people mover station.

He led the group to a people car and they pushed their bicycles ahead of them. They found seats on one end of the car where the bicycles wouldn’t interfere with other citizens, and sat down, holding the bikes in front of them.

Tickets and schedules were not required today, as it allowed the mass of citizens to move freely throughout the area, so there were many strange faces in the group as the people mover pulled out of the station.

“Been a long time since I was on a train.” Frank remarked.

“I forgot you call the people mover a train.” George responded.

“That’s the proper name for it,” his friend answered, “and the place we just pulled out of is called a train station. Damned Green English.”

George knew the train routes by heart, and they made three changes at stations across the area to finally arrive at their destination in Elgin. They exited the people car with their bicycles alongside them, and walked through the crowded train station.

"We're not far from the buffer zone." George remarked. "Only three miles or so. It should be that way."

He pointed to the left, and they continued pushing the bicycles until they cleared the densely crowded station. Once free of the crowds, they mounted their bicycles and began pedaling in the direction George had indicated.

"This will probably get us there quicker." he suggested, indicating a long alleyway between two blocks of domiciles.

They entered the alley and unbeknownst to them, were observed by a pair of enforcers who were none too happy about having to work on this momentous day of celebration.

They - like overseers and directors - knew the true significance of the day, and resented having to work a holiday that symbolized the birth of a mighty new society. This was an opportunity to hassle some lowly citizens, and they followed the trio of bicycle riders into the shady alley and suddenly engaged the flashing red and blue lights of their patrol vehicle.

"Oh Lord." George thought. *"What have we done?"*

"Get off the bikes!" a voice barked over a loudspeaker.

The group obeyed, and George recognized the enforcers as those who had demanded identification when they first scouted the area two months ago.

"Happy Green Day, Enforcer Abrams." George greeted the taller of the two, as they exited the patrol vehicle and approached.

Aaron Abrams recognized George and Brooke, and suddenly this became more than a simple harassment stop. He turned to his partner and whispered something. George instantly became aware of the danger and became apprehensive, as the two men approached.

"You aren't from this quadrant." Enforcer Abrams informed the trio. "What are you doing out here again?"

"But it's Green Day." George replied. "We wanted to come back out and see the area again."

The enforcer glared suspiciously at him.

"Move over there." he instructed, pointing to his right. "Enforcer Horowitz and I are going to inspect your belongings."

"If he finds that atlas, we're done." Frank whispered into George's ear.

"Quiet, Citizen!" David Horowitz ordered.

He began rifling through the bag on Brooke's bicycle and held up some personal items.

"What are these for?" he demanded.

"My brother lives out this way." George lied. "He and his mate invited us out to spend the day and stay overnight. We brought some food too."

Enforcer Abrams poked through Frank's bag and found what appeared to be a large book. He removed it, and took a pair of handcuffs from his duty belt.

“You’re all under detention!” he exclaimed. “Look David, it’s that missing map book from the archives at the Delta Education Center, over in Oak Park.”

He approached George who was the closest, and grabbed his shoulder.

“Put your hands behind your back!” he ordered, trying to push him roughly to the ground.

There was no time to think; only to react. George brought his right knee up and into Enforcer Abrams’ groin as hard as he could, and the large man let out a painful groan as he cupped his testicles. George reached out and slid the gun from the holster on the enforcer’s belt and pointed it at the man as he stepped back.

“Don’t move!” he instructed.

The two enforcers stared in amazement as Abrams tried to catch in his breath, and Horowitz gave a reflexive start as George trained the gun on him.

“I said, don’t move!” George repeated, as Horowitz moved his right hand in the direction of his own sidearm.

The enforcer stopped and suddenly smiled.

“You think you know how to use that death scepter, Boy?” he inquired. “You’re lucky it hasn’t killed you yet. One wrong move and it’ll blow up in your face.”

George glanced at the weapon in his hands. It was very similar to the one he had fired over twenty-five years ago. He remembered two things about making one of these guns work. First you had to cock it, and second, something called the safety had to be off. As he inspected the weapon in a glance, he noticed the words “safe” and “fire” printed in tiny letters. There it was; the safety!

“He may not,” Frank snarled, “but I sure as hell do!”

Enforcer Horowitz suddenly reached for his weapon again and George moved the safety to the “fire” position. He grasped the top of the gun with his left hand and pulled the slide back to chamber a round in case the weapon was not ready. As Horowitz put his hand on his own weapon, George raised the one in his own hand and aligned the sights on the enforcer’s chest. He pulled the trigger and the gun barked with a deafening report.

Horowitz was knocked from his feet, as Frank stared in amazement at his friend. The enforcer landed on his back and a stream of blood spurted from the wound in his chest. He gasped for air as his lungs began to fill with blood.

“Uh-uh.” George responded, as Abrams turned to flee. “Not today. This is the day we stand up to you. That was for my father. This one is for my mother.”

The gun barked again, and the bullet drilled the enforcer cleanly through the face. The back of his head exploded as the bullet tore through his skull. Brooke shrank back in horror at the sight, and little Josh was screaming hysterically at the noise. George faced Horowitz and pulled the trigger again, putting a bullet through his forehead. Frank then dove for Horowitz and pried the gun from his fingers as he freed it from the holster.

He unbuckled the enforcer’s duty belt and removed it, then plucked the shiny blue and gold oval badge from his chest. George mimicked the maneuver on Abrams, heading for the patrol car as Frank stuffed their belongings back into their bags.

“Throw the bikes in the back of the car!” Frank instructed.

“The what?”

“The car! The goddamn car! Put them in the back seat!”

George and Brooke shoved the bicycles into the back of the car, as people began to enter the alley from each end, drawn to the sound of the gun shots.

“Get in and close the door!” Frank called, as he headed around to the other side of the car and got in. “Hallelujah, it’s an automatic!”

The tires screamed as Frank stomped on the gas pedal. Brooke held Josh tightly in her lap, and George clung to the door handle with one hand and his wife with the other. The car fishtailed slightly as it accelerated up the alleyway. People leapt to the sides, as the car sped past them and into the open street.

“That way!” George pointed.

Frank cut the wheel to the right and the car sped down the pavement.

“There!” George exclaimed. “The trees; pull in there!”

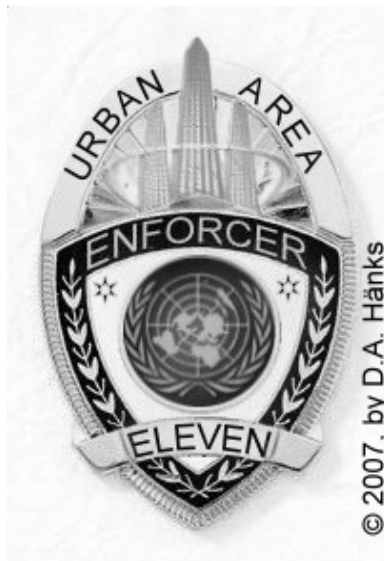
Frank steered the car over the low curb and bounced across the grassy area. He skidded to a stop beneath the trees, and jumped from the car.

“Stay here!” George instructed Brooke, as he too, exited the car. “We’ll be right back.”

The pair entered the woods at full speed and headed for the cache of supplies. George dove into the pile of leaves and pulled the plastic-wrapped backpacks and bags from the cache.

“First trip, let’s go!” he said to Frank.

They dashed back to the car and deposited the backpacks into the rear seat, before returning for the second half of the supplies. The mysterious pair of eyes looked on curiously, as the two people ran back to the fallen tree, and this time, he decided to investigate before they left.



The Urban Area Eleven enforcer’s badge that Frank took from Horowitz

George grabbed the last bag and stood up. As he turned to leave, he drew his breath in sharply in surprise. Less than twenty feet away stood an enormous creature; the likes of which he had never before seen, much less encountered. It was much taller than he was, with four long legs and two enormous flat protrusions with fingerlike edges reaching out from both sides of its head.

“What in God’s name are you?” he inquired aloud, dropping the bags.

Frank turned, half expecting to see some sort of hideous monster, and was momentarily startled to see a gigantic moose staring inquisitively at the pair.

“Good lord, you gave me a start there, Mr. Moose.” he exclaimed. “I was expecting some sort of demon, or a cougar or something. It’s okay George. He won’t hurt you. They only eat vegetation; grass and plants.”

“Like a deer?” George inquired, remembering the animals that would sometimes venture into his father’s corn fields and invariably end up in the freezer for their transgression.

“Yeah. Never seen one in person before, though.” Frank replied. “We’re lucky it doesn’t like people food, or we’d be minus some supplies long about now. Come to think of it, we’re damn lucky the bears are still in hibernation, or one of them might have found it. We’d have nothing left then. Let’s go.”

The inquisitive animal stared as the two people passed by it, and cautiously followed them toward the edge of the trees. It watched as the people got into the car and left in a cloud of dust. The moose often wondered over the years, why the people never returned again, but things like that were beyond its comprehension.

Frank found the switch that cut the flashing lights off, and sped across the grass in the direction of the road. Amazingly, there were no citizens in the immediate area, as most had been attracted to the sound of the fatal gunshots. The car bounced over the curb and back onto the street as sirens wailed in the distance.

“The road is just up ahead!” George called out. “Up here on the left.”

The car shot across the railroad tracks with a thump, and George hit his head on the roof of the vehicle. He winced and rubbed his head as Frank slid the car around the corner and sped down the exit ramp.

“Brace yourselves!” he shouted, as the car tore through the chain link gate that barricaded the exit, and shot onto the interstate heading down the wrong side of the highway.

Behind them, the gate slammed violently shut, erasing all traces of their violent trespass. In the zone checks that ensued over the next weeks during the search for the murderers of Enforcers Aaron Abrams and David Horowitz, the gate was overlooked as an avenue of escape, as it still appeared to be locked. Only in June would it be discovered by a maintenance crew that the chain and padlock were missing. By then the perpetrators had long since vanished into the vastness of what at one time had been the United States of America.

“It looks like our freedom is stained with blood now.” George commented, as the enormity of the situation began to sink in.

“You’ve got it backwards.” Frank responded. “It’s our blood, that’s stained with freedom. It’s an integral part of our very being to want to be free. Our blood may be red, but freedom will always color our spirit.”

Up ahead, a bridge spanned the Fox River.

“Take off your identification tags.” Frank instructed. “They’ve got RFID chips in them. If they try and track us, the most they’ll do is locate them in the river. If they sink, they’ll probably never even be able to trace them.”

Frank slowed the car slightly, and tossed the tags over the guard rail. They twisted in the wind as they drifted toward the water. They made a slight “ker-plunk” as they struck the surface of the river and sank fourteen feet to the silty bottom.

Frank accelerated once again, and the car sped across the bridge, officially entering the buffer zone to the west of Urban Area Eleven - the realm of Urban Director Jeff Goldstein - and into freedom.

Part III

Rainbow in the Dark

CHAPTER 10

“Throw down the chains of oppression that bind you. With the air of freedom, the flame grows bright. We are the strong; the youth united. We are one; we are children of the light.” - Queensrÿche; the Flame

“We made it!” Brooke exclaimed, throwing her arms around George’s neck and kissing him. “Thank the Lord, we made it!”

“We sure did!” her husband responded, grinning broadly. “And we probably couldn’t have done it without Frank either. Thank God you ignored me and went to his place that day.”

Frank looked over and smiled, as he guided the car up the wrong side of the interstate at eighty-five miles per hour.

“How fast are we going?” George inquired. “Any idea?”

“Eighty-five,” Frank replied with a grin, “and she’ll do a lot faster than that, too. This is a real car George, and it’s only a few years old. They’re still making them. Apparently, somewhere there’s enough people buying cars to keep making them for highway speeds.”

Brooke was somewhat apprehensive, as she looked out the windshield at the countryside whizzing past them. She had never been this fast before in her life, and the speed was somewhat dazzling to her.

“I told you Lassie!” Frank exclaimed, reaching out and squeezing Brooke’s thigh in elation. “I told you we had cars that would go this fast, but you didn’t believe me. What do you think now? You still think I’m a crazy old fool that believes in imaginary flying machines called planes too?”

He looked over at George.

“And you! Where in the hell did you learn how to shoot like that?” he demanded. “You been holding out on me, Boy? You grabbed that gun and cycled the action like it was second nature. You surprised the hell out of that copper too, by God! He never saw *that* one coming!”

“My dad had one like it when I was little.” George explained. “I shot it a few times. It all came back to me when I had it in my hand.”

“I’ll say!” Frank exclaimed. “You took those two down like a pro. I must say, you did me proud, George. I thought I was going to have to make a grab for it, but you drilled him before I could even move.”

“How do you know how to use a gun, Frank?” George asked curiously. “Did you used to have one too?”

“Certainly; but I not only had my own, I was in the National Guard for two years.”

“Really?” George said incredulously. “Wow.”

“What’s the National Guard?” Brooke inquired.

George temporarily ignored her and pursued his questioning of Frank.

“See any action?”

“Not really. I was in during Desert Storm, but never got sent over. Thank God they gave me the immunizations *before* the war started. I never got any of that poisoned crap they gave our boys during the war. Poor bastards got bad anthrax immunizations. I knew guys that had headaches so bad they committed suicide; jumped out of windows or blew their brains out. Goddamn government of ours; always experimenting on our own population. Just like the chemtrails before the Biosickness.

“They were busy trying to change the climate. Fighting global warming with aluminum dust and changing the weather with powdered barium. That crap was radioactive, George; people breathing that garbage in all those years. Then they filled those tankers with poison and killed us all off. I hope that Bush has a warm place in Hell for what he did during his reign.

“Anyway, I never got sent to the Gulf, but I had to deploy to Florida after Hurricane Andrew. We had shoot to kill orders on looters; something the later administrations forgot until Katrina hit Louisiana.

“I took out three gang brothers in a firefight after we caught them coming out of a gun shop. We told them to freeze, my buddy and I, but they opened up on us. Took my buddy out; shot hit him in the side of the head; gutless bastards. I put the selector on burst and kept pulling that trigger like it was a clitoris. When the shooting was done, I’d taken two slugs in my vest, and all three of those street punks were lying in the road, deader ‘n hell. That was the extent of my ‘action,’ George. You’re only one behind me now, though. You made an old man proud today. Those people we call enforcers; they’re not real cops. They’re nothing but a bunch of ass kissers that got rewarded with a badge and a gun, and a lot of perceived authority.

“I’ll betcha neither one of those punks you capped this morning had ever tried drawing his gun in a real situation before. I’ll betcha all they did was pop a couple of targets out on a range somewhere once a year for practice. Here’s a newsflash for ‘em, paper don’t shoot back, ha!

“The National Guard used to be a way for people to volunteer to be in the Army or Air Force part time.” Frank continued, answering Brooke’s earlier question. “You only had to serve one weekend a month and two weeks a year, but if something bad happened, you would be called to duty.”

“Oh okay.” Brooke replied.

She looked out the window for a minute, pondering her words, and then asked another question; the one George had been expecting.

“What was it like, to kill someone?”

“Well, for me, it was kill or be killed.” Frank answered first. “Just like the first one George shot. I can’t answer for him on the second one though. That one was just plain beautiful.”

“It was like killing a noisy cricket.” George explained. “All these years of dealing with those memories, and this was finally payback for it all. Maybe my mind can be a little quieter now. It was justification in my opinion; vengeance for the murder of my parent, twenty-five years ago. I know one thing; I won’t hesitate to do it again, either.”

“That’s the spirit!” Frank said encouragingly. “Because it’s going to happen again, sooner or later.”

They sailed through the outskirts of what had once been Rockport but now was nothing more than overgrown woodland, and ten minutes later crossed the border into the state of Wisconsin.

“This would have taken us two days at least, on those bicycles.” Frank explained. “We’re here in less than an hour!”

“How far can we go?” George inquired.

Frank looked down at the gas gauge.

“We’ve got a quarter of a tank left.” he replied.

“What does that mean?”

“It means that I didn’t see how much was in when we left, but it wasn’t terribly much more than we have in here now. With a full tank, we could probably make it to Sioux Falls, but we’ll be lucky to reach Minnesota now; not unless these things are getting fifty miles to the gallon nowadays, which I seriously doubt. This is still a good-sized car.”

Frank slowed the car a bit and crossed over a small open section of the tree-covered median to the opposite side of the interstate.

“What are you doing?” Brooke asked, as they bounced onto the westbound lanes.

Frank accelerated once again, bringing the car back up to around eighty miles per hour.

“We were on the wrong side of the road.” Frank explained. “If by some chance someone sees us and they saw us going the wrong way, they would know we didn’t know what we were doing, and be more apt to report it. This way, we look like we know the old traffic laws, and people will be more likely to believe we are traveling under official pretenses.”

“Oh.”

They passed through Madison and headed for La Crosse. The new-growth forest had begun to give way to rolling open areas that George assumed must be farmland, although at this time of year it was pretty much impossible to tell.

George had also noticed that the median appeared to be maintained at this point, and the exit ramps had ceased being blocked off. It almost appeared as though the highway was being maintained and used.

“Look, a house!” Frank suddenly exclaimed.



The patriots found the former towns and cities reverting to nature

“Sure is!” George responded. “Been so long, I’d almost forgotten what one looked like. Maybe it goes with all this land. Maybe it’s a farm.”

“It may be, but I doubt all this is being run by one family. My understanding from what I heard at the docks is that the buffer zones are a simpler version of the urban areas. People still live in mass housing; just not to the same extent, and with open land around them. There’s probably still some small towns too, because they still do some light manufacturing in some of the zones. Only way to know for sure is to see for ourselves, but being nosey could get us in a whole heap of trouble if we aren’t careful.”

The car sputtered, and Frank shifted into neutral to gain the longest possible coast.

“What’s wrong?” George asked. “Out of gas?”

“Yup. It’ll be pedal power from here on out.”

After several minutes, the car finally came to a stop.

“Looks like this is where we get off.” Frank commented. “Last stop; bum-fuck Egypt.”

He turned the ignition off and shifted the car into park. He removed the key from the ignition and exited the vehicle, walking toward the rear.

“What are you doing?” George inquired, as he joined Frank.

“Taking a leak,” his friend replied, “but then I’m going to have a look in the trunk.”

He unlocked the trunk and lifted the lid, revealing a rifle rack which contained two M16s, as well as some bottled water and several odds and ends.

“Would you look at that!” Frank exclaimed, removing one of the rifles for inspection. “Hot damn!”

“A fire lance!” Brooke exclaimed, as she joined them.

“It’s called a rifle,” Frank corrected, “and it’s either an AR15 or an M16.”

He examined the selector on the rifle and continued.

“It’s an M16. This is what I fired in the Guard. This will fire full auto.”

“My dad had one like it.” George interjected. “He called it a two-twenty-three, I think, and it had a different stock.”

“That was an AR15 then.” Frank explained. “You could fire .223 in them, but they were really chambered for the 5.56mm cartridge. That’s something most people never knew; they just assumed they were the same thing.”

He lifted a padded shooting bag from the trunk and opened it.

“Lookie here!” he exclaimed. “Extra magazines and ammunition. This just keeps getting better and better. We’ve just about got too much stuff to carry, now. We’re going to have to pack it carefully. Too bad we didn’t think to make a trailer out of some extra bicycle wheels and frames. At least we got some extra tubes and tires folded up though, in case we get a flat.

“Lucky those rifles break down or we’d be leaving them behind too. Can’t be seen with any kind of a weapon. If we get caught, we’re screwed. Well, let’s start packing this stuff up and tying it down.”

After thirty minutes or so, they had succeeded in strapping all the bags to the bicycle racks and handlebars, and George had the shooting bag tied to the frame of his bike as well. Frank dropped the keys to the car on the front seat and closed the door.

“Damn, that’s a lot of weight.” he muttered, as he climbed on the bike and began peddling. “Well, so much for that chapter. Let’s see where the next one takes us.”

The ride proved to be more difficult than expected, due to all the added weight, and the trio found themselves pushing the bicycles up longer or steeper grades than they would have had to have done had the loads been lighter. The bulky backpacks, while not terribly heavy, were burdensome in addition.

“Too bad we couldn’t have stolen some gasoline too.” Frank muttered, as they crested a hill and began coasting down the other side.

The shadows began to lengthen and the air began to chill, as the afternoon wore on. It was staying light much longer, as it was only five weeks away from the summer solstice, but it still was not summertime yet this far north.

“We might want to start looking for a place to spend the night.” George suggested. “By the time we find a place and get set up, it’ll probably be close to, if not, dark.”

“Good idea.” Frank agreed. “Let’s see what this next exit up ahead is.”

Many of the exits no longer had any identification other than a number, as the towns they once serviced were no longer in existence. The numbers all still remained however, as did the mile markers or “yardsticks,” as they had once been referred to by commercial drivers.

“Sparta,” George called out as they approached the exit, “number 28.”

“We’ll check the atlas and see where we are then, after we find a place to camp and get settled in.” Frank replied.

They pedaled up the exit and stopped at the road crossing over the highway below. Frank pointed to a location across the road.

“Looks like it used to be a truck stop or something.” he remarked, looking at an area that appeared to be an overgrown parking lot. “Let’s see if there’s any kind of shelter in there at all.”

The weeds had not yet begun to spring up for the season, and aside from the occasional small tree, the parking lot was still fairly discernable. A pile of rubble indicated where the restaurant and fuel station had once been; abandoned and left to crumble under the elements. George spied a structure at the far side of the lot and pointed.

“Let’s see what that is.” he suggested.

“I’ll be damned,” Frank remarked, as they approached the object, “it’s the truck wash. It’s still standing for Christ’s sake.”

Most of the glass was gone, due to settling and breakage, but the basic shell was still intact. It would afford protection from the basic elements, especially if it began to rain.

They had rain gear - each had a rain coat - but it would still be a miserable ride in the rain, especially this time of year, and none of the adults wanted little Joshua exposed to those conditions. The rain would still soak their legs and feet, and the entire experience would tend to be counterproductive.

They cautiously entered what had once been the truck wash for the rest stop, but found nothing of any concern. The concrete floor was still fairly devoid of any debris, and there were no weeds growing inside the structure.

“Looks like we found our campsite.” Frank commented. “Still got plenty of time to scout the area for deadfall and get a fire going.”

He removed the pistol from his belt and handed it to Brooke.

“George and I are going to look for firewood.” he said to her. “You just line up these two sights here, and anything they’re on will die if you pull that trigger, so make certain it’s not us. We’ll be back shortly.”

Brooke nodded.

“I’ll feed Josh while you’re gone too.” she replied, as the two men exited the truck wash and walked toward the woods nearby.

“What we’re looking for is downed branches, but nothing rotten.” Frank explained to George.

He nodded in reply.

“I remember. Dad and I went camping a few times. I know what to look for. You’ll probably be better at getting a fire going than me though.”

Frank laughed.

“Twenty-five years is a long time, George. I expect I’ll be a bit rusty myself.”

Within an hour, they had several armloads of wood deposited inside the shelter, and Frank removed the folding knife from its sheath on one of the duty belts they had taken from the dead enforcers. He cut a section from a young maple sapling and fashioned a bow drill from an extra shoelace in one of the packs.

“This is how you get a fire going.” he explained to George, as he spun a stick with the bow using sawing strokes.

The small pile of crushed juniper bark began to smolder, and Frank gently breathed on it, causing a glowing ember to catch fire. He gently added some small twigs to the tiny flame, which began to increase in size. As daylight waned into darkness, a reassuring campfire crackled on the concrete floor of the old truck wash.

George placed his arm around Brooke and held her tightly. For the first time in his life, he felt truly in love; more so than ever before, for now they were finally free. He gazed into her eyes and felt the love issuing silently from them.

“I love you.” he whispered quietly.

“I love you too.” Brooke whispered back.

In the distance, a cacophony of hysterical barking wails drifted through the darkness.

“What is that?” Brooke inquired fearfully.

“Coyotes.” Frank replied, unrolling his blankets on a smooth section of floor. “They won’t hurt us. They sound spooky, but they don’t hurt people.”

He yawned and pulled the blanket over his head.

“Don’t you love birds stay up too late.” he advised. “We’ve got a long ride ahead of us tomorrow.”

Brooke and George snuggled against one another in the chilly night, with Josh curled up against his mother’s extended stomach. It felt good to stretch out; his leg muscles were tired, but it was the best thing he had ever felt.

*

“Rise and shine.” Frank called out.

George opened his eyes and stared at the roof of the old truck wash. It took him a minute to realize where he was; that the previous day’s events were real and not a dream. He pulled the blanket back and Brooke yawned as she attempted to pull them back over her head.

“Time to get up, Honey.” he whispered.

"Have a good day at work, George." Brooke mumbled, and once again attempted to snuggle away from the chill of the mid-May Wisconsin morning.

"Brooke," George said somewhat sternly, "it's time to get up."

His wife opened her eyes and blinked.

"My goodness," she replied, "I'd forgotten this was real."

"It's real, alright." Frank responded, stoking the ashes and coaxing a few glowing embers to ignite some small sticks. "Looks like another nice day, too. We'll have something to eat and have a look at that map; see just where we are."

George opened the atlas to the Wisconsin page and located the interstate.

"What exit number was this, 28?" he inquired.

"Yes, Sparta." Frank replied.

"Here it is." George said. "Looks like we're close to Minnesota."

"Twenty-eight miles." Frank replied. "The exit numbers go by the mile. We should easily make it across the river today, and into Minnesota. It's about three hundred miles from here to Sioux Falls, so if we can make thirty miles a day, it'll take us ten days. We should have no trouble making at least fifty though, and that will cut it down to less than a week. We can expect delays for bad weather though. There may be days at a time when we have to hole up under a bridge or something until it stops raining. This is going to be a hard journey, George, and we still have no idea where it is we're going, or what we'll do once we even get there."

"The Bitterroots." George replied. "That's where we're going. They're in Montana."

"I know where they are." Frank responded. "They extend into Idaho as well. What do you plan on doing once you get there?"

"I don't know," George admitted, "but they're beautiful, and it's where I want to raise my family."

"If you're gonna dream, dream big." Frank remarked, taking a drink from one of the water bottles. "We don't even have so much as an axe to build a cabin."

"Hey, you're the one that wanted to come along." George retorted. "Quit being so negative."

"Realistic, my boy. Realistic, not negative. There's a big difference. I'd rather die out here a free man, than bottled up back in the city, but we still need to make a plan. We have no idea what lies between here and Montana, or what this society is based upon. For all we know, they could shoot strangers on sight."

"That's true." George admitted. "I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"Not a problem. Now, let's take advantage of this daylight."

They rolled their blankets up and repacked the bags. Brooke pulled her hat down snugly around her ears and made certain Josh was bundled up as well.

"I'm ready if you are." George called out.

"You lead the way today." Frank offered; his hand extended palm up, in a friendly gesture.

"Why thank you." George replied, pushing off with his left foot and pedaling across the cracked and bumpy asphalt.

They coasted down the entrance ramp and onto the interstate once again. After several hours, the trio was startled by a buzzing sound behind them, and a sudden "beep,

beep” on a small horn. George almost lost his balance but managed to keep from crashing. A scooter pulled up alongside them and the young man operating it waved in greeting.

“I didn’t mean to startle you!” he called out, as all four cycles came to a stop. “I just rarely see anyone out here on the highway. Where are you folks from? I’ve never seen you before.”

“Madison.” Frank responded. “We’re taking a family ride for a couple of days. What’s out this way?”

“La Crosse is about fifteen miles ahead.” the young man replied, turning off the scooter. “Not much out here though. A few farms here and there, is about it. I work on the Johnson farm, over in Sparta. I’m on my way into La Crosse to get a few things and catch up on the news.”

“News?” George repeated, before catching a glance from Frank.

“Yeah,” the young man replied, missing the gaffe, “I like to catch up on what’s new in the States.”

“*States?*” Frank thought. “*What the hell is he talking about?*”

“Madison, huh?” the man remarked. “That’s pretty close to the Danger Zone. I didn’t know they had a habitable city that far east.”

“We’re on the edge.” George replied, picking up on Frank’s lead. “Why; are you scared of the Danger Zone?”

“You bet! I heard it’s still so hot it’s still glowing green. I’m Billy Jones, by the way.”

George shot Frank a quizzical look.

“It’s not quite that bad.” George replied. “Some places are hotter than others. I’m George. This is my mate, Brooke, and our son, Josh. This is... my Uncle Frank.”

“Nice to meet you.” Billy replied. “Your mate? You mean like your wife? That sure is a funny expression, Mister.”

“*Something’s not right.*” Frank thought. “*What in the world is going on?*”

“Anyway,” Billy continued, “I need to be getting along. I’m supposed to be back by lunch. You all take care and have a nice ride.”

“You too.” Brooke answered, as Billy started the scooter and accelerated away, waving as he did so.

“What in the hell was he talking about?” Frank burst out. “Danger Zone? Glowing green? Called Brooke your wife? News from the States? This doesn’t sound anything like what I heard was in the buffer zone.”

“No it doesn’t.” George agreed. “What if everything they’ve been teaching us is a lie? We already know most of it is. Why would they want to keep us out of the buffer zone anyway, even to visit, unless there was something important we weren’t supposed to know?”

“Anyone that ever got caught in the buffer zone without a permit didn’t go to the stocks. They went to the hospital and when they came out, they didn’t even know which way was up. That guy that made it to the wilderness got killed in a way so gruesome as to keep us from ever wanting to end up that way. He never said what was out here though. I wonder why.”

“He rode the rail lines.” Frank replied. “I remember that much. Caught a ride on a freight train, which is what we may want to consider doing if we come across another one.

We should have asked Billy if there was one nearby. He probably never came into any contact with anyone.”

“Wonder how he got caught then.” George mused. “If he was on a train, they shouldn’t have known he was there. He said something about motion before they killed him. He must have been walking.”

“Maybe he didn’t know he wasn’t inside yet.” Brooke offered. “Maybe he got off too soon, or the train stopped or something.”

“Maybe.” Frank agreed. “At least we know they don’t shoot strangers on sight in the buffer zone, or should I call it the States? Let’s get going. We’ve lost about fifteen minutes already.”

*

“Would you look at that!” Frank exclaimed, as they approached a long bridge. “The mighty Mississippi.”

“What is that?” Brooke asked in awe. “It’s not the ocean, but it’s huge!”

“The Mississippi River.” Frank replied. “You should see it further south. It gets a whole lot bigger than that! It’s over two kloms wide, and it’s just a river.”

They stopped their bicycles halfway across the bridge and looked out. Ships could be seen moving through the water, and smoke billowed from several tall chimneys along the water’s edge.

“This is all wrong.” Frank muttered. “That looks like a regular city down there. Shipping, industry; the only thing missing is cars. Everyone’s on scooters or bicycles like us.”

A loud roar could be heard approaching from behind, and the trio turned to see a massive vehicle barreling toward them at tremendous speed. It changed lanes as it approached, and Frank yelled to Brooke and George.

“Hold on! The wind’ll blow you over!”

The vehicle roared past as the driver laid on the air horns, and a blast of wind struck them, causing Brooke to almost lose her balance. Joshua began screaming at the noise.

“Good lord! What was that?” George yelled, as Brooke reached out and tried to calm the boy.

“A truck!” Frank exclaimed. “A semi truck. No wonder the highways are kept up. They’re still using them for deliveries!

“You’re right, George. We’ve been lied to all right, but in a way we can’t even begin to imagine. If this is going on here in the buffer zone, what in God’s name are they hiding from us out there in the wilderness?”

“Zion.” George replied. “Something they call Zion. Something so terrible for us to know, that if we try and find out, they’ll cut our heads off to keep others from discovering the truth.”

“Maybe I’d better have a look at that map of yours.” Frank suggested. “I want to see where this Zion is located.”

George dropped the kickstand on his bicycle and fished through the bag on the back of Brooke’s bike. He retrieved the folded copy of the wall map that Darryl had risked his safety to copy for him and unfolded it on the concrete curb of the bridge.

“Be careful it doesn’t blow over the edge.” Frank cautioned. “Put it back for now. Wait until we’re in Minnesota before we look at it.”

George folded the map back up and placed it back into the bag. Ten minutes later they pulled to the side of the highway and pushed the bicycles onto the grass. The section of highway was now paralleling the river and afforded a scenic view. Brooke removed Joshua from the seat on George's bicycle as he dropped the kickstand.

Once again, he removed the paper map from Brooke's bag and unfolded it. This time there was no danger of it blowing into the Mississippi River and being lost forever. George spread the map open and Frank examined it.

"It's the entire United States!" he exclaimed. "They show the whole country. Okay, here's Chicago. These are all the other urban areas here. They're numbered though; I'm not positive which cities all of them are, but here's New York, DC... looks like Richmond, Charlotte or Raleigh, Atlanta, Miami, Dallas - Jesus - they're all east of the Mississippi, except Dallas! I wonder why?"

"Here's the buffer zones. They spread out through all the urban areas, and then everything between the Mississippi and over into the Great Plains. Then it looks like the wilderness reserves are everything west of that; from Omaha down to the middle of Texas.

"Now let's find Zion and see where the hell it is; here it is, Zion. It looks like it's inside the Rocky Mountains. Goes west to California... wait a minute! Here's the border. It goes on some crazy angles, what's up with that?" I can't even begin to imagine why there would be a place with that name in this country. So much doesn't make any sense! I wish someone had the answers."

"Maybe it'll just take time." George mused. "Anyway, we'll find out soon enough most likely, if we make it into the wilderness ourselves."

"One day at a time, George." Frank cautioned. "Let's not get ahead of ourselves. I'm sure we'll learn the answers in due time. We've still got a ways to go before the end of the day, and I'd like to get more into the country again before we look for a place to spend the night, anyway."

George nodded.

"Yeah, you're right. Darn though; what an interesting day it's been so far. We've almost learned more in one day than Brooke and I did the whole time we were in the education centers."

Three hours later they left the interstate at the Witoka exit to search for a place to spend the night. They were less successful however, in locating shelter than they had been the previous night.

"Lucky it's not raining." George remarked, as dusk settled over the woods. "Looks like we sleep under the stars tonight."

He spied a grove of white pines, and motioned in their direction.

"That'll give us a soft spot to sleep." he stated. "The canopy will keep some of the dew from condensing on us as well."

"Good eye, George." Frank responded. "You're learning quick."

They unrolled their blankets onto the thick bed of pine needles and stretched out, relaxing after a hard day of riding.

"Oh, this is so much more comfortable than that floor last night!" Frank exclaimed, as he reclined on one elbow. "It may be you waking *me* up in the morning this time!"

“Ha!” George returned. “I don’t have to report for work in the morning. I may just sleep in.”

“I think we could all use the rest.” Brooke added. “If we sleep a little later, so what? We’re free now, George. *Free.*”

George couldn’t help but smile at the comment. He and Brooke snuggled together, as the darkness of night enveloped them.

*

“Eeeeeeeeeeeah!”

“What in the hell was that?” George burst out, rolling over and grabbing the handgun beside his head.

The scream had awakened him from a deep sleep, and he had no idea from which direction it had come. Suddenly, it began again; quietly at first, then rising into a terrifying crescendo somewhere in the branches above them. Brooke shrank into George’s arms, as he gripped the pistol in the pitch blackness of the otherwise quiet, country night.

“Oh my god George, what is it?” she whispered in a terrified voice. “It sounds like some kind of a monster. I don’t know if I like the woods anymore, George!”

“It’s a goddamned screech owl.” Frank mumbled, as he fished around in the inky blackness for a stick.

The scream began again, and he launched the stick into the canopy above. The sound immediately stopped, and a faint sound of flapping wings could be heard as the tiny bird flew away.

“What in the world was that?” George inquired.

“A screech owl.” Frank replied. “Haven’t heard one in probably thirty years. I’d forgotten what they sound like. Give you the willies if you don’t know what it is.”

“You don’t say!” George retorted. “It scared the crap out of me.”

Frank chuckled.

“Would you believe all that noise was coming out of a little birdie the size of Brooke’s fist?”

“No.” George replied.

“Well it was. Wait until you hear a whippoorwill. They’re even smaller, but they’ll drive you batty if they’re bellowing over your head like that. You two lovebirds get back to sleep, yourselves. Nothing out here is gonna hurt you, unless it’s got two legs and no wings.”

Frank rolled over and soon began breathing heavily again, as he drifted back off to sleep.

“Stupid screech owl.” George muttered.

*

Rays of golden sunlight poked through the pine canopy above, in thin, pencil-like beams, as George opened his eyes. He glanced at his watch and was startled to see that it was already ten o’clock.

“Wow,” he muttered, “time to get up.”

Brooke stirred at the sound of his voice and stretched.

“What time is it, Honey?” she inquired, yawning as she did so.

“It’s already after ten.” he replied. “I guess we should get up.”

Frank stirred to life as George rolled his blankets up.

"I haven't slept that soundly in twenty-five years!" he exclaimed. "Hear any more monsters there, George?"

"Just the one snoring under your blankets." George retorted. "If noise could make our bicycles go faster, we'd be in Montana by now."

Frank laughed, as he joined his friends. Brooke fed Joshua, while George and Frank doled out a portion of food for each of them.

"Only got about a week's worth of vittles left." Frank observed. "We'd best find something else to eat soon."

George nodded.

"We're far enough out now, we could probably find a town and investigate." he suggested.

"Let's wait a few more days." Frank advised. "What if they're looking for us? Today's Monday, and neither of us reported for work duties this morning. I'm sure those witnesses told the enforcers there were three of us, and when three of us turn up missing, they're probably going to suspect us as the ones that killed them."

"Remember what Billy said though." George offered. "For some reason, they don't know Chicago or any of the other urban areas exist. Chances are; no one will even have any inkling that we're probably wanted where we came from."

Back in Chicago, the trio was indeed wanted. The murders of the two enforcers had sparked an area-wide manhunt; even a special Sunday edition of the daily events had been published and distributed to the citizens of Urban Area Eleven.

When George failed to show up for work on Monday morning, his supervisor had remembered seeing George with Brooke and Frank on Green Day. The group matched the description of the murderers and although he doubted his employee as a suspect, he had immediately contacted the Authority. This would no doubt earn him another Good Citizen's Award, and possibly even a promotion to enforcer, himself. Enforcers were immediately dispatched to the now-empty domicile of George and Brooke Cooper, and they smashed the door open with a heavy steel ram.

"There's no one here." Enforcer Goldenring informed his supervisor via radio. "Domicile's empty. We found all the missing bicycles though, it looks like. They've all been cut up or something. There are signs of someone sewing here too; scraps of material lying on the floor. I can't imagine what they could have been making with all that stuff. We also found black barrels in front of the windows full of water. It appears that Citizen Cooper has been sneaking extra warmth during the winter. He must be a free-thinker."

"That is extremely dangerous and distressing news." Enforcer Goldenring's supervisor replied tersely. "Looks like we've got runners on our hands; and one of them a free-thinker at that! If he thinks for himself, he's got to be dangerous."

"Good Green Man! All units consider them armed and *extremely* dangerous. This is not a drill. I repeat; this is *not* a drill! If located, terminate with extreme prejudice!"

CHAPTER 11

“You’ll never have a quiet world until you can knock the patriotism out of the human race.” - George Bernard Shaw

“Here’s a route number.” Frank observed, as they approached Exit 119. “Highway 169 and Mankato. You wanna try looking for a town?”

“Let’s check the map first.” George suggested. “A few minutes by car could be half a day’s ride by bicycle.”

They pedaled up the ramp and stopped at Highway 169. George took the atlas from Brooke’s bag and located the page for Minnesota.

“Christ!” he exclaimed. “It looks like it’s about thirty miles each way. Forget that!”

He looked around.

“As long as we’re stopped,” he said, as he dismounted his bicycle, “nature calls. I’ll be right back.”

He disappeared into the woods alongside the road, and as Brooke and George waited, an approaching car passed by and made a U-turn. They froze in horror, as red and blue flashing lights emanated from the roof of the car.

“Enforcers!” Brooke burst out in a terrified gulp.

She began shaking violently as an officer exited the vehicle and approached them. His uniform was much different than the enforcers in Chicago however; it was a khaki color, and his badge was gold-colored only - no blue - and in the shape of a five-pointed star.

“You folks are a long way from town to be on bicycles.” the officer greeted the pair as he glanced at them, then at George’s bicycle with Joshua seated on the rear. “Where’s the other member of your group?”

“Right here.” George replied, as he stepped from the thicket of alder and pointed his pistol at the officer. “Hands on your head.”

The officer turned slightly, and George cocked the hammer back.

“Uh-uh.” he cautioned. “Do as I say or I’ll put a hole in your head.”

“He means it,” Frank responded, as he reached into his waistband and removed his pistol as well, “and so do I. It’s something we won’t want to do, but if you force the issue, we will do what is necessary to protect our well-being. Do we make ourselves clear?”

The officer swallowed hard, and placed his hands atop his head.

“Crystal.” he replied.

Frank snatched the pistol from the officer’s duty belt before removing the pair of handcuffs as well.

“Right hand behind your back.” Frank instructed.

The officer reluctantly complied, feeling certain that obeying meant certain death, but understanding that failure to comply ensured it. Frank’s wording of his initial instructions led the officer to believe him, but nothing was certain in a situation such as this. Frank

snapped one cuff over the officer's wrist, before pulling his left hand down and clamping it into position as well. He then frisked the officer but found no additional weapons.

"Now I feel we're more even." George stated, as he decocked his weapon. "Who are you and what do you want with us?"

"Sheriff Paul Raines." the officer replied hoarsely. "I'm the law in this part of the state. Who are *you* and what do you want with *me*?"

"Um, we're asking the questions right now, Sheriff." Frank replied.

He fished into his shirt pocket and retrieved the blue-enameled 18K gold badge he had plucked from Aaron Abrams. He held it in front of the sheriff's face.

"I'm an enforcer." he continued. "Suppose you tell us why you were harassing us."

"What's an enforcer?" the sheriff inquired in a puzzled tone.

He identified the badge as being genuine, but neither recognized its design, nor the blue seal in its center.

"Don't play with me, Sheriff!" Frank responded angrily.

Suddenly, he realized the title of the man he was addressing.

"What the hell is a sheriff still doing in uniform?" he demanded. "What the hell is going on here?"

There was an uncomfortable silence, as both parties attempted to digest the terms they were hearing from the other.

"I want answers, Sheriff." Frank said, backing up and training his weapon on the officer.

"I'll tell you whatever you want to know," the sheriff responded, "but I honestly think that somehow, we're on the same side here. I've never heard of enforcers before. Where are you from?"

"Chicago." Frank replied.

"That's impossible!" Sheriff Raines exclaimed. "Chicago was nuked in 2014, along with everything else east of the Mississippi. I don't know who you are, but you sure aren't from Chicago!"

"Frank," George cut in, approaching his friend, "I think he really believes that. Remember what Billy said? Everything was still hot? He said it was still glowing green. That sounds like the radiation they taught us about in the education centers from something called nuclear weapons. It's starting to make a little more sense now."

"Holy crap." Frank replied, lowering his pistol. "More lies from the Authority, but what else is new? Sheriff, we need to talk."

"I'm up for that." the officer replied with a slight nod.

"I *mean* it." Frank said forcefully. "No funny stuff. I'm going to trust you. Violate so much as a fraction of that trust, and one of us is going to put a hole in your head. You might get one of us, but the other will get you."

"Understood."

Frank released the cuffs on the sheriff, but did not return his weapon.

"Okay, first of all, why did you bother us?"

"I'm not used to seeing people this far out of town on bicycles." the sheriff replied. "I wasn't bothering you; I was just checking on you. It's my job."

“Chicago wasn’t nuked in 2014; I can assure you of that.” Frank replied. “It’s now referred to as Urban Area Eleven, and two and a half million people called citizens live there. Same with New York, DC, Atlanta, and a host of others.

“People, or citizens as we are now called, are confined to seventeen urban areas east of the Mississippi River and Dallas. We are restricted from entering the buffer zones under penalty of institutionalization. We are beginning to understand why now. Perhaps you can help us solve the mystery.”

Sheriff Raines was dumbstruck at Frank’s statements. The entire story seemed incredible, but before his eyes was a badge he did not recognize, and three adults and an infant who claimed to be from an area that was supposed to be uninhabitable for the next ten thousand years.

“You have my undivided attention.” he responded. “I think maybe we need to compare notes. Is there some way you can prove what you are saying? It all sounds so... fantastic. You must understand why I am a little skeptical.”

George and Frank exchanged glances, and George nodded. He removed the folded paper map from Brooke’s bicycle and spread it on the hood of the sheriff’s car. The sheriff gasped as he saw what appeared to be three separate zones, in what had formerly been the United States of America, and saw numbered areas he once knew as cities identified on the map as urban areas.

“This can’t be real.” he finally managed to utter. “What in the world is going on here?”

“Will you help us figure it out?” George inquired.

“Yes.” the sheriff said emphatically. “Let’s go back to town. Put your bikes in the back of the car. I have some maps I think you’ll be interested in, as well.”

*

“I’m still having a hard time believing this.” Sheriff Raines commented, as he escorted the four urbanites into his office in the Sheriff’s Department. “They’ve been lying to us for twenty-five years!”

“What exactly have they been telling you?” George inquired. “My name is George Cooper, by the way. This is Frank O’Reilly and my wife, Brooke. The little guy is Josh.”

“Paul Raines. After the Biosickness, they started with the relocations.” the sheriff explained. “Then came the nuclear attacks, or supposed nuclear attacks I should say, that destroyed the entire eastern half of the country. We were told it was the Chinese; that they decided to get us before we got them. It killed almost the remainder of the population in this country and left everything east of here uninhabitable. We were also told that we nuked them in retaliation and it left much of Asia in the same predicament, as well as Europe; that China had nuked them as well.

“We were led to believe that we were the sole survivors, save for a few isolated pockets in Europe and Australia. Areas west of here were designated as wilderness reserves and prohibited from any human interaction to preserve the last remaining bastion of non-radioactive wilderness and forest lands on Earth.”

“That’s where the lies match.” George observed. “How many ‘survivors’ are there supposed to be?”

“A little over five million people scattered across six states, and parts of three more.”

"That's not very many for the area involved." George stated. "You're all in towns like this?"

"Some; and some are scattered all across the states on family farms. It's an awful lot like it was in the 1800's, except we have modern conveniences. It's like something out of an old black and white TV show. The guy and his wife drive into this little town and find people with buckskins and black powder riding horses, but they're all watching TV and have electricity.

"After the world collapsed, there weren't enough people to really keep the society going that had once been, but it also meant that there weren't as many consumers, so the demand for things like gasoline and power dropped. After ten years or so, everything balanced out. Because the population is so sparse outside of the towns, there aren't many gas stations any more. People can get fuel for their equipment, but it's not worthwhile having a car, so most people get around out in the country on scooters, bicycles, and horses.

"Those in towns have better access to a gas station, but the car isn't a necessity because they really have nowhere to go. It's surreal; like combining Early America with modern amenities."

"There's a term for that." Frank observed. "It's called living in the decline of a civilization. I was always afraid that it would happen within my lifetime; that people would find things like cars and computers, but not know how to use them. I wonder why they told you the wilderness reserves were off limits too, and not nuked like we were supposed to be."

"That's a good question." Paul replied. "Unless there were still those of us that knew that the jet stream - and therefore fallout - travels east, not west. If they said the western part of the nation had been nuked, and there was no trace of radiation drifting this way, we'd be suspicious. There would be no way for us to confirm a place had been nuked if it was east of here though, unless we went to look for ourselves, and no one dares do that."

"Why not?" George inquired.

"Aside from the fact that no one is going to walk into a nuclear hot zone to look unless they're daffy," Paul explained, "there's also rumors of some sort of mutant monsters out there that survived the radiation and kill anything that goes near there. Every few years or so, bodies will turn up horribly mutilated."

"I expect that the only monsters they're running into are enforcers." Frank muttered, before he could catch himself.

"Huh, didn't you say you were enforcers?" Paul inquired, overhearing the comment. "Who are you, really?"

Frank wanted to kick himself for slipping up, and chewed his bottom lip for a few seconds, trying to think of a plausible-sounding answer."

"You escaped?" the sheriff suggested. "That's why you were on bicycles?"

"The car ran out of gas." George responded. "We're trying to get to the wilderness."

"But why?" Paul asked incredulously. "Going there carries the death penalty!"

"For you too, eh?" Frank finally responded. "Ever wonder why?"

"Sort of, but not as much until you told me twenty-five states weren't really glowing under a layer of green glass. Now you've piqued my curiosity. Why were you escaping; what did you do?"

"My wife got pregnant." George responded bitterly.

"I don't understand." Paul replied with a perplexed look on his face. "How can that be a crime? You already have a child."

"That's the problem, Paul." George explained. "Citizens are only allowed to have two children to maintain a balanced population. After two, both parents are sterilized. Brooke and I wanted a bigger family so we decided to escape. We stole an old atlas, and Frank agreed to show us how to read it if we'd take him with us."

"What? Two children? That's insane! That sounds more like a penal colony than a society."

"It's designed to keep the population in check." Frank responded. "By only allowing two children except in the case of twins, it keeps the population from ever increasing. You'd think they'd push birth control for that, but that's another amenity we don't have either."

Brooke was ignoring the conversation and staring intently at an odd-looking boxy object with a shiny front, which was sitting on a cabinet on the far side of the sheriff's small office.

"What is that?" she inquired, pointing at it.

"What's what," Paul asked, "you mean the TV?"

Brooke's ears perked up at the mention of the word she had heard George speak of several months earlier.

"Teevee!" she responded excitedly. "You have teevee? George, they have teevee here! I told you they might!"

"I don't understand." Paul managed to say in a dumbfounded voice.

"We don't have any appliances except stoves." Frank explained. "They're not allowed. If they could find some way to make us cook without them, we wouldn't have them either. No running water; community shitters at the end of the hall, no cars, no scooters. George here had to steal bicycles to make the frames for our backpacks because there is nothing in our society that allows us to buy tubing of any kind. Brooke stitched them together from odds and ends and a couple of flags she lifted from her work. She's never listened to a radio or seen a television before."

"My god," Paul exclaimed, "it really does sound like you're living in a penal colony! What in God's name would make our government send thirty million people to prison after the Biosickness?"

He turned to Brooke, whose gaze was fixed upon the television.

"Brooke, would you like to see how the TV works?"

Brooke nodded her head vigorously, and Paul walked over to the small set and turned it on.

"We don't get good reception, but we get a few channels to keep up on the news and weather, and there's a few shows on."

The set warmed up and a grainy picture emerged of a police officer running down a crowded city street, shouting for the suspect he was chasing to stop.

"That's an old one." Paul commented. "From the 80's. They haven't made any new shows since the Biosickness. Hooker always gets his man though."

Brooke dropped to her knees and ran her fingers across the screen, staring intently at the fuzzy picture in front of her.

“How?” she murmured. “How does this work?”

“It’s been twenty-five years since I’ve watched TV.” Frank said softly. “It beams the picture through the air, Lassie. There are invisible waves of light beyond the visible color spectrum that we can’t see, that the picture travels in. This TV set picks them up and decodes them into visible light so that you can see them. Radio works the same way, only it’s just sound.”

“It travels a lot further too.” Paul added. “We get several stations on the radio, and sometimes at night we can pick up broadcasts from someplace I’ve never even heard of called Zion. Half the stuff is in a language I can’t even understand.”

“Zion!” George exclaimed. “You get messages from Zion?”

“You know of this Zion?” Paul inquired. “Is it in your area?”

Frank shook his head.

“Nope. It’s smack dab in the middle of the wilderness.” he replied. “Go get the map again, George.”

George returned a few minutes later with the map, and spread it out on the sheriff’s desk.

“Here’s Zion.” he said, pointing to the odd-shaped area in the western portion of the former USA.

Paul whistled.

“So there are people living inside the wilderness reserves. Who are they? Why don’t they want us to know they exist, and why kill us for trying to find out? And most of all, why did they separate the population?”

“Most of all, why did they kill three hundred million people in this country, you mean.” Frank commented. “They separated the survivors for a reason. Some of us appear to have been left alone, whereas others were imprisoned for lack of a better term, into seventeen urban areas.”

“Did you have many orphans to look after, after the Biosickness?” George asked Paul.

“Some, as with any catastrophe, but not as many as I would have expected. Probably because the families stayed together.”

“At least fifty percent of the population in Chicago is made up of Biosickness orphans.” Frank stated. “Wonder why we got ‘em.”

“Most of the other children I talked to came from the country.” George mused. “We used to talk about the fires before they took us away and brought us to Eleven – I mean – Chicago.”

“George and Brooke are both orphans.” Frank explained to Paul. “They killed his parents for resisting. Brooke doesn’t remember hers, so she doesn’t know what happened to them, only that she’s from Carroll, Iowa.”

Frank glanced over at Brooke who was still enthralled with watching the television. The other show had ended, and she was now watching in fascination, as a bright orange car sailed through the air and landed on a dirt road; the pursuing vehicle skidding off the road and careening into an adjacent pond with a large splash.

“My parents and I didn’t resist.” Paul offered. “We reported to our designated area and were relocated here.”

“From where?” Frank inquired.

“Phoenix.”

“That’s in the heart of Zion, now.” Frank replied. “I didn’t want to relocate myself. They caught up to me and pointed their M16s at me and some friends, and we complied. Have you ever talked to any of the other people around, to see if they did what they were told, too?”

“I never really thought about it.” Paul replied. “Hey, are you guys hungry? We can get some lunch and talk to a few older folks and see if they reported for relocation or if any of them got caught.”

“I’d love some food.” George responded. “Come on, Brooke. You can watch TV later. I don’t really remember what a regular town looks like. Could we look around after lunch too?”

“I don’t see why not.” Paul replied. “It’s a small town; only about three hundred people here now. Before the Biosickness, it used to be a big place from what I understand. We can talk to some of the folks while we’re at it. Good burger joint at the end of the block.”

“I haven’t had a burger in twenty-five years!” Frank exclaimed. “Oh good Lord, what I’d give to taste one again!”

“What’s a burger?” Brooke inquired, as she reluctantly pried herself away from the television and rejoined the conversation.

“What’s a burger?” Paul echoed. “Twenty-five years? What did you eat?”

“A bunch of healthy crap.” Frank said in disgust. “They banned red meat many, many moons ago.”

“No red meat! I sure feel for you folks. Well then, lunch is on me. I don’t expect you to have any money anyway.”

“Cashless society.” Frank explained. “We work six days a week and get fifty kudos deposited into an account every week.”

“What’s a kudo?”

“Like a unit of credit, I guess.” Frank replied. “It takes three kudos for a razor, and one hundred for a bicycle. We’re not allowed to have any more than a hundred kudos in our account, so if we don’t spend them, we end up working for nothing. Keeps us all the same, you see. No one has any more than anyone else.”

“Communism in its truest form. No wonder you wanted to escape.” Paul said in a sympathetic tone. “But how *did* you escape? Are there walls or a fence to keep you in? Did you have to break out of somewhere?”

“Only threats and fear.” George replied. “Those are the walls that imprisoned us. We’ve been conditioned to believe whatever the Authority tells us, regardless of how outlandish or absurd it may be. We had been caching supplies for months, and the only day of the year that we could travel without having our whereabouts tracked, was Green Day.”

“How’d you get the badges and a car?” Paul inquired. “Steal ‘em?”

“In a roundabout way.” Frank responded. “They caught us. George got one of their guns.”

“Aren’t weapons forbidden where you are? How did he know how to use it?”

"They sure are. George learned how to use one when he was a lad. It all came back to him real quick too. I've never seen such a look of surprise. That jackbooted bastard didn't think he knew how to use it."

"You... killed him then?" Paul asked, his face turning ashen.

"Had no choice." George replied. "It was them or us. My wife and children are very important to me, Sheriff."

"Um, I understand that," Paul responded, "but taking a life. I've never had to use my gun the whole time I've been the sheriff here."

"Well, I'm certainly glad we didn't have to harm you." George replied. "I really thought you knew who we were, and were going to send us back. I thought we'd all been caught. I would have shot you and not thought twice. I'm glad things worked out the way they did."

"You and me both!" Paul exclaimed. "I honestly thought you were going to kill me. If I didn't have a family, I probably would have gone for my gun."

"And you would now be dead." Frank replied. "Be glad you didn't. It's time to return that to you, by the way. Here you go. I rather like you; the little bit we've come to know one another. Let's get those burgers now. My mouth's been watering ever since you said the words, 'burger joint.'"

George and Brooke looked around, as the group walked down the sidewalk. George was holding Joshua in his arms and taking in every sight. He hardly remembered what a town looked like, and Brooke didn't remember one at all. It was incredible to see buildings but relatively few people.

"A small town." Frank said quietly. "What a sight to behold. I never thought I'd see a little town again. So used to seeing mile after mile of nothing but domiciles."

"It's so beautiful." Brooke almost whispered.

"Hey there, Sheriff." someone greeted Paul as they passed on the sidewalk.

"Hi Bob." he replied. "Say, hold up a second, would you?"

"Something wrong, Sheriff?"

"No, not at all. I was just wondering if you and your family had reported to the relocation depot after the Biosickness, or if you had hidden out."

"Hide out? No Sir! We turned ourselves in to the Authority immediately! We wanted to do whatever we could to help."

"I see. Thanks Bob. Have a nice day."

Paul held the door for his new acquaintances and they sat down in a booth near the window.

"Good afternoon, Sheriff." a smiling woman greeted Paul politely, as she set some rolled up napkins and silverware on the table.

"Hello Annette." he replied. "Four burgers all the way and fries, and some applesauce for the little one."

Annette nodded.

"Say Annette, do you remember if your parents took you anywhere after the Biosickness?" Paul asked nonchalantly. "My friends and I were discussing old times; how it was when we were little."

"Gee, I really don't remember much." Annette replied. "I was only eight, but I remember hearing on the news about the Biosickness, and how we had to report

somewhere. We packed our bags and as near as I can remember, we went somewhere and they brought us here. I can ask my parents about it.”

“No, no. That’s okay.” Paul replied. “I was just curious. By the time I see you again, the point will be moot.”

He smiled and Annette left. As soon as her back was turned, his face clouded.

“I’m beginning to see a pattern emerging here.” he remarked to George, who was seated directly across from him.

George nodded.

“What if the people who resisted or fought back that weren’t killed outright, were sent to the urban areas?” he ventured.

“That’s what I’m beginning to think.” Paul replied. “And the children of those that were killed standing up for what was theirs, were shipped off too, because things like pride, and honor and courage, tend to run in the bloodline.

“Here’s a theory from way out in left field. It may just be the cop in me, but what if your urban areas aren’t necessarily penal colonies, but huge insane asylums? What if the weak-minded people that rolled over were allowed to continue their sheep-like existence, while those who stood up were herded like cattle and placed into huge concentration camps, where the children were reeducated to respect - and not question - authority?

“What if this is some huge plan of eugenics? The genes of pride run deep. It would take generations of brainwashing to eradicate the need to be free. Look at how quickly it came out in Brooke when she wanted more children than the law said she could have. I looked at your packs when you put them in the back seat of my car. Those are homemade. That took ingenuity. If you were allowed to continue in this society here, you would very quickly rise into power and lead people to revolt against the Authority.

“They have to keep people like you enslaved, or else you would kill your oppressors. I read about people like you before the Biosickness. They were called ‘patriots.’ I remember names like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.”

“That’s my name.” George piped up. “George Washington Cooper.”

“They founded this country.” Frank interjected. “The British called them criminals and tried to have them killed, but they led their brothers and sisters to battle against tyranny. Your parents gave you a grand name, George.”

“Why bother to enslave us though? Why not just kill us all off too? That would have left them even more room.” George wondered aloud.

“You obviously serve a purpose,” Paul observed, “as do we. The rural areas are nothing but farms. Farms as far as the eye can see. You go further west, and the corn reaches to the horizon. Further south, it’s wheat. That’s more than enough for five million people. I always wondered what they needed so much corn and grain for.”

“You’re feeding us too.” Frank responded. “And probably all of Zion as well. The Midwest used to be called the ‘Breadbasket of America,’ because so much grain is raised here. You’re feeding the entire population of three separate regions with your fields. Someone else must be growing cotton and making all our clothes. I’m assuming that happens in the urban areas down South. Places like Chicago simply exist. I wonder if we got most of the orphans and our purpose is to raise them to be sheep, so that one day, we can all assimilate back into one society, but a society where the population remains in check so that overpopulation doesn’t become an issue again.

“Throughout history, there have been fires, floods, and plagues to keep the population in check. With the advances in medicine, we had defeated all the viruses, and fires and floods could be forewarned of and avoided, so the only way to start over was to actually kill us off. I wonder what was in those clouds they sprayed over us. I wonder how those people feel, knowing they tried to play God with our lives.”

“I doubt they even care.” George remarked, as the waitress returned with four plates of hamburgers and French fries, and a bowl of applesauce. “Now that we know why we were separated, we still need to understand who did it, and what exists in their region. We need to find out what the big secret is; why keeping it is so important as to saw the heads off of any who venture in to find out.”

George lifted the burger and took a bite.

“Mm, this is the best thing I have ever tasted!” he exclaimed.

Brooke too, seemed to enjoy the taste of the hamburger. Frank was rolling his eyes and gulping the burger down without as much as a single word.

“It would appear to me,” Paul offered, “that whatever Zion is and whoever lives there, controls what we do. It seems to me that they are the masters and we are the slaves; that we support their existence and they live off the fruits of our labor.”

“I used to hear rumors about groups called the Illuminati and a plan called the New World Order, and of wealthy families with names like Bilderberg, Rockefeller, and Rothschild, that controlled much of the world’s economy.” Frank offered. “People that were supposed to control the United Nations. What if they created a new world that exists only to support them, and what if they all moved here - to our country - and sequestered themselves in an area called Zion, the mythological promised land of their ancient prophets?”

“Then,” Paul said carefully, “I would want to know what lay in the land of Zion.”

“Exactly!” George burst out. “That is why it is so important for us to get there and see for ourselves.”

“What if you don’t make it back?” Paul inquired.

“Then we die free!” Frank exclaimed, wiping his hands on a napkin. We die knowing the truth and we die free men, women, and children. They may take our lives, but they’ll never take our pride!”

He folded his napkin and set it on the table before him.

“So, how was lunch?” Paul inquired.

“I’ve never had anything like that before in my life.” George replied, wiping his mouth with his napkin. That was the best tasting sandwich I have ever tasted. What was it?”

“Ground beef.” Paul replied. “We call it a hamburger. It’s cow meat.”

Paul motioned for the check and laid paper money on the table, something Frank had not seen in almost three decades.

“Money!” he burst out. “May I look at it?”

Paul nodded.

“Help yourself” he replied. “I’d just better get it all back.”

“It’s different from what we used to have.” Frank noted. “It’s paper money, but it’s not US. Look at the backgrounds. The scenery is different; this one looks like New York

before they supposedly nuked it. The colors are different too, and look at these names; Clinton, Weisenthal, and Ki-Moon.”

“Apparently, they were great men and generals who led us to victory against the Red Chinese and the Russians. They seem to be the heroes of modern times.” Paul said. “They’re probably from before my time though.”

“The hell they were!” Frank burst out. “I remember those names from way back alright, but they were no heroes. Clinton was one of the main Globalists that pushed for world domination and communism when he was president.”

“Wait! I remember.” Paul said excitedly. “Ban Ki-Moon was the leader of the United Nations before Clinton took it over in the teens. It’s all making sense now. They couldn’t hope to achieve world domination the way things were going, so they annihilated most of the world’s population and are ruling over what’s left.”

“Charlie Manson tried that back in the 1960’s.” Frank stated. “He thought he could lead the Blacks to victory, and because he thought they were inferior; that they would need the last remaining Whites alive to lead them. The one thing he didn’t count on is that after the initial sneak attacks, history has proven that the civilized Western man has always succeeded in winning the war. It appears that our UN friends, if that’s who it really is, are making the same mistake; they destroyed most of our people and enslaved what’s left. The only thing they’re not counting on is the ability of the free man to rise above his captors and kill them. It may take time, but as we begin to learn more and more, I feel there are more of us than there are of them. All we need is to find out what really lies beyond the wilderness, and let everyone know. From there on out, let nature take her course.”

“All in due time.” George stated. “We have no idea what we’re going to find; if we can even make it in there to begin with.”

“How would you all like a hot shower and a place to recuperate for a few days?” Paul inquired. “You can get some real food in your stomachs and you can help me on my patrols.”

“That would be great!” George replied. “We would be most grateful.”

“Well, come on home and meet the wife and little one.” Paul invited. “I think Brooke will be amazed at what we have in the house too.”

Paul opened the front door to his farmhouse located on no less than forty-five acres, and called for his wife.

“Stephanie!” he called. “Where are you?”

“Right here.” she replied, stepping into view at the top of the stairs.

“I have some friends of mine I’d like for you to meet.” Paul explained. “Come on down.”

Stephanie Raines descended the stairs and joined her husband.

“Hello.” she greeted the guests uncertainly, eying Brooke’s stomach.

“Stephanie, this is George and Brooke Cooper, their son Josh, and their friend Frank O’Reilly.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” Stephanie replied. “Where are you from? I haven’t seen you before.”

Frank and George looked uncertainly at Paul.

"They're from over near Walnut Grove." Paul answered. "They're out riding around the countryside and talking to all sorts of people, trying to learn more about us."

"Oh, that's cool!" Stephanie said. "Brooke, would you like to freshen up a bit?"

"Oh yes." Brooke said, nodding vigorously. "I feel all icky. We haven't been able to wash up for a couple of days."

"I'll get you a towel and show you how to adjust the water. That hot water knob's a little tricky."

"Hot water knob?" Brooke repeated.

"Good Lord," Frank exclaimed, "you've got hot and cold running water!"

Stephanie gave him a strange look.

"Of course we have hot and cold running water." she said, somewhat indignantly. "This isn't a barn."

"These people come from a place where basic necessities don't exist." Paul explained to his wife. "In fact, I believe there are a lot of things in this house that they have never seen before."

A large black Lab trotted around the corner, and Brooke shrank back in surprise at the sight of the strange animal.

"What is that?" she asked, as she grabbed hold of George and ducked behind him.

The dog wagged its tail at the visitors, and George dropped to one knee and held his hand out.

"A dog, Brooke! It's a dog!" he exclaimed, as he petted the Lab on the head and neck.

"His name is Buster." Paul said.

"Hi Buster!" George greeted the dog, who wagged his tail even harder, slapping it noisily against the floor. "I haven't seen a dog since before the Biosickness. Pets are forbidden in the urban areas."

"*Urban areas?*" Stephanie thought to herself. "*What in the world is he talking about now?*"

"You're right, Paul." George continued. "There are a lot of things here that Brooke has never seen because she was too small when the Biosickness happened, to remember any of this, just like Buster, here."

"I had a cat named Cootie when I was a boy. She was a little tuxedo cat. An enforcer was going to shoot her and Dad hit him. That's when they killed my parents. I miss having pets."

Paul smiled, as his wife shot him an inquisitive look. He shook his head almost imperceptibly at her.

"We have cats too." he responded. "Tessa just had a litter about three weeks ago. I'll show them to you later on, if you'd like. She had four black and white kittens and a solid black one. One of the black and white ones is a little tuxedo too. They always seem to be the runt of the litter, but boy are they smart!"

George nodded his head.

"I'd like that. Do you have seedees?" he inquired, looking around. "I remember my dad had them, and it sounded like an entire orchestra was playing in the house. I tried explaining it to Brooke, but she can't imagine."

Paul smiled again. It was almost like dealing with a poor child full of wonder and amazement at a rich friend's expensive toys.

"Yes George, I have CDs. That stands for 'compact disc.' It's two initials, not one word, just like TV is short for television. What would you like to hear?"

"I have no idea." George replied. "I think my dad used to play some guy with glasses, named Danvers or something like that. It was stuff about the country, I think; mountains maybe."

"I have him," Paul replied, as he turned on the stereo, "if it's who I think it is."

"Brooke, you've got to hear this before you go upstairs." George implored. "It sounds so real."

Brooke stopped and listened, as the sound of a guitar began to fill the room. Soon the crisp clear voice of John Denver singing about a place called West Virginia, added to the music. By the time the song was over, George had tears in his eyes.

"That's the one that Dad used to play." he said softly, wiping his eyes. "It's been so long since I've heard it. I closed my eyes and could almost see myself standing in the living room when I was little, seeing him and Mom again. I'm sorry."

Stephanie gave him another strange look, and wondered why her husband had brought such odd people into their house.

"I'm sorry." George apologized again. "It's finally all starting to catch up to me. All these years and now it's all in front of me again."

"I don't understand." Stephanie replied, by now convinced the people in her living room were very strange indeed.

"They're not really from Walnut Grove." Paul admitted. "Look Honey, what we are about to tell you never leaves this room, you understand?"

Stephanie nodded.

"I *mean* it." Paul said forcefully. "This is like work stuff."

"Okay, okay. I promise." Stephanie answered, rolling her eyes. "Geez, what is so important anyway?"

"They're from Chicago." Paul answered.

"That's impossible!" Stephanie snorted. "Chicago's still glowing under a layer of radioactive green glass."

"That's exactly what I said when I first heard it." Paul responded. "It's not the case however."

"I can assure you, it is *not*." Frank replied, finally entering the conversation. "Chicago and sixteen other eastern cities have become giant concentration camps where everyone is free to move about, but cannot leave."

"We escaped to try and find a new life so that Brooke and George could have more children. We have no appliances and no running water. Brooke's never had a bath or a hot shower before. Today was the first time she ever ate a hamburger or saw a dog, and I hadn't eaten a burger in twenty-five years."

"Why not?" Stephanie inquired dubiously.

"Because it's not considered healthy. We can't have anything they deem junk food except on Green Day. Red meat is banned from our diet as well. No hamburgers, steaks, or hotdogs. We're given our food on a daily basis and we have to carry our water from

community wells. Our heat is limited to fifteen - excuse me, fifty-eight - degrees during the winter, and we have no air conditioning during the summer.”

“That sounds like the Russian Gulag!” Stephanie exclaimed. “Or at least what we were taught about it. It sounds like prison. I remember hearing about where they had banned red meat before the Biosickness, but after that, it was okay. A lot of things changed after the Biosickness.”

“For you maybe.” George added. “Not for us. We’re free in a certain sense, but we can’t leave, so in a roundabout way, it *is* like a prison. More like a penal colony though, for comparison. We hope to solve the mysteries surrounding what has happened, and possibly even let others know, so that they may learn and possibly one day be able to do something about it.”

“That’s the strangest thing I’ve ever heard.” Stephanie remarked, shaking her head in disbelief. “Come on Brooke, I’ll take you upstairs and you can take a bath or a shower, your choice.”

“Hmm, I think I’d like to see what a bath is like.” Brooke responded.

“How about a nice, relaxing bubble bath then?” Stephanie asked.

“Okay,” Brooke replied with a smile. “I can’t believe I got to see the TV today, and listen to a CD, see a dog, and now I get to take a bath! It’s hot water right?”

“Of course.”

“Oh, I’ve never been in water, much less water that was warm.”

“How do you wash up?” Stephanie inquired, believing more of the visitors’ stories and genuinely interested in the plight of the former citizens of Urban Area Eleven, now.

“We get ten gallons of water a day.” Brooke explained, as Stephanie turned the bath water on and adjusted the temperature.

“To wash with? That wouldn’t last any time at all.”

“No, for everything. Each citizen gets ten gallons of water for drinking, cooking, washing, and doing dishes.”

Stephanie stared dumbfounded at the woman standing next to her.

“That’s all? Ten gallons for *all* of that?”

Brooke nodded.

“And how do they measure it? You have a water meter?”

“I don’t know what that is.” Brooke replied, as Stephanie dumped some liquid soap into the filling tub, which immediately began to billow with glistening bubbles. “We would take our containers to the nearest wells every day. We had two apiece, and there was a well master that would fill them for us, and we would have to carry them back to our domicile.”

Stephanie’s jaw dropped.

“How far did you have to carry them?” she asked, as she turned the water off. “And what is a domicile?”

“Is it ready?” Brooke asked excitedly, unintentionally ignoring Stephanie’s question.

“Yes.” Stephanie replied. “You can get in it now, if you like.”

Brooke removed her clothes and stepped into the tepid water.

“I’ve never washed up in so much warm water before!” she gushed.

“Brooke, you lay down in it.” Stephanie explained. “Sit in the tub and lay back.”

Brooke slid into the water and the bubbles danced around her neck.

"I've never felt anything like this before." she whispered. "It's so warm! We had to heat water on the cooking machine and it would cool off so fast when I used it. We had nothing but a washcloth, unless we went to the public washroom and poured it into a sprinkler. It would only last a minute or two though, and it always cooled off. You don't know how good you have it here. I would do anything to live in a place like this."

"Here's a wash cloth." Stephanie offered. "Soak for a while, and then use the wash cloth to scrub down. The bubbles will relax you. You can soak for as long as you'd like. Just let me know when you're through."

"Oh, thank you!" Brooke exclaimed. "Mm, this is so relaxing. Oh, I almost forgot to answer you. We only had to carry our water about two blocks and then upstairs. We were on the fifth floor though. Some citizens had to carry theirs almost a klom. Domiciles were where we lived, like this place, except that it was hundreds of quarters all together, not separately like yours. I like your domicile. It's all yours. In the space you call your farm; there would be at least five thousand domiciles in Area Eleven."

"Five thousand!" Stephanie burst out. "I can't even begin to imagine that."

She shook her head in disbelief.

"What's a klom," she inquired, looking at Brooke's obviously pregnant belly, "and how far along are you, by the way?"

"Frank says a klom is like a half mile, whatever that is, and I'm about four months."

"A half mile! They had to carry their water a half mile every day? That is insane! I don't blame you for leaving. I wonder why they tell us you all got nuked though. That makes no sense."

Brooke shrugged.

"The boys have been discussing it all day," she said with a laugh, "But you know men. They love to talk about conspiracies."

"All too well." Stephanie replied with a sigh. "Not too many women pass by the place here. It gets kind of lonely for me sometimes."

She reached out and placed her hands on Brooke's stomach.

"You're awfully big for four months," she observed. "You may be carrying twins."

"You think so?" Brooke inquired. "That would be wonderful. I'd love to have two more at once."

"Well, take your time, Brooke. Jimmy's about due to get up from his nap so I'll check on him. I'll put Josh down for you too. If you need anything, just call me, okay?"

"Okay." Brooke replied, and sank happily up to her neck in the warm, soapy water.

Stephanie turned to leave and Brooke called after her.

"Thank you for all you've done. You don't know what this means to us. We've never experienced friendship like this before."

"And that," Stephanie replied with a smile, "is what separates us from those animals that you have escaped from."

*

"What in the world are they doing up there?" George inquired, checking his watch as the time passed by.

"George, you've got to understand how women are when they get together." Frank explained. "It's 'yak, yak, yak,' and they do everything together. I swear sometimes, when women get together, it's like they turn into one giant, single, female organism."

"I hear that!" Paul exclaimed. "You guys wanna help me throw some steaks on the grill? I raise a little Black Angus out back, and slaughter one twice a year. Some goes to stew meat and ground beef, and rest goes to the most tender slabs of beef you've ever tasted in your life."

"On the grill?" George echoed. "What's a grill? And who's Angus?"

"You're damn straight we will!" Frank exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "Oh Jesus, first a hamburger for lunch, and now a juicy Angus steak for dinner. Does it get any better than this?"

Paul dumped a mound of charcoal into the grill on the back porch, and doused it with lighter fluid.

"We'll let that soak in for about ten minutes," he explained. "Then I'll put a match to it."

"Wish we had matches on the way out here," Frank muttered. "I had to teach Junior here, how to use a bow drill to get a fire going."

"That was a lesson to be learned," George admitted. "It's pretty hard to learn, but once you get the hang of it, you can get a fire going in a few minutes."

"That's always a good skill to learn," Paul commented, as he struck a match and ignited the fluid in the charcoal, "but with a match, you can get one going in a few seconds."

"Damn!" George exclaimed. "I'd forgotten all about matches."

A yellow flame flickered through the charcoal, and soon the pleasant aroma of burning fluid and charcoal filled the yard.

"Smells like old times," Frank murmured.

Stephanie stuck her head out the door and hollered.

"Hey everyone! Let me introduce the new Brooke Cooper."

Brooke emerged from the house wearing one of Stephanie's dresses, and her new friend had spent considerable time applying makeup and eyeliner to her face. George stared in stunned silence at his wife, whom he had never before seen in makeup, as cosmetics were not renewable and therefore not considered allowable for use in the urban areas. She seemed to have taken on a whole new level of beauty. Frank whistled at Brooke and winked at George.

"Now that there's a pretty lassie you got there, George," Frank informed his friend. "Better remember it; because once that makeup wears off, she won't be accessing any more for a long, long time."

"I've never seen you look so beautiful," George managed to say. "Stephanie, what did you do to her?"

"Oh, a nice dress and a little makeup," she replied. "The beauty was there all along; makeup just highlights what Mother Nature gave her. You've got a pretty wife George, as you well know; this just refines everything, and what you are looking at is the finished product."

"Thank you for making her up," George responded, as Brooke sat next to him and watched the flames dance around the charcoal. "Can you believe what everyone back home would say, if they saw the kind of life that exists out here?"

"That's part of the reason they don't, I'm sure," Paul replied. "You know, I've been thinking about something since lunch. We both refer to the government as the Authority

and we both know that going into the wilderness gets you killed. That means the same people control us, however, we lead two entirely different lives and I've been wondering why."

"What about the two types of people like we were discussing earlier?" George asked. "Patriots versus sheep?"

"That's part of it, I'm certain," Paul answered, "but there's got to be more to it as well. Nothing is ever that cut and dry. It's not just the fact that they took the patriots and put them in camps, they put them into a feudalistic society, whereas the same people in control have placed us into an agricultural society based on the same principles of living we had prior to the Biosickness, just on a smaller, simpler scale.

"We're living in more of a democratic-socialist society, whereas you are living in a communist society. Two separate countries if you will; oblivious of each other."

"Interesting avenue of thought. Do you have any ideas as to why?" Frank inquired.

"What if," Paul ventured, "it's not so much a punishment, as a test?"

"I'm beginning to feel like a rat in a maze." Frank responded.

"Exactly." Paul replied. "We have paper money and overtime; cars, scooters, no limits on family size, running water, and free travel, except to the wilderness. You have nothing but a meager existence. What if this is some sort of giant board game, where we determine our own futures by the mistakes we make?"

"Maybe it's a test to see which society exists the most efficiently." Brooke suggested. "Maybe they'll make some kind of hybrid culture."

"That makes sense too." George said, as Paul got up to check the status of the charcoal. "I wish we could grab someone in charge and poke them with a sharp stick until they told us the truth."

He glanced around and found four pairs of eyes staring intently at him.

"What?" he protested.

"That's an excellent suggestion." Frank replied. "Anger and frustration justifies torture to get the answers you are looking for, especially during a war or conflict of some sort and I would classify what the Authority has done to us as a blatant act of war. Every society eventually learns this and puts it to use. Now, just where do we find someone in charge of the whole thing?"

"An urban director would know." George mused. "And it's a safe bet that everyone in Zion knows what's going on too."

"Going after either would be like walking into a hornet's nest." Frank observed, as Paul began dropping steaks onto the grill.

The meat sizzled, as Paul seasoned it and flipped it over.

"Wanna nuke some potatoes, Honey?" he inquired of Stephanie.

"Sure Babe." she replied.

"I'll help you." Brooke offered.

The two women left the porch and went back into the kitchen.

"What if we could expose this whole thing?" George asked. "What would happen then?"

"They'd probably nuke us for real." Paul replied. "We need to know what's going on first, *before* we attempt anything. I'll turn the radio on tonight and see if we can get Zion. It usually seems to come in only after dark."

“The local talk show station I used to listen to would turn up the output to one hundred thousand watts after it got dark.” Frank explained. “I can’t imagine why they’d still be following FCC rules in Zion though.”

“If it’s as big as it looks on the map, they’d have to.” Paul said. “Otherwise they’d interfere with their own broadcasts. There would have been no Industrial Revolution if not for Americans. No cars, railroads, planes, rockets, or computers. America designed the blueprint for modern society to exist upon, even though our technology grew so powerful that it eventually destroyed us. Any technological culture in the future that wants to survive, needs to base their society on Twentieth Century America, regardless of *who* they are.”

CHAPTER 12

"The great masses of the people will more easily fall victims to a big lie than to a small one... Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it." - Adolf Hitler

"Let's have some more marshmallows." Paul suggested, as they held sticks over the glowing coals of the grill.

"I haven't toasted marshmallows since I was an Eagle Scout." Frank remarked.

"You were an Eagle Scout?" Paul inquired with an air of respect in his voice. "Wow. I haven't heard that term in years. That was like an elite paramilitary organization for kids, wasn't it?"

"No," Frank replied, "but thank you for the compliment. That's just more of the Liberals' brainwashing they put out before the Biosickness. Boy Scouts learned how to camp and build fires without matches. They were taught to respect the outdoors; not abuse it. You'd think that would have earned them some respect from the tree huggers but no; they accused us of being racists, and hateful bigots because we didn't want queers in our troops or acting as scoutmasters where they had access to young boys.

"The Eagle Scouts were the ones that achieved the high degrees. In the Cub Scouts, you went through Webelos as the transition to Boy Scouts. The highest honor there was the Arrow of Light badge. Those that earned that usually went on to go through the Order of the Arrow, and eventually became Eagle Scouts. Most American generals and presidents in history, were former Eagle Scouts; not because of the training per se, but because it took a leader to achieve that title. Those same childhood leaders went on to become leaders in their adult lives as well.

"We could, say, survive an airplane crash, and then be able to survive and exist with the contents of our briefcases. We were taught what was edible and what wasn't, how to construct a shelter from tree limbs or build an igloo, how to start a fire, how to trap and field dress animals. That, in and of itself, would have been a requirement for relocation to an urban area if they didn't kill me first."

"What did you do before the Biosickness then?" Paul inquired. "Were you a politician or an officer in the military?"

"No, I served the Guard for a few years, but I never really pursued a career in the military, or law enforcement, or politics like I should have." Frank explained. "I was content to be a website constructor, working out of my house and not having to punch a clock for anyone. Say, you don't still have personal computers, do you?"

Paul shook his head.

"Not what you're thinking of. The Internet pretty much dissolved after the Biosickness," he explained. "There weren't enough people left to make it viable. All the service providers failed except for one, and it's not part of the Web. All we can do is send email now."

“Somehow, I doubt that,” Frank replied, “especially since Zion still seems to be so technically advanced. We just need to figure out how to access their new internet service providers. Happen to have an old PC lying around?”

“There’s one up in the attic,” Paul replied. “I thought it might be worth something some day so I kept it. If nothing else, I could still use it for home stuff. I’d forgotten all about it. We still use computers, but they aren’t internet compatible for some reason. It’s like the software changed.”

“It probably did,” Frank stated. “I’d like to have a look at your old beast sometime though. I might just be able to get the old dinosaur to come back to life.”

“It’s worth a shot I suppose,” Paul agreed, “but I’d be afraid that even if somehow you managed to get online, that they could trace it back, and then we’d really be in a heap of trouble.”

The sky darkened and the stars came out. The group stared up at the heavens and Frank pointed out some of the old constellations that he remembered.

“Been a long time since I’ve seen the stars like this,” he commented. “Back in Chicago, it was so bright at night because of all the lights, that we could never see the Milky Way. What do you think of that, George and Brooke? Isn’t it beautiful?”

They had spent the first night in the truck wash and the second, under the pines, so this was the first time that Brooke and George had actually seen the night sky out in the dark countryside.

“It’s incredible,” Brooke breathed. “It looks as though the sky is glowing; like someone dipped a brush into a bucket of paint made from fireflies, and painted a swath across the sky. It’s so beautiful. What is that smudge?”

“It’s called the Milky Way, Lassie,” Frank answered. “It’s actually our own galaxy. We’re looking through the edge, so all those billions of stars seem to merge together and glow. Over there is the Big Dipper. It’s kind of like a ladle if you were to connect the stars. See those three stars together? That’s part of Orion. Those are his belt, and the other ones nearby make up his sword and the rest of his body.”

“Look there,” Paul said, pointing to a glowing ribbon of colored light in the sky, “the Aurora Borealis.”

“What’s that?” George inquired.

“The Northern Lights,” Paul replied. “Sometimes it looks like liquid fire in the sky. I’ve seen them in every color of the rainbow. Once, they were bright green, and so bright you could read by them.”

“I was up in Anchorage once,” Frank interjected. “In the winter, they sometimes come right down almost to the ground. It’s so cold that the conditions they normally need out in space are present close to the surface. You can even *hear* them sometimes.

“I still remember them like it was yesterday. They were purple and white; dancing over the treetops and humming like a high tension wire in wet weather. Sometimes they’d even pop and crackle; like static on a radio. My friend Sasha - he was an Inuit - told me it was nothing to be afraid of. He walked right out into the middle of that snow field and raised his arms! I’ll swear on my dead mother’s grave that he lit up like a neon light. He had this blue aura all around him. He looked like a vision of divination. He motioned for me to come out there with him, and something deep inside me told me that it was okay; that I would be safe.

"I walked out into that snowy meadow and I could feel the hair standing up on the back of my neck, and all over me; just like a bolt of lightning was about to strike me down. I looked down at my hands, and they had that same blue aura all around them. Sasha's hair was standing up on end, and he looked like some sort of rock star from Hell. I looked at the landscape around us, and it seemed as though everything was moving; that it was shimmering in that same surreal blue and purplish light. In later years, the cops got strobe lights on their cars and it was very similar to that. The big difference was that it was coming out of the air itself, but everything shimmered like looking at the air above a burning grill, or under the ocean, if you remember seeing that on TV, Paul. It was as though we were in some sort of otherworldly dimension. I don't know how to really describe it to you, but that night, I was *inside* the Northern Lights."

"That's truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience." Paul acknowledged. "I once thought I saw a black panther out in the fields behind the house here. They're not supposed to exist up here - only in Florida or other places down South - so I didn't say anything to anyone, but I know what I saw. It doesn't matter what other people believe, Frank. All that matters is that you know what you saw that night, and what I saw on that morning seven years ago. Now, we just have to prove something just as crazy and unbelievable, to thirty-five million other people. Damn, I need a drink."

He returned a few minutes later with a bottle of vodka and some cherry soda.

"Goes down easier this way." he commented to Frank, as he poured a little alcohol into everyone's glass and filled the rest with soda. "Not too much for you though, Brooke I'm afraid; with the baby and all. Sorry."

"Been a long time." Frank said quietly, holding the glass aloft and gazing at it. "Here's to liberty and justice for all."

He clinked his glass against Paul's and Stephanie's.

"You gotta toast." he explained to Brooke and George. "We toast, and then drink."

George raised his glass uncertainly.

"Now you need to say, 'here's to' something that means something to you." Frank explained.

George thought for a moment.

"Here's to Brooke and you, and Paul and Stephanie, and to everything I see that is new. If I die tomorrow, I'll die knowing I have good friends and that no one can ever take those memories from me. I guess you were right, Frank. It looks like my blood is stained with freedom, not the other way around. So here's to freedom. May our blood always be stained with it."

Everyone clinked their glasses together, and George took a sip of the drink and licked his lips.

"Kinda burns." he noted.

"That's why the Indians called it 'fire water.'" Paul said with a grin.

"Drink it on down." Frank encouraged. "The quicker the better."

Paul fiddled with the knob on his radio, as he searched for a broadcast from Zion.

"It's usually somewhere in this range." he said to Frank. "They must not be broadcasting tonight, or maybe the conditions aren't right."

"It's okay." George said reassuringly. "We didn't expect everything to fall into place in one day. We'll stay around and help you if it's okay, and maybe we'll hear it some other night."

Paul continued turning the knob ever so slightly, and suddenly a voice cut through the static.

"Here it is!" he exclaimed excitedly. "This should be it!"

Everyone listened intently, as the staticky voice cut through the darkness of the country night.

"The voice of Zion rings loud and clear." a male voice stated.

"This is it." Paul whispered.

"The snow is still deep in the Wasatch and Bitterroot resorts." the voice continued. "Skiing conditions are still favorable, with packed powder at Montana Snow Bowl, Marsha, Discovery Basin, and Maverick Mountain in Montana, and Nordic Valley, Powder Mountain, Snow Basin, and Park City in Utah. Conditions in Colorado, Idaho, and California are deteriorating quickly however, due to an unusual warm spell in the Eastern Arms of Zion. New York Mountain in Colorado, is in fact already reporting some spring flowers on the southern slope."

"Skiing?" Frank queried. "They're talking about skiing down a goddamn mountain! What the hell is this crap about spring flowers? All those places are inside the wilderness reserves. What the hell is up with that, and what are the Eastern Arms? I don't believe this! This is like we don't even exist!"

"Perhaps we don't." George piped up. "What if they're lying to their own people as well? What if they told them that the eastern half of this continent is still glowing too? If you're going to make a lie, why not make it so big that everyone believes it, even the bad guys? The bigger the lie, the more believable it's going to be. I remember hearing that in the education centers as a kid. Some enemy general or something supposedly said it back a long time ago, in the last millennium. They were trying to put him down, but it seemed to me like he must have known what he was doing, or they wouldn't have talked so badly about him. I suspect the Eastern Arms are the right side of Zion; on the map it resembled a Unification star. Maybe they call the points, arms."

"That's who's controlling the States and the urban areas?" Stephanie inquired.

"It would appear so." George replied. "Paul, you said earlier you had maps you wanted to show us."

"Crap, they're in my office at work." he replied. "I'll show you tomorrow though. It's all kind of moot now though. It showed the boundary lines for the States and the nuclear zones to the east, and the wilderness reserves to the west."

"Your boundaries for the wilderness reserves are probably more accurate than the map Darryl copied for me." George replied. "I would still be very much interested in looking at them. We need to determine where exactly they are, and how we can penetrate them."

"There was a citizen about four years ago, that was brought back to Chicago after an escape to the wilderness. He made it inside but got caught. Just before they took his head off with a butcher knife, he said, 'They heard me walking. Don't walk into the wilderness. They can hear you! They know you're there!' We need to find a way in, other than on

foot or anything else that is going to identify us as humans. Yikes, I feel a little lightheaded for some reason.”

“That’s the alcohol.” Frank said with a grin. “That’s what it does to you.”

“Horses?” Paul suggested. “If they have surveillance equipment, maybe they’re only listening for two legged footprints or something else that sounds like an approaching human. He said they heard him walking; that they knew he was there. That sounds to me like they have microphones set up along the border. If we could trick the people - or computers which is most likely the case - that are listening in, to think they’re hearing the sound of something other than a human being, they shouldn’t bother us. I doubt like hell they chase after deer and buffalo.”

“Us?” George inquired.

“You didn’t think you were going to come here and tell me all this stuff and not go in without me, did you?” Paul inquired. “I want to know what’s in there just as badly as you do.”

*

“God, please be careful.” Brooke implored, as George put the last of the supplies into the back of Paul’s car.

“Don’t worry Honey.” George assured her. “We’ll be okay, I promise. With Paul’s credentials and the badges we stole from the two enforcers, we should be alright, even if we do get stopped for something. We can say we’re chasing a suspect or something, and buy enough time to take out whoever accosts us.

“I know you’re worried, Sweetie, but rest assured, we’ll be okay. Paul and I both have families to come home to. We’re not going to do anything to jeopardize that. Don’t you worry.”

George leaned forward and kissed Brooke on the forehead. Paul made a similar gesture to his wife, and Frank simply waved to both women. Brooke and Stephanie stood arm in arm on the front porch, as they watched their husbands drive out of sight.

“Lord, please watch over them.” Stephanie prayed aloud as the car disappeared around a curve in the road.

“They’ll be okay.” Brooke assured her.

“How can you be so certain?” Stephanie cried. “They’re going into the wilderness!”

“As law enforcement officers.” Brooke replied. “Trust me, Stephanie, I can feel it; they’ll be okay. Even if they do get caught, they’ll have identification as police officers, and if worse comes to worse; they’ll just have to kill whoever finds them.”

Brooke put her arm around her friend’s waist and guided her toward the house, as Stephanie glanced over her shoulder again.

“Does Paul have any weapons here?” Brooke inquired.

“Yes.” Stephanie replied. “He has some. He keeps them locked up in the safe though.”

“Can you get to them?”

“Yes, he told me to get the shotgun out while they’re gone, for protection just in case. Nothing ever happens out here though. No one ever hurts anyone else or steals.”

“Why don’t we take them out back and practice a little?” Brooke suggested. “Let’s learn how to use them all. When the boys get back, we’ll give them a big surprise; show

them we know how to shoot too. Anyway, it'll be fun and it will keep our minds off of things while we're here by ourselves, you know?"

"Okay." Stephanie agreed. "We'll take them out behind the barn tomorrow and practice a little. We can't shoot too much though. Only law officers are allowed to have weapons, and they're not supposed to shoot for no reason."

*

"How far is it to Sioux Falls?" Frank inquired about an hour later.

George looked at the atlas.

"According to the map, we have about a hundred miles still to go." he replied.

"My jurisdiction ends at the state line." Paul commented. "We'll need to come up with a good reason to cross the state line, much less enter the wilderness, if we happen to get caught."

"What did you do with that map that shows the wilderness boundaries?" George inquired.

"I stuck them in the bag under the seat." Paul replied. "Why?"

"This is the time to familiarize ourselves with them." George explained. "I want to know just how far into South Dakota they start."

He fished through the bag that contained the map and some sandwiches that Brooke and Stephanie had made, and retrieved the map. He opened it and gazed at the boundary lines in conjunction with their present location.

"Okay, it looks like we'll hit the wilderness at the Missouri River." he stated. "That seems to be the dividing line through the Dakotas and southward. Zion comes pretty close to the edge in some parts of Kansas and Nebraska too.

"Now, what we're looking for along 90 is a town called Chamberlain. It's on this side of the river, and the last town outside the wilderness. They'll probably have guards posted on the bridge, so there is no way we can simply drive in. I had been thinking about borrowing horses to cross over and then sending them back once we were well inside, but there's no way a horse is going to get across that river."

"Even if we can cross it, we're still going to have to be careful of those motion detectors on the other side." Frank cautioned. "I don't know how far in they go, but I'm assuming it can't be too far or they would interfere with whoever those Zionists are. I would also assume that they're more than just motion detectors if they can tell someone is walking. I'm going to guess microphones and maybe even some sort of infrared imaging. Run it all through a computer to monitor everything, and you've got a set of eyes and ears that can tell the difference between a buffalo and a Boy Scout."

"Sounds reasonable." Paul agreed. "I'd venture a guess that if they're all along the entire length of the wilderness reserves and corridors, that they can't be any more than a single line."

"I was out near Area 51 once." Frank added. "The motion sensors they had out in the desert were black boxes setting on top of posts, about five hundred feet apart. That's about... eleven per mile. Multiply that times what... about twelve hundred miles from Mexico to Canada, plus a thousand more each, across the top and the bottom of the area, and you're looking at close to thirty-five hundred miles. Now multiply that times even ten per mile, and we're talking thirty-five *thousand* of those things, not inclusive of the Pacific coast, if they decided to set them up there as well. With that many, especially if

they're motion, infrared, and sound detectors, and computer monitored, I seriously doubt they're going to be more than a single line either, so I tend to agree with you."

"The thing to focus on then," George said quietly, "is deciding how we're going to get across the river and into the wilderness. What are your rules of engagement, do you know?"

"As far as pursuing a fugitive in general, or pursuing one into the wilderness?" Paul inquired.

"Take your pick." George replied.

"Well, I can pursue a fugitive outside of my jurisdiction," Paul replied, "but they never said anything about following one into the wilderness. It was one of those subjects that never came up, and there was never a reason until now, to do so."

"Well then, I suppose we'll find out soon enough." George said cheerily. "It looks like we're approaching South Dakota. Why don't you turn your lights on and make it look like we're pursuing someone?"

*

"That must be it up ahead." Paul commented, slowing the car slightly as a large concrete bridge loomed into view above the rolling prairie and the dammed-up portion of the Missouri River far below, that made up Lake Francis Case.

"We need to look official." George stated. "I wish we could have taken the enforcers' ID cards as well."

"If we did, they'd know right where we were." Frank replied. "Those things are chipped. That's why we had to toss our own."

"I know that." George replied. "It was more of a hypothetical desire than an actual statement. Paul, let's get off at this exit here. We can scout the bridge from down below; get an idea what's going on with that checkpoint halfway across."

"Good idea." Paul agreed, exiting the interstate at the last moment.

The car stopped at the bottom of the ramp and the trio glanced around briefly. Paul cut his flashing lights off and proceeded toward the town of Chamberlain.

"We need a vantage point." Frank observed. "We're not going to be able to see anything with any degree of clarity from down here."

"There aren't any high buildings out here in the country like in Chicago." George said wistfully. "That's what we need. Hey what's that thing?"

"A water tank." Frank replied. "If we can climb it, it will certainly be high enough to look down on the bridge, but it's a good distance away."

"Optics." Paul interjected. "I keep binoculars in the glove compartment. If we can get to the top of that thing, we can zoom in like we're peeking in their window."

He maneuvered the car through town until they located the water tank sitting atop the bluff that overlooked the Missouri River and Lake Case. It was ancient and rusty, but most likely still supplied water pressure to the town's water supply. If it was still in use, then it was more than safe to climb, provided one didn't fall off the steel stairs on the way up.

"What's it for?" George inquired, as they got out of the car and approached the once-blue tank, now mostly rusty and the remaining paint faded almost to a chalky white. "I've never seen anything like this before."

“Water pressure.” Frank replied. “On a public water system, you need to pressurize the water so that it flows into your pipes. Instead of using pumps to create continuous pressure, they just have to pump it into a tank like this on a high spot, or into one on a tower in flatter areas. The force of the gravity pushing all that water is more than enough to pressurize the water system.”

“I didn’t see one in Mankato.” George responded.

“We’re all on wells.” Paul replied. “Every house has a well and a pump to pressurize the system individually. At one time, Mankato was a big town and it was all on public water and sewer, but after the Biosickness, we lost about ninety-seven percent of the population. We all bored wells and dug septic fields after that. Everything went back to self-sufficiency.”

The majority of the fence surrounding the water tank had long since caved in and the padlocked gate meant absolutely nothing, as the trio simply stepped over a section of chain link fencing lying on the ground. With the reduction in population, the corresponding crime rate had also dropped, as children had begun being taught respect once again in the rural schools. There was no vandalism, and no need to protect oneself from lowlife street gangs. That threat had been eliminated soon after the Biosickness had come to pass.

The experiment that was going on in the current society had to play out with no outside influences, and all known gang members - particularly those in violent groups such as the Bloods, Crips, and MS13 - had all been eliminated in tactical military strikes within a month of the deadly chemtrails in 2014. The experiment of forced multiculturalism had failed miserably in the latter half of the 21st Century, and now the citizens of Zion watched as two vastly different types of predominantly White societies unknowingly competed against the other in an unknown struggle for survival.

“Watch your step.” Paul advised, as they ascended the ancient steel steps encircling the water tank. “These things don’t seem very friendly. They should hold us alright, but make sure you don’t slip.”

After several minutes, they reached the steel catwalk that topped the tank and allowed access to the inside of the town’s water supply.

“This would have been a terrorist’s dream at the turn of the millennium.” Frank commented, as he gazed at the hatch atop the tank. “Imagine; they could have come right up here and dumped some kind of radioactive compound or biological agent into the water supply.”

“I always suspected it was our own government we had to fear.” Paul responded. “Not some zealot from the mid-East. They proved me correct when they dropped biological agents from US aircraft and killed over ninety percent of the world’s population in forty-eight hours. Iraq was never the enemy. Neither was Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Yemen.

“I was only a kid when the War on Terror was being waged, but my father used to point things out that made me listen to him. Either way, our country is gone, Frank. No more gumball machines, skateboards, or video games. The worst part is, that we are nothing more than rats in a maze for someone to get their rocks off from watching us eventually destroy one another.”

“Then we need to be the ones that spoil their fun.” George remarked, as Paul removed the binoculars from the case and removed the lens caps.

He scanned the bridge that spanned the manmade Lake Francis Case.

“I see two people,” the sheriff reported, after several minutes of looking at the checkpoint. “No more. Apparently, they don’t get too many people willing to risk their lives by crossing. I’ll bet those guys have it made, too. Sit there all day and do nothing, and get paid for it. That’s almost as good as collecting welfare and food stamps back in the days of old.”

“Any barricades?” Frank inquired.

“Nope.” Paul replied, handing him the binoculars. “Have a look for yourself.”

Frank trained the optics on the checkpoint, which resembled an old agricultural inspection station, and adjusted the focus for his eyes. There were no coils of Concertina wire spread out across the bridge as one would expect if the checkpoint were truly a roadblock, or fencing of any kind. There appeared to be surveillance cameras mounted on the guardhouse and on the light poles that surrounded it, but nothing that would indicate that the area was mined in any way.

“It looks a like a typical border crossing to me.” Frank observed, as he handed the binoculars to George, who peered through them but had no idea how to focus them. “For all intents and purposes, it looks like a car could be expected to approach at any time.”

“How do you adjust this thing?” George asked.

“Rotate that wheel in the middle until everything becomes clear.” Paul explained.

“Hey, I just saw a flash of light on the other side. Can you see what may have made it?”

“Let’s see.” George responded, as the bridge came into focus. “It was where? Oh, over past the end of the bridge. Something’s moving. I can’t see what it is yet though. It must be seven kloms away. The sun must have reflected off of it just right for you to see it.”

He strained to see what the object was, when something glinted again, this time from a different location.

“Move that lever.” Paul instructed. “It’ll zoom in.”

George glanced at the top of the binoculars and located the lever. As he moved it over, he was amazed to see the distance suddenly loom much closer. He fiddled with the focus again, but the picture was waving around, due to the slight movement of his hands. He sat down and placed his elbows on his knees to steady the picture, and looked to the far side of the bridge again.

“There’s more sparkles.” Frank commented, as George gazed in disbelief at what he saw in the distance.

With the optics zoomed in to forty power, the five miles of distance were reduced to less than one eighth of a mile, and the entire sight picture was very clear. The town of what had formerly been Oacoma, South Dakota, appeared to be a bustling community; complete with functioning traffic lights to handle the number of cars that were visible and moving about the town. People were also clearly visible, and George stared at what would have been a normal business day in a typical Midwest town in 2005.

“Can you see what they’re coming from?” Paul asked. “What are they, George?”

“I think you’d better see for yourself,” George replied, “and I think you’d better be sitting down when you look, too.”

Paul gazed at him quizzically as he took the binoculars back, and trained them to the west. He locked his elbows to his sides to steady the picture and gasped.

"Holy mother of Jesus!" he exclaimed. "It can't be."

"What is it?" Frank inquired. "What do you see?"

"That *is* designated a wilderness reserve, is it not?" George questioned of Paul.

"It damn sure is!" Paul replied.

"What the hell is it?" Frank demanded impatiently. "Would someone please be so kind as to tell me what is going on?"

"A town," Paul replied, shifting his gaze slightly southward and following the ribbon of interstate into the distance with the binoculars, "and it's not the only one."

"What?" George and Frank burst out simultaneously.

"I can see five more located along the highway." Paul answered, lowering the binoculars and staring at his two friends before handing the binoculars to Frank. "Look for yourself. They disappear into the distance. I can't see any details like I can in the one just across the river, but one thing is certain; not only were we lied to about your urban areas and our buffer zones, we've been lied to about the supposed wilderness reserves too. I don't know exactly what it is that we're looking at over there, but it sure as hell isn't undisturbed wilderness!"

"I wonder who they are." George mused.

"I would guess that this is where the radio broadcasts have been originating from; somewhere inside this area they call the wilderness." Paul replied. "I'm guessing we're looking at Zion, but why they would lie to us about it and the wilderness is still a mystery."

"So that's Zion!" George exclaimed.

"We still need to find a way in." Frank stated. "I don't care who or what they are, the Authority has been lying to us, and I want to know the truth. I don't care if it's called the wilderness, Zion, or Hoochie-Coochie Magoochie. I want to know why it was worth the lives of three hundred million American citizens and five billion people worldwide, to keep it all a secret, and I want to know who's behind it."

"Well, we can't cross into Zion here, that's for certain." Paul observed. "Even if we killed the guards and got through, there's an entire society on the other side to contend with. It would be like trying to break into East Germany during the Cold War; not a good idea. We need to find an alternative way across."

"That we do," Frank agreed, "and we're not going to find it up here. Let's go back down and look at the maps. We could probably cross into an Indian reservation with less suspicion. Are there any that border - or better yet cross - the river?"

"We'll have a look and see." Paul replied, as he turned and began descending the stairs. "Even if there are, how are we going to cross the river to get there?"

*

"Hold it tight to your shoulder!" Stephanie called out to Brooke. "Hold it, and gently squeeze."

The shotgun exploded with a deafening blast, and almost knocked Brooke from her feet as it discharged.

"Ow, my shoulder." she winced. "That hurt."

Stephanie giggled.

"It's like getting kicked by a horse, huh?"

"I've never been kicked by a horse." Brooke stated, rubbing her shoulder gingerly. "I've never even seen a horse whatever that is, much less been kicked by one, but that sure hurt."

"It wasn't bad for your first time." Stephanie said encouragingly. "Here, we'll put some padding in there for the next time."

She folded a shirt and placed it between Brooke's shoulder and the stock of the twelve gauge shotgun.

"Try it again, Hon." Stephanie coaxed.

Brooke placed the bead of the shotgun on the target and taking a deep breath, pulled the trigger. The shotgun barked once again, but this time the kick wasn't nearly as hard.

"Hey," Brooke said with a smile, "that wasn't too bad."

She racked the action of the gun and aligned the bead once again on the target. Brooke squeezed the trigger and the shotgun roared; the buckshot tearing a hole through the target. Brooke cycled the action and repeated the process three more times, until the gun was empty.

"You did it!" Stephanie exclaimed. "Look at that!"

Brooke stared at the piece of cardboard that Stephanie had nailed to a large wooden stake. Most of the cardboard was gone, as well as the top half of the stake.

"Wanna try the revolver?" Stephanie inquired with an evil grin.

"Is that one you hold in your hand?" Brooke inquired.

"Yes. It's a .357 magnum." Stephanie replied.

Brooke nodded her head vigorously.

"Yeah, I'd like that." she said with a smile.

Stephanie returned a few minutes later with the revolver, and showed Brooke how to load the cylinder and cock it for single action, as well as using the double action.

"If you cock it manually and then fire it, it reduces the amount of pressure you need to apply to the trigger." Stephanie explained. "You will get a much more accurate shot that way."

She taped a paper target to what was left of the stake and cardboard.

"Okay, try it now." she encouraged.

Brooke took the pistol into her hands and looked the weapon over carefully.

"This is different from the ones that George and Frank have." she noted. "Theirs don't have this round part, and the handle is shaped differently. Paul has one too. Frank calls them semis."

"They fire just as smoothly when you keep pulling the trigger as this one does if you cock it each time," Stephanie replied, "but this one has a whole lot more power."

"Even more power than their .45s?" Brooke inquired.

"Oh yeah." Stephanie assured her friend. "The bullet isn't as big, but it packs a whole lot more power. It has almost twice the powder in the cartridge."

"Wow," Brooke breathed, "I wonder what it would do if you shot someone in the head with it."

"Probably blow it off." Stephanie commented dryly.

"The .45 did- wouldn't do that, I don't think." Brooke slipped, and then corrected herself.

Stephanie didn't answer, but wondered about her new friend; where they had come from, and how Frank and George possessed weapons in a society that forbade them. Then, there was the matter of their being from a place that was supposed to have been devastated by nuclear attack twenty-five years earlier.

Brooke's *faux pas* only added to the mystery. Stephanie watched as Brooke cocked the hammer back, and wondered if she had really seen what a bullet could do to flesh and bone in person. Brooke slowly squeezed the trigger as she aligned the sights on the paper target and the gun thundered in her hands.

"Dead center!" Stephanie yelled. "Holy crap, Brooke! Whatever it was, it's dead now."

She watched intently, as Brooke fired five more shots; all of them within the white concentric circles of the target, and two within the black center. Brooke seemed to have an air of confidence and superiority about her, as she stood and gazed at the target in a cantilevered pose, with the pistol by her side and cocked slightly outward in a confident and intimidating position.

"There's something different about you." Stephanie stated. "You handle yourself and these guns like they are a natural part of yourself. Who are you really, and why are you here?"

Brooke stared intently at her new friend; torn between telling the truth and keeping her secret. Paul knew, and he had instructed Stephanie to be quiet about their origins, so she felt as though she could trust the woman standing beside her.

"Where I come from, it is against the Guidelines to have more than two children." she finally answered. "We work thirty-six hours, six days a week for fifty kudos, and we are forbidden to have most of the things you have in your house.

"We planned, Stephanie. For *four months*, we planned and we stockpiled food and supplies so we could escape and come here to see what they were hiding from us all these years. We made our backpacks from bicycle parts and flags. We hid our supplies in the woods just inside the buffer zone, but the day that we were supposed to leave, we got hassled by two enforcers. You've never seen the likes of enforcers, Steffie. They're mean; so mean I cannot describe it. It's almost like they enjoy being mean; like their sole purpose in life is to hate.

"They went through our stuff and found our maps. They had us; we were caught. We were going to the stocks for public humiliation and possibly to a hospital for reeducation. They placed us under arrest, and George grabbed one of their guns. They started laughing at him; they thought he didn't know how to use one. They didn't know his father had taught him how to shoot before the Biosickness; before they murdered his parents in cold blood before his eyes. George shot one in the chest, and then the second one in the face when he went for his gun. Then he went up to the first one; he was laying there gasping for air. He had this look on his face, like 'what the hell just happened to me,' and George just shot him right between the eyes. I can still see the blood as it splattered all over the alley. They had killed his parents, Steffie. Enforcers murdered his mom and dad in front of him. I don't blame him for what he did. I *can't* blame him."

"I know." Stephanie said quietly. "I would do anything for Paul. He knows about this, I take it?"

Brooke nodded, and set the revolver on the grass. Buster trotted up and Brooke began to pet him. Stephanie took a deep breath and sighed.

"Brooke, there is nothing more important in this life, than freedom. It comes at a price, but it is worth *any* price. You will learn that freedom is never free, and quite often, it costs you more than you *ever* imagined."

*

"Here we are." Paul said cautiously, as he crossed into the boundary of the Crow Creek Indian Reservation. "Let's hope this works."

They were still in the buffer zones but now also on an Indian reservation, which was supposedly exempt from Authority status. Since half of the reservation was within the designated wilderness reserve, it was possible that there were no black boxes in that area. It was also distinctly possible, that they simply skirted the boundaries of the reservation instead, laying in wait to blow the whistle on anyone who tried to sneak through.

"We'll look for the tribal police." Paul stated, as they entered the town of Fort Thompson.

Townpeople eyed the car curiously, as Paul looked for his local counterpart. He pulled to a stop alongside an elderly Crow woman.

"Excuse me," he called out, "Can you tell me how to get to the police department?"

The woman nodded and pointed down the street.

"Go to the second street and turn right," she instructed, "but if you are looking to talk to someone, try the White Buffalo Café. You passed it about two blocks back. The station closes at five."

"Thank you." Paul replied, and made a u-turn.

They entered the restaurant and looked for a uniformed officer, but saw no one resembling a tribal police officer. A man approached them, and it was then that Paul noticed the badge clipped to his belt.

"I wasn't looking for plain clothes, sorry." Paul said with a laugh, as he extended his hand. "I'm Sheriff Paul Raines, from Minnesota."

"Hello Sheriff Raines." the officer replied. "I am Charles White Wolf. I am the chief of the tribal police for the Crow River Indian Reservation of the Sioux People. How may I assist you and your companions?"

"We're pursuing a fugitive." Paul lied. "We have reason to believe that he has crossed into the wilderness reserves to escape."

"That would be foolish indeed." Officer White Wolf responded. "There are sensors located all along the edge of the wilderness that would pick him up. And you believe he has come through this area?"

"We do." Paul replied. "He is a very resourceful person. We think that he may attempt a rail crossing or some other similar method that would mask his movement."

"I see." Charles White Wolf said, looking at George and Frank. "These men are your deputies?"

"We are enforcers." Frank interjected. "We have been pursuing this man for several weeks now. Sheriff Raines was kind enough to assist us."

"I see." Charles repeated in the same monotone. "And you would be?"

"Enforcer O'Reilly," Frank identified himself, showing the Crow officer his badge, "and this is Enforcer Cooper."

“You are indeed a long way from your homes.” Charles observed. “May I inquire as to what offense this fugitive committed and do you have a description, so that I may advise my officers to BOLO him?”

“He’s a runner.” Frank replied. “We have reason to believe he is also responsible for the theft of a map book from one of the local archives as well. He is also rumored to be a free thinker and that is why we consider him so dangerous. We think he was heading for the wilderness.”

“Let’s discuss this while having something cold to drink.” Charles suggested. “You must be thirsty having driven so far.”

The trio followed him to a table and sat down. The local officer suddenly reached to his side and drew his revolver. Before any of the visitors could react however, he placed it on the table in front of him.

“That will show you that I trust you and I hope you extend me the same courtesy.” Charles said matter-of-factly. “Sheriff Raines, I have no doubt whatsoever that you are who you claim to be.”

He looked first at George, and then Frank

“You two however, are not enforcers, and do not think I do not know what they are.”

“What are you talking about?” George inquired somewhat hoarsely.

“Enforcers do not have names like Cooper and O’Reilly. As a law enforcement officer whose jurisdiction borders the wilderness, we are indeed aware of what is truly going on in the real world - unlike yourself, Sheriff - because like it or not, we are a part of what exists inside the wilderness ourselves. We are caught living in both the past and present as we see what goes on, on both sides of the border.

“We know that it is two men, an expecting female, and a baby who are wanted not only for running, but for the murders of two enforcers in Urban Area Eleven on Green Day. These fugitives are considered armed and dangerous, and are to be apprehended at any cost. There is also a shoot on sight order for the two males in the group. They found the car you so foolishly left alongside the road and believe you to be headed this way.

“Sheriff, you will be allowed to enter the wilderness alone in your quest for your ‘fugitive,’ but your two ‘enforcers’ will be identified as imposters and you as an accomplice along with them, if you attempt to pass them off upon entry. You should have sworn them in as deputies before you left.”

He stared intently at George.

“You will find your answers, Mr. Cooper. I do not know what you intend to do once you have them, but everything you think you want to know lies on the other side of the river. As I said before, they will let Sheriff Raines in and he will be sworn to secrecy under penalty of death just as I have been. The trick will just be to get you two in there with him. I have an idea for that though. It has worked before, and it will work again tomorrow as well. I give you my word; you have a friend in the Crow people, and the Sioux Nation in general. We want our America restored just as much as you do. We are all just as much slaves in this ‘brave new world’ as you are.”

CHAPTER 13

“All deception in the course of life is indeed nothing else but a lie reduced to practice, and falsehood passing from words into things” - Robert South

“Lay forward so that you feel like you are almost falling off.” Charles White Wolf instructed.

Frank and George leaned forward on the horses that their newest ally had loaned to them, so that their heads were alongside the horses’ necks.

“That way, you will blend in with them on the infrared scans.” he explained. “The computers are trained to listen for the sound of people walking. They shouldn’t pay attention to the sound of the horses, but if they happen to look, they will not see the image of someone sitting on them either; just a bit of a hump on their backs. You will look like a moose or camel to them, and they are not regionally-aware. That is the downfall of a computer; it is still only as smart as the person who programmed it, but without the ability to comprehend the obvious.

“Once you get to the rendezvous location, all you need to do is slap them on the butt and they will come back home. After that, you are on your own. You will have a fantastic story to tell your friends though, Sheriff; I guarantee that. That is, if you wish to place your life in jeopardy by revealing what you find to the outside world.”

Paul nodded and got into his car. He would cross into the Wilderness via Route 47 and deal with the Border Security on the outskirts of the Lower Brule Indian Reservation on the other side of the Missouri River, while Frank and George crossed the border into the Wilderness several miles to the north, on horseback. They would pass through the network of listening devices in the open range, and meet up at the intersection of Route 47 and south end of what had formerly been BIA Route 10, as it emerged from the Brule Reservation.

George looked over at Paul and waved.

“See you on the other side.”

George and Frank guided the horses through the waving grass as they left the paved surface of Route 47 and headed out into the open prairie. The grassland resembled a vast green ocean, as the wind blew across the surface of the seed heads in rippling waves.

“Bet you’ve never seen anything like this before.” Frank commented to George. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

“It sure is.” George replied. “What do they call this?”

“Prairie.” Frank answered. “We’ve been driving through it but you couldn’t really tell along the interstate or in the towns. This is untouched, natural American tall grass prairie. There’s no other place like it in the world. A few hundred years ago, the bison roamed the range out here by the tens of millions. Within twenty years, they were close to extinction, wiped out by the Army to starve the Indians into submission; bastards. It must have been

something to see a herd of animals the size of the entire state of South Dakota thundering across the plains.”

They forded a tributary of Counselor Creek and paralleled Route 47, staying inside the boundary of the reservation for about three miles, before turning south. Frank pointed to a black box mounted on a steel post alongside an array of photovoltaic cells several hundred feet away. He placed his index finger vertically against his lips and motioned for them to drop forward. The horses passed by the box, with both George and Frank hiding on the opposite sides of the animals as the computer scanned the infrared images and matched them to the footprints it recorded in its microphone.

The pair held their breaths in anticipation as they continued on in this fashion for several minutes; until they were well beyond the range of the electronic spies. They finally sat upright once again and Frank looked back over his shoulder.

“They seem so benign,” he whispered. “They just sit there like sentinels overlooking the River Styx.”

“Let’s hope Paul made it through as uneventfully,” George whispered back, kicking his horse slightly in the ribs.

The palomino broke into a gallop, and Frank nudged his sorrel in a similar fashion. The horses loped through the waving grass, and George and Frank gripped their saddle horns and stood in the stirrups to avoid bouncing against the undulating hard leather saddles of the steeds. Route 47 once again came into view, and the men guided the horses westward, toward the junction of Bureau of Indian Affairs Route 10.

“There it is!” George called out, as he pulled back on the reins and slowed the horse to a trot. “No sign of Paul yet, though.”

“I hope he made it through, okay,” Frank said in a worried tone. “If he didn’t, we’re a long way from both Brooke and your son, and the Bitterroot Mountains. We’re halfway between nowhere and nowhere else.”

“What time is it?” George inquired.

“Ten thirty,” Frank replied. “We made good time. We’ll just have to sit here and wait, and hope everything’s okay.”

The sun rose higher into the sky and it began to warm up. George took a bottle of water from the small pack that was slung across the horse’s hindquarters and took a drink.

“Where the hell is he?” he muttered aloud as he dismounted to stretch his legs.

“It’s a little after twelve,” Frank said as he checked his watch again. “Charles said they would probably detain him for a bit to talk to him and swear him to secrecy, but I’m starting to get a little worried.”

He dismounted his horse as well, and tied the reins to the stop sign on BIA 10 so he could walk a round for a bit. There was no shade, and the strong sun was becoming annoying.

“There’s something coming!” George called out. “Let’s mount up and be ready, just in case.”

They climbed back into the saddles and withdrew their handguns, as they nudged the horses and trotted toward the oncoming vehicle. It was still several miles away, but could be clearly seen in the flat and desolate landscape.

“It looks like Paul’s car,” George observed, “but I’m still erring on the side of caution here.”

“Just be ready to start shooting and bolt, if it’s a trap.” Frank advised. “I’m still not that comfortable with this entire situation.”

The car drew closer and flashed its lights a few times. Frank and George cautiously brought the horses to a stop as the car drew abreast. There appeared to be only one occupant, and he gave a thumbs up out the window and above the roof.

“It’s Paul!” Frank called out, and the driver stopped the car and exited, shaking his head.

“What the hell happened?” George called out. “You had us worried to death!”

“I had myself worried there for a while too.” Paul responded. “They swore me to secrecy under penalty of death, just like Charles said they would. They even registered me and everything; fingerprints and all! I’ll have to check out on the way back too. That might pose a problem for us going back through, but we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it. Now, jump in the car and I’ll fill you in on what I found out so far.”

Frank and George dismounted the horses and tossed the bottles of water onto the front seat of the car, and a swift smack on the hindquarters of the horses sent them galloping on their way. George watched for a few minutes, as the horses disappeared from sight over a rolling hill to the northeast. He took a deep breath and savored the air as the breeze swept across the vast plains.

“Green sea.” he muttered.

“What’s that?” Frank inquired.

“It looks like a green sea.” George responded. “I feel like an ancient mariner adrift in an endless ocean of grass.”

“Just don’t get seasick and puke in the car.” Paul quipped. “C’mon, let’s get the hell out of here and on our way.”

*

“What was that?” Brooke inquired, as the sound of a car door reached their ears.

Buster growled and leapt to his feet at the noise.

“It sounded like a car door.” Stephanie replied.

She hurried to the door and peeked out the window.

“There’s a strange black and purple patrol car in the driveway.” she said quietly.

Brooke’s eyes widened in terror at the news.

“Are they wearing red uniforms?” she inquired in a terrified whisper.

“Yes,” Stephanie replied, “do you know who they are?”

“Enforcers.” Brooke answered, as she began to tremble uncontrollably.

“Go upstairs and hide in the closet in the guest bedroom.” Stephanie instructed. “I’ll see what they want.”

Brooke nodded, and dashed up the stairs to the second floor bedroom to conceal herself in the closet while the enforcers visited the house. She had no idea why they were there, but felt certain it had something to do with her, and with Frank and George. There was a knock on the front door, and Stephanie opened it.

“Yes?” she greeted the two garishly-dressed officers before her. “May I help you?”

“Are you Sheriff Raines’ wife?” the taller of the two enforcers inquired.

“Yes,” Stephanie replied, “why?”

“We understand that he is in pursuit of a fugitive. We may also be after the same fugitive. May we come in?”

Without waiting for an answer, the man entered the house, followed by his partner.

"Excuse me!" Stephanie said somewhat indignantly. "This is *my* house."

"What can you tell us about the fugitive your husband is pursuing?" the second enforcer inquired, ignoring her and glancing around the living room in a manner which struck Stephanie as a visual search.

Buster entered the room and growled at the two strange men who exuded an air of danger about them.

"Contain your animal," the first enforcer instructed, "or I will dispatch it if it comes toward us."

"I don't know anything about a fugitive." Stephanie replied, as she grasped Buster by the collar and pulled him into the bathroom. "What's this about? And who are you, if I may ask? I've never seen uniforms or badges like those before."

"We are with the Authority," the first enforcer said importantly. "I am Enforcer Weisman and this is Enforcer Silvers. Your husband entered the wilderness in search of a fugitive and it piqued our curiosity. We seek three adults and a child, in connection with the murder of two of our enforcers several days ago."

"I don't know anything about that." Stephanie replied. "I also don't know anything about the person my husband is pursuing."

"You don't stay in contact with him?" Enforcer Silvers asked arrogantly.

"My husband patrols a large area in this state," Stephanie responded. "Sometimes, he's gone for days at a time."

"Has he mentioned any strangers in the area?"

"No. What is this about?"

"We believe the people we seek may be in this area or may have passed through this area," Enforcer Weisman replied. "We thought perhaps one of them may have become desperate and robbed the restaurant; that maybe your husband's fugitive is one of our own. Perhaps they have split up. We needed to follow up on that."

"I see," Stephanie replied. "Where did this happen? I will keep my eyes and ears open for anyone matching their descriptions. What do they look like?"

"Two adult males; one early 30's, the other in his late 50's, and a pregnant female with a one-year-old child," Enforcer Silvers responded, ignoring her question about the location of the crime.

The sound of Joshua crying as he awoke from his nap attracted the attention of Stephanie.

"I need to check on the children," she stated. "I'll be right back. Please have a seat and I will be back as soon as possible."

Stephanie climbed the stairs and entered the den where Josh and Jimmy were taking their afternoon naps. She gave Josh a bottle and turned to leave, and was startled to find the two enforcers standing in the doorway behind her.

"Excuse me!" she said again, this time angrily. "This is my house that you are visiting. I didn't invite you up here. Please leave my house."

"When we get the answers to our questions," Enforcer Weisman said roughly. "I will ask you again, have you seen anyone matching the descriptions of the fugitives we seek?"

"No!" Stephanie responded angrily. "Now get out of my house!"

“Your husband was seen eating lunch yesterday with three adults and a child that matched their descriptions. Where did they go?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about!” Stephanie snapped.

“I think you do.”

“There were a lot of babies killed in Nazareth, but it didn’t make them all Jesus!” Stephanie hissed.

“That’s blasphemy, you bitch!” Enforcer Weisman replied, grabbing her roughly and dragging her down the hall. “How dare you use that name in our presence!”

He found Paul and Stephanie’s bedroom and threw her on the bed, ripping her housedress open. Stephanie screamed and clawed at his face. This only enraged the man even more.

“You’re going to tell us what we want to know,” he snarled, “and by the time we’re finished, you’re going to be begging for the opportunity to tell us even more. You’ll be down on your knees, groveling at my feet like the dog you are.”

He tore Stephanie’s dress the rest of the way off and yanked her panties from around her waist. She screamed again and struggled to free herself from the man’s strong grasp as he held her down with one arm and unbuttoned his red BDU pants with his other hand.

Downstairs in the bathroom, Buster could hear the screaming of his mistress and began barking loudly as he clawed at the door. Stephanie hadn’t closed it all the way, and it suddenly moved inward a few inches. The dog shoved his nose into the opening and forced the door open. Then he bounded up the stairs looking for the source of Stephanie’s cries. The dog launched himself through the air and sank his teeth into her attacker’s arm, who screamed and tried to pull loose as the dog shook his arm violently.

“Kill it!” he screamed at Silvers.

Enforcer Silvers drew his .45 and pointed it at the dog, as Brooke left the confines of the closet and reached for the .357 laying on her nightstand. After her target shooting the day before, Stephanie had left the pistol in her care for the duration of their husbands’ journey. A shot rang out from the bedroom at the other end of the hall, and Buster yelped in pain as the bullet tore through his side. He dropped to the floor and struggled briefly, before he died.

Enforcer Weisman rolled off the bed and held his mangled arm tightly, which was bleeding profusely from multiple puncture wounds. Both Jimmy and Joshua had awakened at the sound of the gunshot and were crying loudly in fright.

“I’m gonna kill you now, you worthless bitch!” he bellowed at Stephanie, as she too slid off the bed and recoiled against the wall in fear. “I’m going to kill you, and then I’m going to kill those noisy kids of yours too!”

“The hell you say!” a female voice exclaimed from behind him.

He whirled to face Brooke standing in the doorway with the .357 pointed at him. Anger had replaced fear, and Brooke looked amazingly collected as she stood in the doorway facing him.

“One of those children happens to be mine!” she snapped. “Either way, you’re not harming one hair of one being inside this house. Your little reign of terror is over. You might be somebody in the urban areas, but out here you’re nobody; just like us. I’m the pregnant female you’re looking for, by the way. You wanna know where I am so bad; well now you’ve found me. Go ahead, take me in.”

Brooke had already raised the .357 and cocked the hammer back, and as Silvers attempted to redraw his own .45, she fired two shots at his chest. The exterior wall behind him spattered with crimson dots as his spine literally exploded outward from his back, and the .45 fell from his fingers, clattering to the oak floor and bouncing under the bed.

“And you!” she hissed, pointing the gun at Weisman. “Don’t move or I’ll blow your balls off one at a time. Stephanie, get his gun.”

Stephanie snatched the enforcer’s pants from the floor and withdrew his .45 from the holster. In fury, she suddenly cycled the slide and emptied the magazine into his chest. Weisman was knocked back against the wall, and left a large, bright red streak on it as he slid partway down, before tumbling forward to the hardwood floor.

Stephanie dropped the empty gun in shock, which clattered to the floor, and Brooke set the .357 on the dresser. She then helped her friend to the bed where she dropped to the mattress, and Brooke held her tightly.

“It’s okay.” Brooke whispered reassuringly into her ear, as Stephanie buried her face in Brooke’s chest and cried hysterically. “It’s all over now. They can’t hurt you any more.”

Her ears were ringing loudly from the gunshots fired in the enclosed room, and could only imagine how loud it must have been for her friend, who was standing in front of the muzzle when she discharged the .357 at Silvers.

“He killed Buster!” Stephanie wept, as she dropped to the floor next to her beloved Lab and stroked his fur in sorrow.

“I’ll help you bury him.” Brooke promised. “Then, we need to figure out what to do with these two. I’ll check on the children while you get dressed.”

She calmed the boys down and repositioned the bottle in Joshua’s mouth.

“I like this thing,” she said as Stephanie appeared in the doorway. “It’s so much more convenient than having to nurse all the time.”

“Now I think I know how George felt.” Stephanie said quietly.

Brooke put her arms around Stephanie and hugged her reassuringly.

“We both do, Hon. Vengeance isn’t a pretty thing, but it’s a mighty powerful weapon, isn’t it?”

*

“So what happened; what took you so long?” George inquired. “We were really starting to get worried.”

“You and me both.” Paul replied, as they entered the town of Reliance and merged onto Interstate 90 once again. “It was starting to feel like the Spanish Inquisition with all the grilling, and then came all the briefing. I was beginning to feel like that Double-O guy from the old movies with all the info they were giving me.”

“So what did you learn, anything useful?” Frank inquired.

“Well, I could tell you, but then I’d have to kill you. Hell, I’d have to kill myself too, for telling.” Paul added thoughtfully. “Anyway, here goes: Apparently, citizens of Zion live as though nothing ever happened; the Biosickness, the loss of technology, everything.

“They of course didn’t go into extreme detail because I don’t have to know everything, but the Zionists are special people that were chosen to keep the old ways going. I was told that they are superior to me in every way, shape, and form; that I am

subservient to them, and if one of them gives me an order, no matter what, I am to obey it under penalty of imprisonment.”

“Damn.” Frank muttered.

“There’s more.” Paul continued. “Most of them aren’t Americans.”

“What?” George exclaimed.

“That would account for the other language you say you sometimes hear on the radio,” Frank acknowledged, “but what language could it be? The elites here in America must have merged with someone, but who, and why?”

“From what you told me the other night and from what they told me today, I deduced that they, ‘they’ being the Zionists, basically moved to the western United States after the Biosickness from all over the world.” Paul mused. “The core of the United Nations now calls this place home.”

He frowned.

“Now,” he continued in a dogged voice, “we just need to confirm all this, and then figure out how to let the air out of their life raft.”

The car sped along for several hours before reaching Rapid City. George stared in amazement, as more and more houses and businesses appeared.

“This is just like it used to be everywhere!” Frank burst out. “It’s like walking back in time.”

Paul exited the interstate and headed south.

“Where are we going?” George inquired. “Montana is still west.”

“Mt. Rushmore.” Paul answered. “We’re this close; I want to see it.”

They continued through the outskirts of town and into the country. After about forty-five minutes of driving, Frank suddenly pointed.

“There! It just popped into view.”

Several minutes later, Paul pulled into the parking area of what had formerly been a popular national park. The trio exited the vehicle and walked up a slight incline toward the overlook that afforded a commanding view of the famous mountain. All around them, people bustled about, laughing and conversing in both English and the unidentified language. It was as if there had never been a Biosickness; as if they had somehow stepped back in time to the 1990’s, except for the bilingual conversations.

“What the hell?” Frank burst out, as they crested the hill alongside the Visitors’ Center. “Who the hell is that?”

The three men stared incredulously at the face of the mountain, which in addition to the likenesses of Washington, Jefferson, Roosevelt, and Lincoln; also bore the face and shirt collar of an additional - and unknown, although vaguely familiar - individual.

“Excuse me,” Frank said to a passerby, “but my history isn’t what it used to be. Can you tell me when the fifth face was added?”

The woman gazed at them thoroughly before replying.

“Yes. They began work on President Clinton’s face in 2019. His bust was completed in 2021.”

“Thank you.” Frank responded.

“This just gets better and better.” Paul mumbled. “Clinton? What the hell is up with that? First he’s on our money, now Mt. Rushmore? It’s a wonder they didn’t chip off the faces that were already there and replace them with all the other New World Orderers.”

“We’ve seen it. Let’s not push our luck.” George suggested. “I’m beginning to get an uneasy feeling here.”

Frank nodded.

“I agree.”

They began to walk back toward the car from the overlook at the base of Mt. Rushmore, when Paul suddenly noticed a figure peering in the windows of his car. He hastened his pace and accosted the man.

“Who are you? What are you doing looking inside my car?” Paul demanded roughly.

A man of perhaps fifty years of age stared intently at the sheriff and his companions.

“You’re from outside of Zion!” he said in amazement. “Don’t you know how dangerous it is for you to be in here?”

“What do you mean?” Paul inquired suspiciously.

“You stick out like sore thumbs.” the man replied. “You might want to consider letting your beards grow out, or least get some goatees.”

“Is there a point to all of this?” Frank asked dubiously.

“You really don’t know what’s going on in here, do you?” the man asked quietly.

“I don’t understand.” George interjected. “What are you trying to say? Who are you?”

“My name is Ishmael Golan.” the man replied.



President Clinton’s bust was added to Mt. Rushmore in 2019

He stared intently at the three outsiders before him, and judged their perplexed looks to be genuine.

"My real name is Jason St. John," he almost whispered. "My wife Jenny and I have been hiding in plain sight for most of the past twenty-five years. Please, let's go somewhere where we can talk."

*

Stephanie placed the last shovelful of dirt over the hole where Buster lay. Tears filled her eyes, as she remembered her faithful companion of six years.

"He died protecting you." Brooke said comfortingly. "Remember that."

"I know." Stephanie said tearfully. "I just can't help but miss him. He was such a good dog. Paul brought him home when he was eight weeks old."

"I'm so sorry." Brooke apologized. "I'm sorry they came here looking for us and I'm sorry it cost you your dog."

"It doesn't matter." Stephanie replied, wiping her eyes. "People like that will hurt others regardless of what the circumstances are. If it wasn't here, it would have been somewhere else. Now, we just need to get rid of them somehow."

"We need to start with their ID cards." Brooke responded. "They have tracking chips in them."

"Nothing a fire won't fix." Stephanie asserted. "But if they're being tracked, then we don't want the last known coordinates to be here. We'll have to take the tags someplace else and destroy them there."

"Or cover them with foil and bury them." Brooke added. "That would work too. They'd never know what happened to them."

Stephanie nodded.

"Let's get started on those two upstairs."

She retrieved a roll of heavy plastic used for covering tomato plants early in the season, and some duct tape from the garage, while Brooke filled a bucket with warm, soapy water and found a sponge under the kitchen sink. The two women removed their clothes before rolling the bodies of the enforcers onto the plastic and wrapping them up tightly. Stephanie then bound the packages securely with the duct tape.

"They're heavy!" Brooke panted, as she attempted to drag one of the bodies toward the stairs.

She and Stephanie dragged the corpses one at a time to the top of the landing and let them tumble down the stairs. They cascaded down the staircase and ended up in a jumbled heap on the slate floor of the vestibule.

Brooke and Stephanie washed the walls and floor thoroughly to remove all traces of blood, changing the water several times to ensure it was completely gone. After that, the bloody bedding and mattress were tossed out the window into the back yard.

"We'll need to burn those when we get back." Stephanie directed. "Now we need to shower and wash this blood off of us before we get dressed again."

Reddish water swirled down the drain, as the two women rinsed the blood from their bodies and hair. A wipe down of the tub and walls after they finished ensured that no traces of the enforcers' blood remained.

"There's a big lake just past Nicollet that we can drive their car into." Stephanie said to Brooke as she turned the water off. "We'll put some plastic on the seat and I'll drive it."

You follow me in our pickup. All you have to do is steer it, and push the gas pedal to go and the brake to stop. Then we'll drive to the Minnesota River and tape their ID cards to a piece of wood. The river has roads that follow it all the way to the Mississippi, and then the Great River Road follows it. To the satellite, it'll look like they're just driving around. By the time they find them, if they even do at all, they'll be so far from here that they won't know where to begin looking."

Brooke nodded, and twenty minutes later was cautiously following her friend toward Swan Lake. They arrived at the lake half an hour later and Stephanie parked the enforcers' car at the head of the boat ramp as Brooke carefully stopped the pickup truck, and put it in park as Stephanie had shown her. Joshua and Jimmy were dozing in the back seat and oblivious of the situation their mothers were involved in.

"Help me find something to hold the gas pedal down." Stephanie said to Brooke. "I'm going to send the car out into the lake."

They found a football-sized rock, and Stephanie straightened the steering wheel before rolling the rock onto the gas pedal. She then reached through the open window and shifted the car into drive. The car accelerated quickly down the ramp, and struck the surface of the lake with a loud splash. It continued to coast out into the large lake as it gradually began to fill with water and sink. By the time the car disappeared under the surface of the tannin stained, root beer colored lake, it was more than one hundred, fifty feet from shore.

Upon their return to the house, Brooke and Stephanie dragged the blood-stained mattress and bedding behind the barn and Stephanie doused it with a quart of gasoline before striking a match and tossing it atop the mattress from several feet away. The gasoline ignited with a loud "whoosh," and a small fireball leapt twelve feet into the air. Within two minutes, the mattress was blazing fiercely, and a column of dark smoke billowed into the sky.

"This is all my fault." Brooke said quietly. "They came here looking for us; and all because I wanted more children. It's my fault that Buster's dead and that they tried to rape you. I'm so sorry, Steffie."

"It's not your fault Brooke." Stephanie replied quietly, as she watched the flames arching into the air. "Those people were evil, and evil has no boundaries. If it hadn't been us it would have been someone else and probably already has. Don't blame yourself; blame those that gave them the authority to enter my house and rape me just because they wanted to. Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I understand now why you wanted so badly to escape, and I understand why George did what he did when you were escaping. Perhaps one day, I can help you expose those that are responsible for creating this shambles of the once-great nation they have stolen from us and handed over to a bunch of thugs and hoodlums."

*

"Okay," Paul addressed the stranger, "we're a quarter of a mile away from the parking lot. Suppose you tell me just who you are, and why you're being so secretive about all of this."

"I told you, my name is Jason St. John. I've been living under the identity of Ishmael Golan for the past twenty-one years."

He looked at George.

“You still don’t get it, do you? I survived the Biosickness of 2014 in Arizona.”

“Holy crap!” Frank burst out. “you’re one of us!”

Jason nodded.

“Yes! I grew a goatee to blend in more.”

“This is what we’ve been looking for, Paul!” Frank exclaimed. “Someone on the inside who can tell us what’s going on here!”

He let out a deep breath and extended his hand.

“Something tells me we can trust you.” he said, looking Jason squarely in the eye. “My name is Frank O’Reilly. This is George Cooper and Paul Raines.”

“What’s it like out there?” Jason inquired, shaking his hand and those of Paul and George as well.

“It depends.” Paul responded. “Where I’m from, it’s not too bad, but where they’re from, it’s like being in prison. Most of the survivors live in cramped cities called urban areas. They have no appliances, running water, or non-essential items. It’s the ultimate Communistic society. As near as we can figure, it’s all part of an experiment to see which type of structure will work the most efficiently.”

“I don’t know.” Jason replied. “We have an awful lot of notes to compare here, but Zion - this place - is on the verge of collapse. No one does anything here if they don’t want to. Food is free, gasoline, medicine, housing; it’s all for the taking. Above and beyond that, there is a certain amount of free-market business. If someone wants to get ahead in life, all they have to do is assert themselves. If they don’t, they’re still taken care of.”

“Who supports them?” George inquired. “If no one works, or doesn’t need to work, who supports them and supplies what they need?”

“We do.” Frank said quietly, as things began to dawn on him. “You, me, Brooke, Paul; we’re nothing but slaves. Everything we do benefits them, not us. We make their profits for them. We live in prison camps called urban areas; Paul and Stephanie live in work release areas called buffer zones, where all the food and manufacturing occurs, and the Zionists reap all the rewards. It’s a free market economy on steroids; riches built upon slave labor, and the best part is that none of us have any idea whatsoever, that someone else owns us lock, stock, and barrel.”

“We’re on the brink of an economic depression unlike anything the world has ever seen.” Jason explained, as Paul, George, and Frank listened intently. “Slave labor is the glue that’s keeping the fabric of Zion together, but the fabric is still unraveling.

“You have a society, which for the past twenty-five years, has been relying on you people for its sustenance. They created this veritable utopia for themselves at the cost of four and a half billion lives, and the freedom of half a billion more.

“What they now have is essentially a tribe comprised of nothing but chiefs and almost no Indians to support it. Those that collaborated before the Biosickness were rewarded with life, but also serve their masters; just to a lesser extent. The entire society has become top-heavy with the elite of the elite, and there is no longer a virtual marketplace for the general population.

“It used to take an entire plantation of slaves to support one wealthy Southern family. Now, we have the equivalent of an entire plantation of the wealthy, trying to live off of the efforts of a single family of slaves. It won’t work; it can’t sustain itself.”

“What are you saying?” Paul inquired, not grasping the meaning of Jason’s words.

“I’m saying that you have an entire society that for all intents and purposes has been collecting Welfare and food stamps, and there isn’t enough of an economy to support it.” Jason explained. “You have an entire society that wouldn’t know how to pick up a hammer and drive a nail to save its life. When the bottom falls out of this bucket, there won’t be a patch in the entire universe that will be capable of sealing it.”

“You mentioned about collaboration before the Biosickness.” George observed. “What did you mean by that?”

“You always need people on the inside;” Jason replied, “people that will sell out for power or the promise of wealth. In our case, it was an entire class of people that fell prey to itself. Those that were already living here in this country were used to set up the trap and were rewarded with positions of power and money. However, those that orchestrated the entire event used them as well, by having them remain shopkeepers and tradesmen.”

“How did you come by your identity?” Paul inquired. “You obviously weren’t part of the plan, yet you are one of the chosen ones.”

“They’re invaders.” Jason replied. “That means they’re the enemy. When at war, you do what you need to win a battle. I see nothing wrong with taking a few enemies’ lives to succeed in your battle plan. We found a husband and wife that were close in age to us and buried them out in the middle of the Algodones Dunes, along with another guy that we used for my wife’s uncle. We’ve been living happily ever after as the Golans, ever since.”

Paul nodded.

“I see,” he agreed. “I would tend to concur. I expect that George and Frank here have been in your shoes a time or two themselves, since they escaped from Chicago. All is fair in love and war. You do what you need to do, to survive.”

Paul had no idea that at that very minute, his own wife was experiencing this knowledge firsthand, and she and Brooke doused the ashes of the burnt-up mattress with water to extinguish the flames.

“You never told me what you are doing inside Zion.” Jason commented. “Why have you risked your lives to enter this place?”

“We came here looking for answers.” George responded. “Like Paul mentioned earlier, Frank and I come from overcrowded cities back East called urban areas. The one we lived in was called Eleven, but you would know it as Chicago. We do nothing but exist; we are there only to give your wilderness brethren a job. My wife and I escaped with our young son, and our friend here, Frank, to live in freedom. We didn’t want to be limited to two children or continue on living as a modern Stone Age family. We wanted what every man, woman, and child in this world deserves; the right to live as free citizens, not subjects.

“What we have discovered since we left, however, is that there seems to be three distinct civilizations within what used to be the United States, and each one knows nothing about the other. The smart minds and those that resisted, were sent to the urban areas, if they weren’t killed outright, and those that accepted their fate remained in the Midwest to carry on a reduced form of living but a relatively free one. I guess you could say I come from a Marxist society, Paul comes from a socialist one, and I have no idea what to call what you have described to us here.”

“Rome.” Frank observed. “Like the ancient Romans, they’ve conquered all others for slave labor and use their own people as domestic servants. The Romans’ downfall was that they used lead for cooking and eating utensils, and the acidity in their wine and tomato sauce leached the toxins into their food and drink. Over several generations they lost the ability to reproduce, and as their intake of food and alcohol increased, the remaining population slowly went mad from heavy metal poisoning. It left their enemies free to attack them without much resistance; at least not a rational one, and end their primitive version of the Galactic Empire.

“Now that we know who our enemy truly is, we have the ability to defeat them as well. Like the Romans, these ‘Zionists’ have an Achilles heel and rather than being based on food and drink, it’s based solely on power, greed, and wealth. We just need to figure out the contemporary counterpart to putting lead into their wine, so that the peasants may revolt.”

CHAPTER 14

“To sit back hoping that someday, someday, someone will make things right, is to go on feeding the crocodile, hoping he will eat you last- but eat you he will.” - Ronald Reagan

“You were talking about an economic collapse before, Jason.” Paul remembered aloud. “I’d like to hear more about that. What exactly did you mean, and how does it affect us; if at all?”

“As more and more of the older people are dying off, knowledge is being lost with them.” Jason explained. “There are fewer and fewer people able to actually allow this society to continue. The entire system has become top-heavy and it can’t continue to balance much longer without toppling under its own weight and unevenness. Before too long, things won’t be able to support themselves anymore and the whole economy will simply collapse. It’s like a child’s tower of building blocks. Pull the right one at the right time, and the whole thing comes crashing down around your ears like the Tower of Babel.”

“Unless that’s what the urban areas are *really* for.” George mused. “Maybe they aren’t really rehabilitation camps at all like we thought earlier, but training and labor facilities to ready us for becoming true slaves to Zion. What if they suddenly tell us that we are all relocating again, but this time to other parts of the country; that we are being allowed to live as normal human beings again, but only under the careful eye of our superiors? Then we will become the garbage men, plumbers, and laborers in the wonderful new world, while they are free to use our services and ‘graciously’ allow us a meager living. It’s the rebirth of a nation, using us as slaves and indentured servants to satisfy their greed and power.”

“Now that’s a distinct possibility as well.” Jason agreed. “What if it’s just a huge backup plan? Maybe you’ve all been expendable all this time; kept alive only as human produce in the event they couldn’t sustain themselves and needed servants to keep going. When Plan A fails, always have a backup; maybe now it’s time to go to Plan B.”

“That would make sense.” Frank responded. “I would venture that should they require us to keep their plan going, then Zion could remain exclusive, like a huge Beverly Hills or a western version of the Hamptons, while the rest of the country remained relatively poor and in servitude to the elite. We would end up with a society like we had before, just completely controlled by a select few. It would make pre-1960’s segregated America look like the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

“They could have done that without this stupid, extravagant charade then!” Paul burst out. “Why go through all that trouble in the first place?”

“Like Jason said, we were all nothing but a backup plan in case theirs failed.” George explained. “They wanted a place with nothing but their own kind, but in the event it failed, we were available to support them. In the meantime, they’ve been keeping us on

basic life support; toughening us up with meager rations and no heat, to toil in the fields and get by on bare necessities while they live in splendor.”

“And *that*,” Frank said with a smile, “will be their downfall. It seems that they never want to get their hands dirty, and this time they may very well have even forgotten how. If it’s too late, then even this new scenario won’t work; it will be too late to do anything to stop the inevitable.

“All this time they’ve been sitting in their counting houses, getting fat and lazy, while we’ve been pushed to our own limits of endurance. Who do you think would fare better in a survival situation; the broker or the Boy Scout?”

“The Boy Scout,” Jason replied, “but the prostitute will always fare well regardless of the outcome. Trouble is; we basically now have an entire society of virtual street whores, cashing in on the hard work of everyone else. *Someone* has to bring home the bacon, or else the frying pan will simply burn up on the stove, and set the entire house afire.”

“And when they get desperate enough, they’ll begin killing off the competition, which is each other.” Frank replied, as they began walking back in the direction of the parking area. “I think we just found our contemporary lead vessel.”

*

Stephanie sat quietly on the back porch, as the sound of a locust buzzed high in the red oak tree overhead.

“I wish I knew where the boys were.” she said softly, as Brooke returned with two glasses of iced tea.

“Wherever they are, I’m sure they’re fine.” Brooke reassured her friend.

Brooke herself was worried about George, but didn’t dare let Stephanie know her true feelings.

“How are you feeling?” she inquired.

“Okay I suppose, all things considered.” Stephanie replied. “I am a little concerned about Paul, George, and Frank though.”

“I know.” Brooke said understandingly. “I worry a little about them too, but worrying won’t change anything. All we can do is trust their judgment. Just keep the radio charged and perhaps a call will come through.”

“From South Dakota?” Stephanie asked dubiously. “They’re way out of radio range, Brooke.”

“I don’t know,” Brooke replied, “but the ground is flat. I don’t know anything about radio transmissions, but we did hear that broadcast from Zion the other night. Maybe their radio will carry that far too.”

“That show was broadcasting with a lot more power than a car radio.” Stephanie replied. “I really don’t think there is any comparison.”

“Try calling him.” Brooke suggested. “It can’t hurt.”

“I suppose not,” Stephanie said grudgingly, slowly rising to her feet, “but I really don’t think it will work.”

She picked up the radio and pushed the button on its side.

“Base to Sheriff, Base to Sheriff, do you copy?”

After several seconds, Stephanie repeated the call, but nothing but silence greeted their ears.

“It was worth a try.” she said quietly as she set the radio down. “I was really hoping to hear Paul’s voice.”

Her hopes had been raised, and Brooke could see the stark disappointment in her eyes as she set the radio down.

“I remember they taught us something about someone named Macaroni in the education centers when I was in Level 12.” Brooke recalled. “We did an experiment with wires and something called an antenna.”

“That was Marconi,” Stephanie answered, “Macaroni is another word for pasta.”

“Oh,” Brooke responded, “well anyway, they taught us how to make one of those antennas for boosting an incoming radio signal. Maybe it will work for sending one too. Do you have any wire around?”

“What kind of wire?” Stephanie inquired.

“Something with two wires.” Brooke explained. “It was two wires in a wire. I don’t know how to explain it.”

“I have some speaker wire.” Stephanie replied. “Maybe that will work. TV antenna wire was what you probably used though.”

Her curiosity had been piqued at Brooke’s suggestion, and she was now willing to try almost anything to get a connection to her husband. Stephanie located the spool of wire and showed it to Brooke, who examined it.

“It was different than this.” Brooke said. “The stuff we used was flatter and you could see the wires inside, but I think this will work; at least I don’t see why it wouldn’t. It’s very similar. Do you have a knife?”

Stephanie nodded. She returned with a folding pocketknife and handed it to Brooke, who proceeded to cut a section of wire from the spool. Stephanie watched intently, as her friend began fashioning a working FM antenna from the speaker wire.

Brooke stripped the ends of the wires and twisted the copper strands together on each end, then cut through one of the wires in the middle of the cord and exposed both halves of it, which she stripped as well. She then cut both ends off the longer section and twisted the wires from one end to the wires in the middle of the shorter cord, creating a “T”-shaped configuration. Brooke then stripped the other end of the long feed wire and separated the two copper strands.

“Do you have a screwdriver to take this case apart?” she inquired. “I need to replace this antenna with the one I just made.”

“Yes, I have one that will fit those screws out in the kitchen.” Stephanie replied. “I’ll get it.”

Brooke opened the cover to the radio and carefully removed the screws that held the antenna in place and created the connections. She replaced the contacts with the two wires from the makeshift antenna and set the radio down.

“Now we need to get this antenna up high and stretched out.” she explained to Stephanie. “If we can hang it in the upstairs hall, I think it might work.”

The women carefully carried the makeshift antenna up the stairs and fastened the cross piece to the wall in the hallway by driving nails into the studs and bending them over the wires so as not to pierce them. They returned downstairs and Brooke took a deep breath before pushing the button on the side of the radio once again.

“Base to Sheriff.” she said, repeating Stephanie’s earlier words. “Do you copy, Sheriff?”

Once again, nothing but silence greeted their ears. Brooke felt a strong sense of disappointment at the prevailing silence, but said nothing to give away her emotions. Stephanie on the other hand, was not as patient.

“Well, there’s still no reply and Paul’s spool of wire is cut in half.” she said crossly. “I should have known this wouldn’t work. That’s what I get for pinning my hopes on chances between slim and none.”

“Maybe they’re not near the car.” Brooke responded encouragingly. “Anyway, it was worth trying. I was only trying to help.”

“I know, Brooke.” Stephanie replied quietly. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to take it out you. It’s just that I miss Paul so much, and I’m worried about them going into the wilderness. I don’t even know what I’m thinking sometimes, anymore.”

“Sheriff to Base.” a voice suddenly crackled over the radio. “Come in Base.”

“You did it!” Stephanie shrieked, grabbing the radio from Brooke and depressing the button. “Paul, come in!”

“Everything is okay.” the staticky voice replied. “Keep it simple. Everything is fine on this end. Outside Rapid City. Pursuit of fugitive is unchanged. More to follow. How are things on your end?”

“Okay.” Stephanie replied. “Nothing out of the ordinary. What is your status on the fugitive?”

“Still in pursuit, Base. Investigating further leads that may take me toward the Bitterroots in the morning. I will try contacting you again, but am unsure of radio communication. I’m amazed we can still get through.”

“Deputy Brooks wired up a long range antenna.” Stephanie replied. “It seems to have been successful. Keep in contact every hour until you reach the Bitterroots once you move out, if you would. Once there, if still in radio contact, we will maintain radio communication on a regular basis. If you find communication is failing between your current location and that of the Bitterroots, please advise Base before proceeding. Do you copy that?”

“Copy that, Base.” Paul replied. “Give my love to the children and the babysitter. Out for now.”

“You did it!” Stephanie exclaimed again, setting the radio down and hugging Brooke ecstatically. “I don’t know how, but you did it!”

She took a sip of the iced tea that Brooke had made.

“It was so good to hear his voice.”

“Yes it was.” Brooke agreed. “I wish I could have heard George’s voice too though. The important thing is that they’re safe and we have confirmation of that. I can go to sleep tonight knowing for certain that my husband is safe, even though I didn’t hear his voice. This must have been what it was like for women whose husbands and boyfriends sailed to sea, or went to war back in the days before the Biosickness and the urban areas. They must have been very strong to get through what you and I have gone through, for years at a time.”

Stephanie nodded.

"I see your point," she replied, nodding. "We are indeed much more fortunate than those wives and girlfriends of the past. For someone who has spent her entire life in a bubble, you sure seem to have a comprehensive perspective on things out here in the real world."

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"They must have been worried," George observed. "I wonder how they got that little radio to broadcast this far."

"I don't know, but since there is no Deputy Brooks in my department, I'm assuming she meant your wife," Paul replied. "We'll have to ask her when we get back. Lucky we got back here when we did or we'd have missed it. The timing couldn't have been any better."

He turned back to Jason.

"You've been a wealth of information, Jason. I don't know how we will bring this all together, but we certainly know a lot more than we did this morning."

"It'll be getting dark soon," Jason replied. "Why don't you follow me back to the campground and spend the night with my family? We'd love the company. I think there's a whole lot more that we can discuss before you leave. In fact, come morning, we all may just decide to head out together."

"For where?" George inquired curiously.

"Montana," Jason replied. "You were mentioning the Bitterroots, and I think you'll find a lot of your answers there."

"Why is that?" Frank asked, somewhat suspiciously.

"I'll tell you once we get back to the RV," Jason replied. "I'd like you to meet my family first, if it's okay."

Frank nodded. He supposed that if this were a trap, they had already been made, and following Jason to another location wouldn't make much of a difference.

"We're down in the Game Lodge Campground, about ten miles south of here," Jason explained. "I had actually come up this way to get some stuff from the little store over in Keystone, and I decided to drop by the mountain again for a quick look, as it was only a mile out of the way. I'm glad I did, or I'd have never run into you guys. I think it's a good sign that we met."

"It's certainly timely," George agreed with a gesture. "Lead the way."

*

"Jenny!" Jason called out.

"Where have you been?" his wife demanded, as she exited their RV. "I was getting worried! You left three hours ago."

"I'm sorry," Jason apologized. "I went over to Mt. Rushmore and met some new friends. I want you to meet them. Get Jake too."

Jenny returned with their twenty-year-old son, and Jason officiated over the introductions.

"This is my wife and son; Jenny and Jake," Jason introduced his family, "or as they're officially known, Ina and Ishmael Golan Jr. These are some travelers; Paul, George, and Frank."

Hands were shaken, and Jason motioned for everyone to enter the RV.

“These men have come from the outside, seeking answers.” Jason explained to his wife and son, as everyone sat down in the living room area of the RV. “There is a whole world outside of Zion that we know nothing about, and vice-versa. I’m gonna to get the smoker going, and grill some javalina chops, and then we have a lot of catching up to do.”

Over the next few hours, George and Frank relayed their stories of Urban Area Eleven, while Paul described life in the buffer zones. Jason and his family listened spellbound, as George told of their planning and escape to the buffer zones, and of the horrors they had left behind.

“I almost can’t believe it!” Jason finally exclaimed. “All this time, each of you thought that the other areas had all been destroyed, except the garbage they told all of you about Zion- I mean the wilderness reserves.”

“What have they said about where we come from?” Paul inquired.

“Well, we know that there are survivors living in the urban areas, but the conditions you’ve described are not what we have been led to believe. We assumed it was normal life, just contained to an area like a small state. We have no idea that the cities are not connected or that you have no running water. That is just inhumane!”

“That’s why we left.” Frank commented dryly.

“I certainly don’t blame you.” Jenny responded soothingly. “A person is nothing more than a caged animal, without freedom.”

“Speaking of animals,” Jason added, “you’ll never believe what they turned the Sonoran Desert into. They brought all these exotic animals in from Africa and turned them loose. Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas have herds of elephants, zebras, and giraffes roaming through the mesquite, and the main predators out there are lions and cheetahs now. They’re mixing with the domestic mountain lions too, I’ve heard, making some hybrid cat they call the luma. People just can’t leave Mother Nature alone, can they?”

“I remember before the Biosickness, they were talking about bringing them here for part of the preserve that they were turning the wilderness into,” Frank remarked, “but this area isn’t really a preserve; at least not for animals anyway. More like a hunting preserve for the New World Order?”

“Yes! The sick bastards brought them here to hunt.” Jason spat. “There’s nothing wrong with hunting for food or to cull a population, but they imported them for their own personal sporting safaris. They brought most of them here and bred them for ten years. Now, instead of having to go all the way to Africa where they’re almost extinct, now they fly into Tucson, Las Cruces, or Lubbock, depending on what they want to shoot.”

“Now see, that’s just plain wrong.” Paul interjected. “We have a problem with too many deer, so we hunt them for food as well as keeping our crops in better shape, but shooting those animals for no particular reason is uncalled for. I never had any use for ‘trophy hunters,’ and these ‘people’ take that connotation to the next level.

“You mentioned something earlier at Mt. Rushmore,” he continued, “about possibly accompanying us to Montana. What did you mean by that?”

“Oh yes, I forgot to tell you, Jenny.” Jason responded. “They’re headed for the Bitterroots. How convenient, huh? I said we would go with them. Everything they want to know is there.”

Jenny nodded.

"I certainly wouldn't mind heading that way again," she replied. "It's been awhile since we saw Roy and Betty Sue, and their kids."

She smiled at Frank.

"You'll like Roy and Betty Sue," she stated. "They're like us. They took on new identities after the Biosickness too, except they're Indians; well at least Betty Sue is supposed to be. The chief befriended them and let her take on his niece's identity after she died in Los Angeles during the Biosickness. Roy was allowed to stay because he was married to her. They're wilderness enforcement rangers up in the Bitterroots now. We ran into them about twelve years ago when we were out that way. It took a while before we realized what was going on, and they never made an attempt to turn us in when they realized we weren't really citizens of Zion. Eventually, they just took a gamble and asked us. What we learned was incredible."

"It must be beautiful where they are then," George mused. "I saw an old picture of some hikers out there when we were getting ready to escape from Chicago. That's why we want to go there."

"Well, it is indeed beautiful," Jason agreed, "but there are better reasons for you to go there, at least for now. Not only our friends - I told you they think like we do - but so do all the Indians out there. This is bigger than anything you expected, George."

"You know, we noticed the same thing where we crossed in here," Paul responded. "The chief of police told us they knew everything because they were on the border, and he said we had a friend in the Crow people. He even knew who George and Frank were, and that Brooke and little Josh should be with us. They know *everything*."

"So do the Flathead, the Blackfoot, and probably all the other tribes and nations," Jason replied. "The big difference though, is that the Flathead are actually planning something. They've all been appointed the guardians of the wilderness areas out here because of their ancient ties to nature. They've also been allowed to stay in touch because they're people of honor and hold to their word. That was a big mistake. By trusting them with certain jobs and open communication, they've basically created an underground network."

"If you could somehow get the word to the outside of what's going on here, there is no way that Zion could remain in power. There are too many of you, and they rely too heavily on technology. All their strength lies in computers and other technology, and most of them have no idea how to operate real machinery or fix what breaks."

"They've become lazy," Frank observed. "This goes back to what we were discussing earlier. There's thirty million of us, give or take, in the urban areas, and another seven million spread across the heartland. Add to that the number of Indians on reservations, and we have what, close to fifty million people to take on Zion? There can't be anywhere near that number living in here."

"But what about the military?" George inquired. "All they have to do is unleash another Biosickness on the eastern half of the country, and it will kill the rest of the survivors off."

"There *is* no military," Jason replied. "There's no need for one. They destroyed everyone around the world that was a threat to them. The bases are all closed up and I'll bet the missiles wouldn't even fire anymore. Sure, they have a few blue uniform-clad goons that parade around and act like they are soldiers, but they basically do nothing but

sit on their asses and watch the borders. I seriously doubt that anyone has the ability to manufacture whatever it was they used on us last time and even if they did, there just aren't enough planes that could disperse it all. Nope, this time the playing field is going to be a *little* more even."

*

"Where are you?" Stephanie's voice inquired over the radio.

"Sheridan, Wyoming." Paul replied. "We tried raising you earlier, but the Black Hills must have been effectively blocking the transmission. We're a lot higher now, and the signal must be carrying over them. We may lose you in the grasslands of Montana again, but once we get into the mountains, hopefully the signal will carry. I still can't believe it's reaching this far, as it is."

"I think it may only be between these two radios," Stephanie replied "or at least this one and whoever picks it up. The antenna on this end is powerful enough to pick up your otherwise-weak transmission, and to broadcast back to you. It may also be unidirectional, but either way, you can thank the Lord that it works. That's all that matters for now. Check in again in an hour okay?"

"10-4." Paul replied. "Out for now."

He followed about one hundred feet behind Jason's RV, and marveled at the scenery. He had never had the opportunity to visit this part of the country prior to the Biosickness, and it was entirely different from anywhere in Minnesota, yet he knew full well, he would soon encounter scenery unlike anything he had ever witnessed before, or hoped to see.

For the next few hours, Paul was unable to establish radio contact, due to the relative flatness of the topography. A few unintelligible words crackled over the radio every now and then, but nothing distinguishable. Several hours later, they entered Bozeman, Montana, and began to slowly ascend into the mountains.

"Give it a try again." Paul suggested to George, who was seated up front, next to him. "We're higher now. It may go through."

George keyed the mike and spoke into it.

"Sheriff to Base, come in, Base."

Several seconds later, Stephanie's voice crackled weakly across the speakers. It was faint and slightly garbled, but still amazingly clear for the distance involved.

"This is Base. Reading you fairly well, considering. What's your 10-20?"

George looked quizzically at Paul, for he was not familiar with 10-codes.

"Bozeman." Paul said to George. "Tell her Bozeman."

"Bozeman, Montana, Base." George replied. "We're gaining altitude; expect radio transmissions to improve over the next hour, out for now."

"I've never seen anything like this before." George stated in awe, as they approached Missoula. "This is so beautiful. Look at these trees! I've never seen trees like these before."

"They're all sub-alpine firs and lodge pole pine." Frank responded. "I studied silviculture before I joined the Army. From here on out, you won't see any deciduous trees at all, just conifers like these."

"Look at that!" Paul exclaimed, pointing off to the right. In the distance, a large white "M" was clearly visible against a rocky mountainside.

“It must stand for Missoula.” George replied, looking at the atlas. “That’s where we are now, I think.”

He gazed at the map for several seconds.

“We should be entering the Bitterroots shortly.” he stated. “We’re almost in them. They’re just to our left. They’re so close I can almost taste them. We’re already in the middle of the Rocky Mountains, according to this atlas.”

Jason’s amber turn signal began blinking, and Paul followed the RV off the interstate onto a state highway. Jason pulled to the side of the road and Paul stopped behind them.

“It’s about one hundred miles to Kalispell.” Jason explained, as they all met outside the recreational vehicle. “After that, it’s all back roads. In another three hours, we’ll be there. Then my friends, you’ll have the answers to everything swirling around inside your inquiring minds.”

“Lead on.” Paul replied, as they retreated to their vehicles and once again headed for some of the most spectacular scenery in the contiguous US.

The Bitterroots were every bit as beautiful as they had imagined, and they continued to marvel at the scenery, as they wound ever higher into the rugged and majestic peaks of western Montana. Within two and a half hours, they were traveling down a graded logging road that paralleled a crystal clear river. Jason slowed, and turned into someone’s yard.

He blared out two sharp blasts on the RV’s air horns, as they came to a stop alongside a rustic-looking log cabin. A few seconds later, an older man and woman, and three young adults emerged from the log house.

Jason exited the RV, and shook the hand of the man and embraced the woman, as Paul turned the car off. He motioned to his new acquaintances, who approached the family with interest.



The Bitterroots were every bit as beautiful as they had imagined

“Roy, this is Paul, George, and Frank.” Jason introduced them. “They’re from the outside. This is Roy and Betty Sue Graywolf Guilbault, and their three children; Jules, Inez, and Sallie.”

“If you’re friends of Jason and Jenny, then you’re friends of mine.” Roy responded in his strong Cajun accent, extending his hand in greeting. “Outsiders, eh? Where are ya from?”

“I’m from Minnesota,” Paul replied, “but my friends here are from what used to be Chicago. Now it’s called Urban Area Eleven.”

Roy whistled respectfully.

“Not just outsiders, but escapees as well. You’re living dangerously, coming out here.”

“We know that,” George replied, “but we need to know what is really going on. We need to know who we are and *what* we are.”

“You’re pawns.” Roy answered. “This is a game of chess, where both sides are being played by the same team. It took me quite a while to understand what was going on, but once I did, it all became crystal clear to me. This game has three possible outcomes, and all of them are controlled by - and benefit - the New World Orderers.”

“Who are they, exactly?” George inquired.

“Old money, mostly.” Roy replied. “All the rich bastards from all over the world and the Zionists that controlled the media and banking in this country before the Biosickness; and all the gutless politicians that allowed it to happen.

“You see, they present themselves as the chosen ones and as such, they have seized power in all avenues. They took power in the governments of the civilized world, and in the media via newspaper, TV, movies, and in the corporations of the free world. They went on to form the United Nations and created their own army of ‘peacekeepers,’ an army that was free to invade any country in the world, including our own. The UN was never about world peace, but rather world domination. It was the foot in the door for the New World Order to spread efficiently and undetected throughout the world, with most of the funding coming from the US, and in the end, most of the domination ending up here as well.

“They dominated our military in the form of scientists and independent contractors, and convinced our politicians that global warming was real; that we were responsible for the increase in the Earth’s temperature due to all of our ‘greenhouse emissions,’ and funded a secret project that used aluminum and other compounds to cool the climate and control the weather. What they succeeded in doing, however, was to throw the earth’s natural cycles out of kilter, and it caused major changes in our global weather patterns.

“This was further blamed on the effects of global warming, and before long, there was a bona fide agency created to investigate the global warming. We had one team playing both sides! They were spraying not only our skies, but those of Canada and Europe as well, in an ‘effort’ to stop what they had created. It ended with the dumping of biological agents that decimated the population and allowed them free rein of what was left. The problem was, that they wanted their cake and to eat it too. They left enough of us to live as slaves in the urban areas to care for them, but it also left enough to rise against them. That’s the problem with a parasite; you want to be the sole life form, yet you can’t

live without the host. It sort of puts you in a paradox, unless you want to earn your own way, and a parasite is incapable of doing that. That is their downfall.”

“Their Achilles heel.” Frank muttered.

“Exactly.” Roy responded. “There were two kinds of dinosaurs; plant eaters and meat eaters. The Zionists are the meat eaters, and in their ignorance, they killed most of the plant eaters off. What will happen when the remaining plant eaters become self-aware and refuse to be eaten?”

Frank looked at him intently for several seconds before replying.

“They’ll ride through the night crying, ‘the British are coming, the British are coming; to arms, to arms!’”

“Exactly.” Roy replied. “Now we only have to figure out whether or not it’s ‘one if by land or two if by sea.’”

“And then,” George added, “it’s the meeting of us versus them, at the bridge of the new Lexington, wherever it may be.”

“Right here.” Frank said, placing his fist over his heart. “The location is meaningless; courage is all that matters. Thomas Jefferson once said, ‘the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants,’ and we’ve been through one hell of a drought for the past twenty-five years.”

Part IV

Blue Skies Again

CHAPTER 15

“A law of nature rules that energy cannot be destroyed. You change its form from coal to steam, from steam to power in the turbine, but you do not destroy energy. In the same way, another law governs human activity and rules that honest effort cannot be lost, but that some day the proper benefits will be forthcoming.” - Paul Speicher

“So what’s our recourse?” George inquired.

“In due time.” Roy replied. “Right now, why don’t y’all come on in and make yourselves at home? We’ve got plenty of extra room down in the basement; it’s all finished off and dry. Jason, y’all know the drill. You can crash down there too, or stay out here with the deer and timber wolves.”

“We’ll take the basement too.” Jenny interjected. “I’m a little tired of that RV.”

“Alrighty.” Roy replied. “I’ve got some fresh elk I shot a few days ago if anyone’s hungry. I had it hung out back for a couple days to age, and the boys and I just finished butchering it this morning.”

“That sounds good!” George burst out. “But this is the wilderness; they let you have guns and even go hunting?”

“Of course.” Roy answered. “This is Zion. They only disarmed the enemy. This place is full of nothing but citizens of Zion and the Indians that were exempt. The rules only applied to everyone else; not themselves. They own and carry guns just like we used to everywhere else before they started disarming us; even full auto stuff. There’s no restrictions in here.”

“George is a pretty good shot himself, from what I hear.” Paul remarked.

Roy stared intently at George and Frank for several seconds as it dawned on him.

“Holy Shiite Muslims!” he exclaimed. “You’re the ones! The whole civilized world is looking for you. You’re taking a hell of a chance coming in here. If they ever catch you, they’ll make the death of William Wallace look like a birthday party compared to yours. I’m honored to meet the man who was able to take out two enforcers with their own guns, although they painted you as a cold-blooded killer that attacked the poor pricks from behind and ambushed them. My guess is that is was probably along the lines of the other way around.

“Everyone that wants this country back is behind you though. You’re all like folk heroes to them. You showed that it was possible for anyone to stand up against them and to be free.”

“That’s why Charles White Wolf said we had a friend in the Sioux Nation.” Frank mused.

“We’re all on the same side in this.” Roy replied. “It’s just a question of where and when it all goes down, and how.”

“We were talking about that yesterday.” Jason responded. “Their technology is what keeps them going.”

“They don’t know jack squat about fixing it either.” Roy snorted. “They keep cannibalizing what they have; they don’t know how to make any more.”

“That’s the idea.” Frank said with a grin. “What if something were to happen to their precious technology?”

“They’d be screwed.” Roy answered. “They’d go floob-dooby trying to compensate. They’ve only got a handful of technicians from what I hear that keep things running, and they don’t know how to make more; just fix what breaks.”

“We need to find out where their satellite communications are based, and take it out.” Frank continued. “Their entire perimeter guard and all communications with the urban areas would go down. Each urban area will effectively become an island, and there will be no way to monitor the perimeters to keep people out. It’ll be like the Oklahoma Land Rush all over again.”

Roy nodded.

“You may just be onto something there.” he agreed. “Let’s have some dinner and tomorrow we’ll go talk to someone that could shed some light on where their weakness is and how to overcome it.”

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“I feel a lot better, now that we can keep in touch with the guys.” Stephanie remarked, as she set the radio down after Paul’s latest communication from Wolf Mountain. “It’s getting hard to hear him now, but at least we know they’re all safe.”

Brooke nodded, and petted the purring kitten curled up in her lap. It had wandered out of the barn and come to her when she called it, and she had taken quite a liking to the furry little black and white tuxedo kitten.

“I wonder what they’re up to.” Brooke mused. “It’s been almost a week. What could they be doing that is taking so long?”

“Whatever it is, I’m sure it’s important, or they wouldn’t risk staying there.” Stephanie replied. “Besides, from what Paul said, they’re out in the middle of the wilderness; no one would even know they were there.

“Hey, you’re supposed to be the one cheering me up and giving me encouragement, not the other way around! Come on, let’s take the boys into town and get some ice cream. That’ll take our minds off of everything for a while.”

“Okay.” Brooke replied, setting the kitten onto the chair beside her.

She went into the back yard where Joshua and Jimmy were playing with some toys in the sandbox, and called them. The children dropped the toys and approached her politely.

“How would you boys like some ice cream?” she asked, with a twinkle in her eye.

They nodded vigorously, and Brooke smiled broadly. This was what being a mother was all about; not hauling water and waiting in line for food rations in an artificial refugee camp. She took the children by their hands and walked them back into the house.

“Okay then, go wash your hands and we’ll take you out for ice cream.” she directed.

The boys giggled and dashed down the hall to the bathroom, where Jimmy dragged the stool out from next to the sink so they could stand on it to wash their hands.

“All this time, George and I never even knew what we were missing.” Brooke said quietly, as Stephanie picked her purse up. “I knew I wanted more children, but I never understood how much of a blessing they really are to have in your life.”

*

“Paul, George, Frank; this is Thomas Whitehorse.” Roy introduced his new acquaintances. “He’s the chief of the Flathead people. His father was the one that set Betty Sue and me up with our new lives as part of the tribe, after the Biosickness. Thomas, these men are from the outside, and I trust them.”

Thomas nodded and shook hands firmly with each of the three men.

“You are a lawman.” Thomas observed, noting the badge clipped to Paul’s belt.

He had since ditched his uniform for plain clothes to reduce scrutiny to not only himself, but to George and Frank as well. All three men now sported goatees, to better blend in with the Zionist population.

“Yes I am.” Paul replied. “I’m Sheriff Paul Raines from Minnesota. I came here in pursuit of a fugitive.”

“These two men are your deputies?”

Paul shook his head.

“No, they’re just friends of mine.”

“I see.” Thomas responded. “Did you know that their first names happen to match those of two escapees from one of the eastern urban areas?”

“I keep hearing that.” Paul replied. “I tend to ignore it, however. As far as I know, the eastern part of the country was nuked in 2014 anyway.”

“I see.” Thomas repeated, with a hint of a smile tugging at his lips. “It takes a man of integrity to place his life in danger to help a friend in need. Welcome to the Flathead Nation. How may we be of assistance to you in your manhunt?”

“I’m beginning to think that perhaps the person I’m pursuing didn’t even come this way.” Paul answered carefully.

“Most likely not.” the chief agreed. “We’ve been expecting you; all three of you, although I am disappointed that I could not meet George’s wife. I’m sure she is in good hands however, wherever she may be.”

Thomas stared at Paul intently.

“Roy Guilbault would not have brought you here unless there was a good reason, and I am looking forward to sitting down and discussing this reason with you.”

“From what we’ve been able to deduce, Zion is ready to collapse under its own weight but could continue by employing all of those in the urban areas to act as free labor.” George offered. “We’ve also noticed that it appears to rely heavily on technology that it can maintain, but has effectively lost the ability to recreate, should something happen to it.”

Thomas nodded.

“Go on.”

“If we knew where the heart of their technology lay; if there was a main communications center where they maintained their satellite and intelligence equipment, we could possibly destroy it, and with it, their ability to detect intruders or effectively communicate with the urban areas or what they still call the States.”

“How would you propose to destroy this equipment, even if it were located in one area?” Thomas inquired. “Undoubtedly, it would be under surveillance and protection.”

“With a bomb.” Frank interjected. “There’s got to be enough stuff laying around out here to blow something up.”

“That equipment is located in the Cheyenne Mountain Complex southwest of Colorado Springs.” Thomas replied. “You could drop a nuclear bomb on it and it would not take out their communications.”

“Perhaps,” Frank acknowledged, “but what if you put the bomb *inside* the mountain?”

“It would still need to be an extremely powerful weapon.” Thomas pondered. “Unless you could get right to your target, it still would probably not knock everything offline. That is even assuming you knew where to go.”

“I am assuming that there is someone that has indeed been inside that mountain at some point in time,” Frank responded, “and I’m assuming you could find that person. However, what we need more than that, is someone who was stationed at an underground silo for the Air Force.

“Many if not all, of the missile fields must have been abandoned in the past twenty-five years. If you could find someone who’s familiar with them, it’s possible to get a nuclear warhead from an old Minuteman or Titan, and arm it manually. That would definitely take out the installation from the inside.”

“It would. But that would be a monstrous job to try and get the warhead loose and out of the silo. It would weigh several hundred pounds, I would think. I honestly do not know how we could get it out of there.”

“With a tow truck.” Frank replied. “Don’t your cars still break down?”

“Why do these answers come so easily to you?” Thomas inquired. “I will contact the other nations and see how many people I can find with experience in missiles and Cheyenne Mountain. I honestly do not know if we can find anyone with that experience, but if we can, I will definitely refer your suggestions.

“I believe that you are correct in your assessment of their defenses and communications. I also believe that you are correct in your plan to destroy their technology. We must do what we can to sever their communications and force the collapse of their house of cards.

“You have all traveled a great distance at great risk to yourselves to find the answers you seek. It is important that you learn all you can, and bring this knowledge back with you to share with the rest of the country. Did any of you think to bring a camera?”

“Didn’t want to risk it.” Paul responded. “If I got caught in here with a camera, they’d think I was a spy for sure and probably kill me, after many days or even months of torture to extract what I know.”

“You are probably correct, too.” Thomas agreed. “But by the same token, getting caught with George and Frank would probably carry the same penalty anyway. Besides, it’s a whole lot easier to hide a camera than it is two adults. You will not have this opportunity again; I would make use of it to gain the proof you need to share with the world. If you could get these pictures to the outside and get pictures of the urban areas to the States, word would get around. It would only be a matter of time before it became known what was here.”

Paul nodded.

"I suppose," he agreed.

"What's a camera?" George inquired.

"It's a device that captures images on film in realistic-looking pictures called photographs." Frank explained. "You get the film developed into the pictures."

"Oh I remember those now." George replied. "I can't believe I'd forgotten about them. I'm starting to sound like Brooke now."

He looked at Thomas.

"Can you get us a camera?" he asked. "We could take it back across with us; Paul wouldn't have to worry about hiding it when he checked out. They'd never even know."

Thomas nodded.

"I can," he responded, "but we don't use print film anymore; everything is digital now. We just plug them into our computers and we can see them or print our own pictures if we want."

"We do the same thing," Paul added. "Our computers are probably compatible with yours in that aspect."

"I will burn a copy of the installation disk for you anyway." Thomas replied. "It is important that you are able to get these pictures to other people outside Zion."

"Paul," Frank mused aloud, "You said that you no longer have Internet access like we used to, but the network that you have still lets you send emails?"

"Yes."

"Can you still send attachments?"

"Why yes."

"Well," Frank remarked, "there used to be an old saying that a picture is worth a thousand words."

"And if it gets sent to ten people, who send it to ten people, who send it to ten more, in no time there will be a thousand voices along with it, to spread the thousand words." Paul added. "It wouldn't take long to spread throughout the entire heartland. Getting the word to the urban areas will be a little trickier though."

"But not impossible." George responded. "That's our next order of affairs; get the images of the buffer zones and Zion into them. I remember a fortune cookie I got one time when I was a little kid. I never forgot the words: 'Nothing is impossible to your willing heart.'"

*

"I'd like to stay behind, at least for now." Frank said to Paul and George, as they prepared for their return to Minnesota the following day. "I don't know how, but I'd like to stay behind and do what I can to help from the inside. I know you can begin spreading the word on the outside, and if there is something I can do here, I want to. This place is so serene; you were right, George. It is a beautiful place. You can't stay here without Brooke though, and it will be too dangerous for you to attempt a crossing again. You'll have to stay in the States for now."

"I know." George agreed. "I wish I could stay, but not without my family."

"Perhaps one day, you and Brooke, and the kids can come back here," Paul suggested, "but for now I think it's agreed all the way around, it's out of the question. Maybe we should have brought them with us too. Then you could have simply stayed."

“No.” George replied, shaking his head. “That would have been too dangerous. I would have never risked bringing them here after I found out what was really inside the so-called wilderness.”

“Staying won’t be a problem, Frank.” Jason interjected. “When Jenny’s Uncle Steve passed away, we buried him in an old rural cemetery in Idaho, and told no one. His identity is still good, and you are close enough in age to pass yourself off as him.”

“Thank you.” Frank replied. “I’ll do whatever I can to help whoever needs it. I never thought I’d ever see anything beyond Chicago again, so every day out here is like a bonus anyway.”

“Since I’ve come to know the three of you,” Paul said earnestly, “I’ve come to learn that every day is a bonus no matter where you are, as long as you have your family with you to share it.”

“Now *that*,” George noted, “would make a good toast.”

*

“We have found three people who have the knowledge and skills needed to locate and remove one of those warheads should we be so lucky as to find unguarded missile silos.” Thomas stated three days later. “One of them also has the knowledge to disarm it before it is removed, and to rearm it once we reach Cheyenne Mountain. A former officer in the Security Police was stationed there for several years while he was in the Air Force. His mind is older, but hopefully still sharp enough to give us drawings of the layout that we can use to navigate the complex should we somehow be lucky enough to gain entry, and when I say ‘we,’ I mean us as a people, not that you or I will be going in there ourselves.”

“I’d like to though.” Frank offered. “I was in the military myself, back when this country was truly something to be proud of. I’d like to do what I can to help get it back. I have lived for the past twenty-five years of my life as a virtual slave, because of the equipment in that mountain, and I can think of nothing finer than to be a part of the team responsible for its destruction.”

“You are well aware of the risks involved, so I will not bore you by voicing them,” Thomas responded, “but why after all this time, would you give up your new freedom for such a dangerous venture that might cause your death? You could live as a free man for the next thirty years before you died of natural causes.”

“This isn’t real freedom.” Frank replied. “It’s nothing more than a weekend pass; a hologram of freedom that exists on the enslavement of others. The underlying problem will still exist, and I prepared myself for death when George’s wife first came to me with a dream of escape. Now that said, if I could have tasted the fresh air of the country for just an hour again, it would have been worth it, but to live as I have for the past two weeks is nothing short of a gift from God. No matter what happens now, if I were to die tomorrow, I would be two things: I would be happy, and while this is still not what we used to have, compared to what we’ve been living in, I would be *free*.”

Thomas Whitehorse looked at Frank for perhaps a full minute before replying.

“The blood of the warrior runs deep within your veins.” he finally stated. “I have seen evidence of this blood in all three of you. Only men of courage would have risked their lives to cross into Zion for no more reason than to know the truth. I know that all of you would like to stay here and fight this evil from within, but for right now Frank is the only

one that is able to remain behind. You have already decided this amongst yourselves, which leads me to believe that you would all indeed prove yourselves great and intelligent warriors in battle.

"I do believe that you will be a great help in ridding this nation and world of the monster that has sunk its claws into our freedom and liberty. You have knowledge of the old times locked in your head, Frank O'Reilly. We can benefit greatly from that knowledge and determination that you possess, to restore liberty to this country. I would be honored if you would stay and help us."

Thomas extended his hand, and Frank grasped his new friend not by the hand, but by the forearm. It was something he had learned many years before when he had been a Scout, and was based on the greeting of the American Indians.

"Eagle Scout." Frank responded, before the chief could even speak. "Now let's go kick some monster ass."

Thomas smiled, and George looked at him.

"You spoke of the Authority as a monster before. Do you know who it really is; who was behind the deaths of my parents and four billion others around the world?"

Thomas was quiet for a minute and Paul interjected.

"They told me enough at the border, that I think I understand, or at least can figure some of it out." he replied.

"Who do you think it is?" Thomas inquired.

"Those agents were wearing black uniforms and blue berets. I remember an article in a magazine I found in someone's garage a long time ago, about a force called the United Nations. It was formed in the 1900's and acted as a global police force. The picture I saw of those men in that magazine looked almost identical to what I saw the other day. Is the Authority really the United Nations? Did they somehow become so powerful that they were able to kill their enemies around the world and turn the rest into slaves?"

"If an agent from the Authority were to overhear that hypothesis come from your mouth, you would be killed on the spot, as would everyone else who heard you suggest it." Thomas stated emphatically. "Yes, the Authority was once known as the United Nations, before it was exposed as a political puppet for the New World Order. I suppose it is time for you to know the entire truth of what you have gotten yourselves into."

Thomas sat on a bench overlooking a scenic valley and gazed out over the landscape below. He motioned for the others to sit as well, and the three outsiders knew they were about to learn the answers to the questions they so desperately sought.

"From almost the inception of civilized man, there has always been a desire to conquer; to take from others and impose your ways upon them. In days of yore, this was possible because of the power of the sword and the general ignorance of the people. Empires such as those of the Greeks and Romans are an example of this, but as technology increased, so did the ability of the people to stand behind trees and take out the enemy from afar with firearms.

"Those that wished to gain control learned many hundreds of years ago, to take not with force, but with money and political power instead. They developed clandestine organizations that were designed to pass this power to those of their own kind. This allowed them to place their agents into almost every government of the world to pass laws that gradually usurped power from the people and granted increasing amounts to the

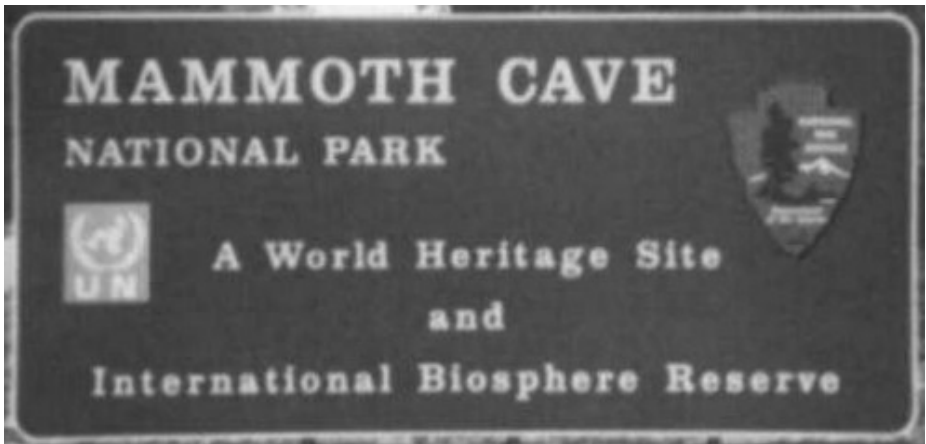
governments. Once this was established, they began to form alliances to bring their armies and navies together under one flag in the name of peace, but peace was the furthest thing from their minds.

“They formed a collective known as the United Nations; from which they could collaborate and donate money, weapons, and troops, to build a massive military force around the world. It was originally designed to resemble a relief agency; in fact they called themselves ‘peacekeepers’ at first. Gradually however, they began to shift from peacekeeping to policing, and as our world leaders passed more and more resolutions in the name of free trade, they became enforcers of the new laws and began to see themselves not as an agency but as an absolute authority.”

“That’s where they got their name from!” George burst out. “What egotistical elitists!”

“Yes.” Thomas agreed. “There have been those who wanted a one-world government for a long time, but until recently, they had no way to implement it. It was by and large, the United States that enabled it to happen, however. We supported the UN and signed the treaties that took away our rights. We put up as collateral to them, our national parks and forests. Some were even conned into the same thing with private parks, like Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina. They were so proud to be a World Heritage Site that they never understood that they had actually sold their property to the New World Order.

“The public was conned into thinking that International Biospheres and World Heritage Sites meant something good for the environment, but all it really meant was that we were mortgaging our natural resource areas like a giant game of Monopoly. We were turning over Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon, never truly understanding the consequences of our actions. We were powerful enough to stop it all by voting no, but those that controlled everything controlled our politicians as well, and when it came time to collect on the payments, the UN simply seized our wildernesses for their own use.



Many of our national parks were mortgaged to the United Nations

“We had shadow governments within our own government; secret agencies that spied on others with no purpose other than to blackmail and extort them into voting for their own personal agenda; the New World Order. Some, like Kennedy, tried to stop it; to expose what was going on but were killed themselves. The others quickly got the message and fell right into line. All it would have taken was for a few of the string pullers to have their heads shot off and it would have stopped, but people are never willing to risk their own lives for those of others; not enough anyway.

“That is how communism works. It matters not what name you call it - socialism, communism, or even democracy - it works because of fear. That is also why communism will always eventually fail. It forces people who ordinarily would not be together, to live and work together. That feeds resentment and anger. You cannot take the wolf and the bobcat, place them into the same cage, and expect them to coexist peacefully. It is against their nature, as it is with people. They will turn against each other, and if they do not kill each other off, will eventually turn against their captors instead. So it has always been and always shall be. Look at us; we could fight over past transgressions, but we instead choose to turn our bitterness against those who enslaved us, and then you.

“The concept of communism seems harmless enough; that all people are equal and no one has any more or any less than the other, but that takes away the entire purpose of the human life - to better one’s self - and it breeds resentment. Therefore, the only way for communism to succeed, is through force; tyranny or what the western world used to call Red Communism. You and I call it slavery. Eventually the people will resist, but they are quickly removed from the picture. It takes a lot to get them riled enough to actually do something to risk their lives. As long as they aren’t starving and have a place to live, most become complacent, just as they have since the Biosickness.

“The problem is that no one ever wants to jump out and start pushing the bandwagon as long as they have food in their stomachs. Once it gets rolling however, then everyone is more than willing to jump on board, but as history has shown time and again, when people like Kennedy put themselves at risk to push the wagon and are taken out, the rest of the people get scared and run, instead of standing together in solidarity. The last time the people stood in solidarity against a tyrant was in 1776.”

“And what a difference it made!” Frank exclaimed. “We showed the world that a few peasants armed with some rifles and a few cannons could take on the best army in the world and defeat it.”

“And that,” Thomas responded, “is what scared them so much in the days around the turn of the Millennium. They needed to rid the world of those who could resist them or survive in the aftermath of the Armageddon they wanted to throw at us. They knew that an armed world was a dangerous world to their vision of utopia. They needed to disarm the people, but Americans weren’t about to give up their right to bear arms. Their moles in the media wrote stories about the evils of guns and they paid idiots to wreak havoc with firearms in public places to sway the public to their side but it still wouldn’t work. In the end, they simply eradicated the areas of this country where most of the guns were registered, or where people were used to surviving on their own.”

“I still don’t understand why they left you alone though.” George interjected. “Of all the people in the world, didn’t they expect you to survive; to have guns and know how to live off the land?”

“Yes,” Thomas replied, “but they were also counting on us to help them; to use this opportunity to get back at the White Man for taking our land from us in the first place. They were under the misguided impression that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. We have no more enemies; what would we do with one half of the North American continent? We are just as used to living with modern amenities as you are. We cannot pick up some stones and make axes and arrowheads, and expect to survive as a people. They mistakenly thought that as aboriginal people, we would pledge allegiance to them as our saviors and that we would keep their secrets for them, while helping them to enslave us.

“We pledged allegiance to their flag not to support them, but to survive and buy ourselves valuable time. That time has served us wisely, and now things are beginning to fall into place. News of your escape has traveled far and wide, and the Authority will do whatever it has to, to be certain that you are caught and executed for your actions. There have been those that escaped in the past, but they were all caught and silently returned.

“You two are different, in the fact that you didn’t simply run away; you planned for months, your escape to the outside world, and when you were intercepted, you killed two of their trained enforcers with their own weapons. That showed free thinking; a dangerous concept to them. You represent all that they fear, and if you were to spread that knowledge to others, it would soon spread to the others like a wildfire across the prairie.

“You must return with photographic evidence to prove to the world what is here, and then you must do the same with the urban areas. The word will spread if you do it the right way. Those in the buffer zones must be made aware of the great cities that still exist to the east, and of things like Mount Rushmore that have been changed. Most importantly, the people in those cities must know of the freedom that still exists beyond their borders. That is where our hope lays for the destruction of the infrastructure of the Authority.

“Not only are there millions of people to rise against them, those are the very people they fear the most, because each one has the potential to do what you have done. You are the ones they tried to destroy in the Biosickness; the ones who refused to live under a regime and who had the ideas to start over again, just like your forefathers did in the Revolutionary War. Their equipment is old and outdated, just like their concept of a one-world government. They have been cannibalizing what is left, and the last remains of it are inside the complex at Cheyenne Mountain.”

“And that,” Frank said emphatically, is where we will destroy them.”

“Their technology yes, but not their infrastructure. That will be your doing. Without their computers and satellites, they will be without forewarning, and helpless against invasions into the wilderness areas, they will have no long distance communication and therefore will not be able maintain intelligence with the urban areas or the other locations on the other continents. They will be split in half, and divided they shall fall!”

CHAPTER 16

“Hell may have no fury like the wrath of a woman scorned, until the morning a ‘free’ man awakens and realizes that he has been enslaved, and then all bets are off.” - D.A. Häns

“I’ll be coming home tomorrow.” Paul announced into the microphone of the radio. “No luck in locating the fugitive, so I am on the way back. I should be home in a couple of days. Tell Deputy Brooks that all is well on this end and we’ll have a bunch of paperwork to go over when I get back.”

“10-4, Sheriff.” Stephanie replied.

“How are things on your end, Base?” Paul inquired.

“They’re okay.” Stephanie answered. “Everyone is looking forward to your return. Deputy Brooks wants to say hello.”

“Hello Sheriff.” Brooke’s voice crackled across the airwaves. “We are awaiting your return. Sorry you didn’t get your man, but there are always other opportunities. We will see you soon. Base out for now.”

“It was nice to hear her voice again.” George commented, as the communication ended. “I really miss her.”

“As I miss Stephanie.” Paul responded. “We could have never stayed behind without them, anyway.”

“I know,” George replied, “I know.”

Paul closed the car door, and the two men walked around to the deck of Roy’s cabin, where everyone was seated. The sun was setting and the view across the valley was spectacular.

“I sure am going to miss this place when we leave.” Paul remarked.

“You and me both.” George responded wistfully. “It’s so beautiful up here. But, if I never return, I can still know that I at least got to see Montana, and that’s more than anyone back in Chicago can ever say.”

“You’re welcome up here anytime you want.” Roy offered in his gruff Cajun accent. “You and your families will always be welcome in our home. You’ve shown more courage by coming here than anyone I’ve ever run into before. I hope that one day you can return without any fear of the damned Authority. Let’s hope that this idea of yours works, Frank.”

Frank nodded, and stared across the valley as the sky began turning a fiery shade of crimson.

“With any luck,” he said, pointing toward the redness, “that is what the inside of Cheyenne Mountain will look like for the next thousand years.”

The sky faded from red to brown, and finally to black. The stars came out and shone even more vividly, due to the higher and much clearer air, than they had in southern

Minnesota. From an adjacent ridge, the melancholy howl of a timber wolf echoed through the forest, and the hairs on the back of George's neck stood up.

"Even spookier than that screech owl, isn't it?" Frank inquired. "I never actually heard a wolf before."

"Between them and the coyotes, it can get pretty unnerving out here sometimes." Roy stated, as he lit his pipe and began puffing. "But, you get used to it. It's the screams that scare the beejezus outta me, though. Only heard 'em twice, but we locked and loaded everything we had, both times."

"What was it," Paul inquired, "a mountain lion?"

"Coulda been, I suppose." Roy replied. "But I sure never heard no lion scream like that. It was deep like a lion, but it lasted for about fifteen seconds. You could hear it echoing all through the mountains. Second time we heard it, I fired a .308 into the ground and it stopped. Two days later, Betty Sue and I came across an elk about two miles from here, with its head ripped right off."

"Grizzly?" Paul ventured.

"Maybe, but I never seen a grizzly leave human-looking tracks two feet long." Roy stated. "Last time we heard 'em, it was a night just like this; the aurora borealis shining in the sky- wait! You hear that?"

"What?" George inquired nervously, looking around.

"There it was again." Roy said quietly.



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The view from Roy and Betty Sue's cabin was spectacular

A loud shriek erupted from the edge of the porch, and all three of the newcomers fell out of their chairs; Paul reaching for his sidearm. The floodlight came on and the entire deck was suddenly illuminated in light. Roy burst out laughing, as an unfamiliar Flathead appeared at the edge of the deck.

"Thought I heard someone come up on a hoss." Roy said, as the Indian sat in an empty chair alongside George. "I was hoping you'd pick up on the story and make it interesting. What are you doing out this way, anyway?"

"Checking traps." the man replied. "I heard you telling your story and thought I would embellish it a little. I hope you do not mind."

"Not at all." Roy replied. "David, this is Paul, George, and Frank. This is David Cody."

Hands were shaken and David looked intently at the trio.

"The Three Wise Men from the East." he responded. "I have heard of you. I am honored to make your acquaintance."

Small talk continued for a few hours, before everyone decided to call it a night. Roy's basement acted as a way station for anyone passing through the area, and David turned in along with everyone else. The following morning found everyone gathered around the table for breakfast, discussing the return of Paul and George to civilization.

"Make sure you get a picture of that valley before you leave," Roy suggested, as George and Paul stowed their gear in the car, "for old time's sake. You can show your ladies what you saw out here. They'll never believe you otherwise."

Paul snapped a picture of the valley, as the rising sun illuminated it from behind him, causing the towering snowcapped peaks to shine like silver in the distance. Frank followed him back to the car and stuck his hand out.

"It's been great knowing you, Paul." he said as he shook the sheriff's hand, his breath visible in the cool mountain air. "George, you take care of that lassie of yours. You tell her goodbye for me, and you tell her she did right by coming to me to read that map."

George nodded and clapped his arms around his friend.

"God bless you, Frank O'Reilly." he said with tears in his eyes. "You have been the best friend a person could ever have, and I'm proud to have made this journey with you."

"You too, my boy." Frank replied. "Raise your kids well, and teach them what you've learned. Keep that lassie of yours in line too. Perhaps one day, we'll meet again."

"Until then," George responded, "live free or die."

"I'm already free, and if that what it takes to ensure I stay that way, I'm ready to die."

Frank raised his fist and cradled his arm in Italian "up yours" style.

"Here's to the frigging Authority!"

*

"They're here!" Brooke shrieked, as the noise of a slamming car door sounded in the driveway. She and Stephanie dashed from the house to greet their husbands, who grabbed them and held them tightly.

"I missed you so much!" George exclaimed, as he whirled Brooke into the air.

"Oh, I missed you too!" she replied, as he set her back down. "I wanted to talk to you so much on the radio, but I knew you couldn't talk. What in the world do you guys have beards for?"

"Goatees." George replied. "We grew them to blend in."

“Everyone in Zion has goatees?” Brooke inquired.

“Or full beards, yes.” Paul replied.

“They’re ugly.” Brooke said with a frown. “Please shave yours, George.”

“I agree.” Stephanie concurred. “You too, Paul.”

She looked around.

“Where’s Frank?” she asked with a worried look. “What happened? Is he okay? They didn’t catch him, did they?”

“He’s okay.” Paul assured her. “He stayed behind on a mission.”

“What kind of mission?” Stephanie inquired, as they entered the house.

“I’ll tell you about it once we get settled in.” Paul promised, looking around. “Where’s Buster? He’s usually the first one to the car.”

The looks on Brooke and Stephanie’s faces told him something was wrong.

“We both have information to share.” Stephanie said quietly. “Two enforcers paid us a visit while you were gone.”

Paul could read his wife’s face like a book.

“What happened?” he demanded.

Stephanie began to cry, and Brooke put her arm around her.

“I’ll kill them!” Paul snarled. “I’ll track them down wherever they went and kill them with my bare hands. Who were they?”

“There’s no need.” Brooke said quietly. “We took care of it ourselves. They came here looking for us, and Stephanie wouldn’t tell them anything. One of them tried to rape her and Buster attacked him. The other one shot Buster, and then I shot and killed him before he could shoot Stephanie. She grabbed his .45 and emptied it into the one that attacked her. We put them in the trunk of their own car and scuttled it over in Swan Lake. Then we put their ID cards onto a piece of driftwood and put it afloat in the Minnesota River. By the time they realize they’re not responding to radio transmissions, those cards will be in the Gulf of Mexico. They won’t know where to begin looking.”

“We came home and scrubbed the walls and floor down, and then we burned everything, including the mattress and sheets that were on the bed.” Stephanie said, taking over where Brooke left off. “Then we fixed the holes in the wall and repainted and papered the room. There’s no trace left.”

Brooke looked at George.

“We understand now, Honey.”

George put his arms around Brooke and held her tightly.

“What did you use?” he asked quietly.

“The .357 that Paul keeps,” she replied. “Steffie and I had been target shooting the day before with it, and with the shotgun. We wanted to surprise you and show you how well I could shoot when you came home, so she told me to hang onto it until you guys got back. They were going to kill her, and then they said they were going to kill the boys too. I couldn’t let that happen to anyone. It was on the nightstand, and I just grabbed it and used it. I wasn’t even scared.”

“You did the right thing.” Paul said quietly. “That’s exactly what it’s there for.”

“I hated them for what they did to me and Buster.” Stephanie whispered. “Once I started shooting, I couldn’t stop. It was like I was watching myself from outside my body. It was like a movie.”

"It's understandable." George said consolingly. "I know how you feel. When I killed those enforcers the day we escaped, it was like I was paying them back for everything the Authority had done to my parents and the rest of the world. When I went back and shot that guy in the head, I felt satisfaction; like justice had finally been served after all these years. War and slavery will turn a person into a monster sometimes. Sometimes you have to turn into one yourself, just to survive."

"It's over." Brooke said suggestively. "Why don't you guys sit down and relax, and we'll get you something to drink. You can tell us all about your trip and what happened to Frank."

Paul and George recounted the events of the trip, as Brooke and Stephanie listened spellbound to every word and detail.

"How did you get back across the border?" Brooke inquired of George.

"Basically, the same way we got in, just in reverse. The chief of police had told us who to contact at the Lower Brule Reservation on the way in, so we did that. Paul picked me up in Fort Thompson and we headed back from there without any problems."

"Did they give you any trouble at the border, Paul?" Stephanie inquired.

"No," he replied, "I told them that I had discovered that my fugitive was a citizen of Zion, and therefore was exempt from extradition. They nodded and gave me that, 'so you understand now' look.

"They searched the car briefly anyway, so luckily all the important stuff was with George, in his gear. He had all our proof, so thank goodness nothing happened to it."

"What kind of proof?" Stephanie inquired curiously.

"Tell you what," Paul said mysteriously, "I have some software to load into the computer. Give me about an hour or so to load it and some files, and I'll show you for yourselves."

"Okay." Stephanie and Brooke chimed in unison, and then giggled at their almost childlike response.

The two women had never before had such a close friendship with anyone other than their husbands, and it felt good to have a "best buddy," with whom they could laugh and be themselves. For Brooke, the therapeutic effect was even greater, having been sequestered from true happiness all her life. She had learned more about life in general, in the past few weeks, than most people learn about life in middle and high school combined.

The three adults caught up on a few more local tidbits of news, while Josh and Jimmy scampered about on the living room rug, playing with some toy cars and trucks that belonged to Jimmy.

Jimmy didn't seem to mind sharing his toys with the younger boy, and interacted well with him. He had never really had a friend somewhat close to his age before, much less one who had spent as much time around him.

"They're getting to be like brothers." Stephanie noted. "Jimmy has really reacted well to Josh being here. I can see a big change in his behavior. I hope that whatever happens, you can stay close by."

"Me too." Brooke agreed.

She snuggled up to George and ran her fingers through his hair, looking into his eyes.

"It's so good to see you again," she whispered. "Tell us more about Montana. What were the Bitterroots like?"

"They were beautiful," George replied, "so peaceful and beautiful to look at. Things are so far away out there, that sometimes you can't tell how far they are. I've never been able to see that far before, except maybe looking across the oc- I mean, Lake Ontario. On the lake, you can't see anything to tell that things are far. In Montana, you are up high and looking out over everything."

"I don't understand," Brooke said. "How can you be up in the air?"

She was still having trouble with the concept of mountains, and how they caused the ground to be much higher in one place than another.

"The ground gets higher," George attempted to explain.

"Let's just show them," Paul's voice suggested from his home office down the hall. "Then they can see for themselves."

"Did you get all the software downloaded?" George inquired, as they filed into the room.

"Not only that," Paul replied, with a huge smile on his face, "all those disks are full of files. Some are picture files and some are intelligence."

"Where did he get those?" George whistled in amazement.

"I don't know and it doesn't matter," Paul answered. "The important thing is that we got it out. We can make copies, and that information can be spread anonymously. Here's the stuff we took with that camera that Thomas gave us."

Several thumbnail images were displayed on the computer screen, and Paul clicked on the first one. The view from Roy's deck appeared, and Brooke felt a rush of excitement as she looked across the valley.

"See that mountain over there?" George inquired of her. "It's almost twenty-five kloms away. The bottom of the valley is about two thousand feet below. Now do you see how you can be standing on the ground and still be so high in the air?"

Brooke nodded in amazement.

"Yes, but I don't see how these pictures are here. They look so real."

"They are," Paul explained. "A camera takes an image of what it sees and records it, just like the music on a CD."

"It's like magic," Brooke breathed.

"In a way, I suppose it is," Paul agreed. "This is all of us together on the morning that we left."

He pointed out everyone in Roy and Jason's families and opened the next frame. A single picture of Frank waving at the camera was next.

"I sure am going to miss him," Brooke murmured. "He was such a good friend to us."

"Indeed he was," George agreed. "I wish now we'd gotten to know him better, sooner."

"Here's Mt. Rushmore," Paul said, as he advanced to the next picture. "Look at this, Honey. Notice anything strange?"

"Who the hell is that?" Stephanie inquired, staring at the screen with a puzzled look on her face.

"Clinton," Paul replied, rolling his eyes.

"What?"

“Apparently, he’s considered the father of the New World Order. He was instrumental in repealing rights and passing executive orders that allowed them the ability to take control of our country, which was the last bastion of freedom on the planet. America was the only thing that stood in their way and he helped to destroy it. They look at him the same way we look at Washington and Jefferson. They revere him.”

“Now that,” Stephanie said with a shudder, “is just plain wrong.”

The next picture, obviously taken by George, showed the rolling prairie of South Dakota prior to his return into the buffer zone.

“What is that?” Brooke asked with amazement in her voice.

“It’s called prairie.” George explained. “It looks like the ocean; it’s like a sea of grass, as far as the eye can see.”

“What in the world?” she exclaimed at the next picture. “What kind of an animal is that, and why are you on top of it?”

One of the Indians that had helped George get back across into the buffer zone had taken a picture of him prior to his departure.

“It’s called a horse.” George replied. “That’s how people used to get around before they invented cars and trains. That’s how I got across the border each time.”

“Remember when you fired the shotgun and I said it kicks like a horse?” Stephanie asked. “Well, that’s a horse.”

“I sure wouldn’t want to be kicked by that!” Brooke burst out, and everyone laughed. “I’ve learned so much since we left Chicago; things that I never even dreamed of. I never want to stop learning.”

“You don’t have to.” Paul assured her. “You’ll all have a new life here. We’ll just have to work out the details; that’s all. You came here to be free, and so you shall be.”

*

“Frank, this is everyone you’ll be working with on this mission.” Thomas said, as he introduced him to a group of people; some in their sixties. “These are the people I told you about; all are experts in their field and between all of you, I believe - no, *I know* - that we can successfully extract a nuclear warhead from a missile silo and transport it to Cheyenne Mountain.

“This is Steve Siler; he used to work on the warheads. He knows how to arm and disarm them. This is Barry Bearwood; he is familiar with how they integrate into the Minuteman missiles. Hopefully, the Titans aren’t much different. He’ll be the one we need to get the thing apart. Bill Couteau was an SP. He’s the one I told you about that was stationed at Cheyenne Mountain. He’s familiar with security, should it even still be in use. Justin Bird knows where most of the silos are located and will be instrumental in helping you find them. He was stationed at Offutt for four years.

“I want you to spend the next several days sitting around a table, putting all your experience out for everyone to see. Bill has drawn out, as best he can remember, the layout of the complexes inside the mountain. Apparently, there are more than one. You all need to study those drawings until you are familiar with them inside your own heads in the event something happens to him.

“Learn your strengths and weaknesses, and formulate a plan. Some of you are older and I do not expect you to be able to do a lot of this yourselves. I have people that I trust, that can be your mules so to speak; to do all the heavy lifting. Your contributions are

locked inside your heads. Without the knowledge that is in there, we cannot hope to pull this off. All of you need to go over what you learned in the military and familiarize everyone else when they come on board. Then, you can begin to formulate a strategy about making this plan become a reality.”

*

“Okay, turn left here, and then go for about three miles.” Justin instructed; glancing up from the map he was perusing. “Look for a square concrete structure inside a chain link fence.”

A few minutes later, the small boom truck that carried Frank and two others came to a stop and the occupants exited the vehicle. The rest of the group was in a dark green extended cab work truck, and stopped directly behind the boom truck. They had been unsuccessful in locating a tow truck for the job, but somehow, Thomas had secured the use of an old blue boom truck for use in the operation. Although not as innocent-looking for the operation as a tow truck would have been, it would still do the job.

“There it is.” Barry confirmed, noticing the white signs that advised of the small installation as being government property. “Looks rather harmless from up top.”

Frank nodded. He had never actually seen an underground silo site in person, and the facility intrigued him. While not large and complex like some of the sites he had seen in movies, these small silos made up the bulk of the Montana Missile Fields, as well as those in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Colorado, and Kansas.

From above, they appeared to be nothing more than a small concrete building surrounded by an expanse of grassy prairie and a fence. Signs on the fence warned of federal penalties should one trespass, but aside from that, the complexes looked benign; no more threatening than an old microwave transmission tower might appear to be. In fact, many of the old government communications facilities were located in suburban neighborhoods prior to the Biosickness and the residents were none the wiser that below the red and white towers lay huge underground warehouses that covered tens of thousands of square feet. Once one entered the rollup door and descended the freight elevator, however, an entirely different picture began to emerge.

Banks of computers, warehouse areas, and in the case of the missile complexes, the underground silos, all became apparent as one stepped out of the elevator and into the corridors. Now, all the levels were most likely decayed into dark, dank caverns full of outdated and nonworking equipment. For the band of thieves however, it was very important that some of the equipment was still capable of working, should it be plugged in again.

*

“I’ve generated a generic email message to go out to random addresses.” Paul explained to George. “One of those programs that Thomas gave me let’s me send mails from a non-existent account with no way to trace it back to the original computer. I’m going to send it to one hundred addresses that I have been able to find in records, and hopefully, those people will send it on to as many people as they can. If it works, the word should spread through most of the states within a few weeks. I’m sending not only photographs, but technical information as well. This will really make people stand up and take notice.

"In the meantime, we'll head to Chicago for more photographic evidence and follow up with the second punch. Even if they didn't pay the first one any attention, when they get the second one, they'll be forced to consider it as genuine."

"That's a good idea," George remarked, "but we can't go into Chicago. I'd be recognized for certain. They probably have my picture up all over the place. What about the one they call Dallasfortworth?"

"That's a long way from here." Paul answered thoughtfully. "Not quite as far as Kalispell was, but still a long haul. I don't know how I can keep explaining all the gas I'm using - or worse yet, all the traveling - to the Authority."

"Can we take enough with us so that we don't have to use a station along the way?" George inquired.

"I suppose." Paul replied. "No patrol car this time either. We'll take the pickup. It won't attract any attention, and we can carry a couple of drums full of gasoline with us. It'll save us from stopping along the way to fuel up. That's a good idea, George."

The following morning, the pickup was loaded with three barrels full of gasoline, and a week's worth of supplies for the trip to Urban Area Seven, formerly known as the Dallas/Ft. Worth area.

"We're going to miss you," Brooke remarked wistfully, as she hugged George tightly, "but we know you'll be safe."

"We'll be fine." George assured her. "We're just going to sneak in and deposit some flyers and take some pics. We'll be in and out in no time; piece of cake."

"Just don't get cocky and choke on that piece of cake." Stephanie retorted wryly. "We know you'll be fine, but we still worry about you."

"I know," Paul replied, "and that's why we love you both. George, let's see how well you can learn to drive."

Twenty hours later, the pickup pulled off the interstate several miles from the outskirts of the sprawling Texas megalopolis. From a small rise, the pair viewed the largest and westernmost containment facility of the New World Order, through Paul's binoculars.

"Look at the size of that place!" Paul gasped in disbelief, as he stared across what had once been golden plains. "It's huge!"

The city stretched as far as the eye could see; beyond the horizon and over the curvature of the Earth.

"We'll get a little closer," Paul stated, as they returned to the truck, "but not much more. I don't want to risk being detected, even though there's cover on this side."

George nodded.

"We'll have to ditch the truck and pedal it the rest of the way," he agreed. "Too bad the bikes don't have hooves; it'd be a whole lot easier than pedaling in and out. I'm used to it, but you're going to have some troubles, Paul. You really should have practiced before we left. How long has it been since you've ridden a bicycle, anyway?"

"I don't know; fifteen, twenty years maybe." Paul responded. "No problem, I mean how hard can it be? It's like... riding a bicycle."

George rolled his eyes and shifted into drive.

"Okay," he replied with a grin. "You brought the first aid kit though, right?"

Paul leaned over and punched him lightly but good naturedly in the shoulder.

“Okay, smart aleck. I’ll show you how easy it is to ride a bike.”

George pulled off the road and into a mesquite thicket, where the truck was shielded from view. They were close enough to the edge of the buffer zone that the chance of anyone being out here was slim, but the pair was taking no chances.

“Okay,” Paul grunted, as he dragged one of the bicycles from the bed of the truck and mounted the seat, “I’ll show you how easy it is to ride a bike!”

The front tire wobbled back and forth, as Paul fought to maintain his balance, and the bicycle toppled over, dumping him onto the dirt lane. George could not help but burst out laughing, adding to his friend’s chagrin.

“It’ll just take a little getting used to again.” Paul muttered, as he stood the bicycle up and tried once more.

“Don’t over compensate.” George suggested. “The front end will feel light, but don’t be tempted to steer too much. You’ll feel like you’ll fall over, but don’t turn the handlebars.”

“Okay.” Paul acknowledged.

He tried again, and this time fought the temptation to turn the handlebars. He was a little unsteady, but managed to keep the bike upright.

“There you go.” George said encouragingly. “By the time we get there, you should have it all ironed out.”

They shouldered knapsacks that contained the camera and the flyers that Paul had printed out with pictures of Mt. Rushmore and an operational ski area in Montana, along with a description of what had happened to the country since the Biosickness had been unleashed on the world. They then began their journey toward Dallas, and what they hoped would be the beginning of a resistance effort by the good citizens of Urban Area Seven.

*

“Hold her steady!” Justin called out, as the cable from the boom truck lowered into the exposed missile silo.

The group had spent nearly three days readying the warhead for removal, and now were about to raise it from the silo where it had remained entombed for almost seventy-five years. Systems checks on the circuitry revealed that it was still functional, which amazed Frank. Apparently, the gold plated contacts had indeed resisted corrosion; an expenditure on the taxpayers who although long dead, were about to be vindicated.

“Got it!” Frank called out, as he grabbed the hook on the end of the cable and attached it to the nylon webbing that was securely strapped around the warhead. “Take the slack up, slowly.”

The cable inched upward until it bore the weight of the warhead and became taught. Frank held his breath as the warhead swung free, then began its slow ascension up the concrete tube. Shouts of jubilation echoed through the facility as the warhead ended its journey and bobbed back and forth, just below the boom of the truck.

“We did it; we got it!” Barry exclaimed. “Now let’s get this thing crated up and on its way. I can’t believe we found a useable one in the first silo we hit; God must be watching over us.”

“Indeed He must.” Frank responded. “Now, let’s pray that Steve can make it tick again, once we are there.”

"It seems to be in working order, from all the diagnostics I was able to run," Steve replied, "but we will not know for certain until I am ready to arm it. If it does not work then, it will be too late to get another chance. I may have to blow it manually, and I sure would like to avoid that if I can. I still have a few good years left, and I would really like to see how this all turns out."

Justin nodded.

"We all know the risks involved, but none of us would be here if we did not understand that the destruction of Zion is paramount to a life of freedom. I just hope that old Bill can remember his way around those tunnels."

"I'll get us in, all right." Bill asserted. "You just help keep my ass covered while I'm doing it."

He looked at the warhead, which was now secured in a cradle in the back of the green work truck. Frank and Justin placed a tarp over the bomb, and everyone struggled to replace the utility box onto the bed of the truck, effectively hiding the deadly cargo it contained.

"This was the hardest part." Frank noted. "Now comes the easier, yet infinitely more dangerous one."

"Hi-ho Silver, Kimosabe." Bill responded with a grin. "We must get the shipment of rifles to the fort, and avoid the banditos along the way."

"The Lone Ranger and Tonto ride again." Frank replied. "Now let's take this shipment of rifles and shove it up their ass, before we pull the trigger."

*

"I still can't believe it." Paul whispered, as they stood on the outskirts of what had once been Plano, Texas.

Now known as the Planogrid section of Urban Area Seven, the location was on the extreme northeast corner of a city that covered almost one thousand square miles, and was home to close to seven million inhabitants. It was the largest of the containment cities; having taken survivors from almost all the states west of the Mississippi River, and the only one that actually protruded into the Wilderness Area on one side.

"This is much bigger than Chicago," George said quietly, "but it feels the same; miserable, tired, and hungry. It feels just the same, only hotter."

"I can't imagine living in a place like this." Paul observed. "It's inhumane. How could people do this to others? We're nothing but cattle to them. There is more than enough room on this planet for everyone now, why do they have to keep everyone herded into these human stockyards?"

"We've discussed this already," George replied, as he snapped a picture of the Dallas skyline towering over the rows of domiciles, "we're expendable."

"I know, I was just musing to myself. I still can't fathom that they did this; that this was their plan for the New World Order - the beautiful Land of Utopia to save us all from ourselves - a new Garden of Eden."

"Some utopia." George snorted. "For themselves alright. Lucky they weren't trying to build a new Labyrinth instead. It's more of a *dystopia*, if you ask me."

The pair pedaled into the heart of what had once been Dallas, and began discreetly leaving flyers where they would be found by citizens, and with hope, read and passed around. It was a gamble, but then again so was life.

George spotted an enforcer and motioned to Paul.

“Can you get a zoom on him?”

Paul nodded.

“I think so. No one’s seen anything like that in the States before, I’ll guarantee you. He looks like a clown in that getup.”

“A clown that would kill you for saying that.” George replied, as Paul snapped a picture of the crimson-clad enforcer berating a young woman who was on the verge of tears. “They get off on power and violence.”

“Hey Mister,” a young voice behind them suddenly piped up, “what’s that thing?”

Paul whirled around to see a boy looking at him, and particularly the camera in his hand.

“Um, it’s uh, nothing.” Paul stammered. “It’s just a box I found. It’s nothing.”

“Can I see it?” the boy inquired.

“Uh, no... it’s just trash.” Paul replied. “I need to throw it away. See ya.”

He and George pedaled quickly away from the area and stopped several blocks away.

“That was close.” George breathed. “Luckily his mother wasn’t close by. Thank God that enforcer didn’t see it. We need to leave more of these flyers and then we need to get the hell out of here.”

“My legs are killing me.” Paul groaned, as they pedaled back in the direction from which they had arrived.

“You’re not used to riding a bike.” George explained. “I told you, you should have practiced.”

“Too late now. Let’s just get this done and get out of here.”

“I have an idea.” George suggested. “Let’s take a train closer to where we came in, and we can leave a lot of flyers behind. That will get them out to a lot of people that will ride it on their way home this afternoon, and maybe spread them out more.”

“Okay.” Paul agreed. “I’m up for anything that will give my legs a rest anyway.”

George motioned to a passerby, who returned his glance.

“Excuse me, but we aren’t from this grid.” he explained. “Could you tell us how to get to the closest people mover?”

“Two blocks that way.” the man replied.

“Thank you.” George responded.

He and Paul made their way to the station, where it suddenly dawned on George that he no longer had his ID card; not that it would work here anyway.

“Crap!” he exclaimed.

“What’s the matter?” Paul inquired.

“We need our ID cards to ride the stupid train.” George replied. “Damn all this technology anyway. I never understood before, just how much I should value privacy until I learned what it was. Maybe we can sneak around the outside. The stations in Chicago weren’t very secure; everyone there was terrified of violating the rules.”

“Let’s hope they are here, too.” Paul answered.

They approached the station and George scoped it out.

“Same setup.” he informed Paul. “Since we’re on bicycles, it will look like we’re just stopping by to rest. We’ll let a few trains go out, then we’ll just get onboard one headed in the right direction.”

They parked their bicycles next to a sitting bench and waited. After several minutes, George noticed a small poster attached to the side of the station. Feeling bored, he ambled over to read it and kill a few minutes in the process. He gave a start, as he saw the faces of himself, Brooke, and Frank on the poster, and the words, 'Have you seen these Citizens? Report them immediately to your nearest enforcer' in bold letters across the top.

"Crap." he muttered to himself.

He returned to Paul and sat down.

"There's a wanted poster with us on it over there." he reported quietly.

"Just don't do anything to attract attention to yourself and you'll be fine." Paul assured him. "People who act guilty usually are."

Forty-five minutes later, they were speeding toward Planogrid, and George took a stack of flyers from his pack.

"Gonna drop them in the other car." he explained to Paul, who nodded in agreement.

Since it was the middle of the day, the passenger list was light. George found the next car devoid of passengers and the one beyond that only contained two. He sat in one of the seats and casually left a stack of flyers behind, before returning through the other car and leaving a handful on each seat. He rejoined Paul in the first car, and as the train pulled to a stop, left the remainder of flyers behind.

They exited the station and made their way back to the point of entry earlier in the day. All that lay between them and the mesquite forest beyond, was a few hundred feet of grassy parkland. This was apparently the standard no man's land between an urban area, and the buffer zones.

George and Paul casually wheeled the bicycles across the grass to within a few feet of the mesquite, and sat down to avoid any suspicion from anyone who might be observing them. After fifteen minutes, they cast furtive glances around and suddenly pushed the bicycles into the low canopy of trees.

"Let's go!" George urged, as they pushed the bicycles through the woods toward the road they had arrived on. "I don't want to take any chances."

Five minutes later, they emerged from the mesquite and began riding northward toward the truck. By the time they arrived, Paul was almost unable to move his legs, from all the pedaling they had done.

"I can hardly stand up." he groaned to George. "You're going to have to drive, George."

"Lucky I practiced on the way down, huh?"

"Okay, okay, you made your point." Paul grunted, as he eased into the passenger's seat. "Gees Louise, my legs feel like they're made out of lead."

"Wait until morning." George responded. "They'll feel even worse when the pain of the torn muscle kicks in. If you have any pain tablets, take some."

"I never had any idea what it would be like to break out of prison until this afternoon." Paul stated, changing the subject and rubbing his calves. "When we went into, and back out of, the wilderness area, I was there with permission, but this was an actual escape. I could feel the adrenaline; the fear of being caught and punished. It's an awful feeling, George."

"It is." George agreed. "Now just imagine going through that plus having shot two enforcers, and knowing more are on the way, and you still have to get the supplies you

stashed before you could make your escape. God, the pressure was unbelievable. It's a wonder we didn't all puke."

"I don't envy what you, Brooke, and Frank went through one bit," his friend replied. "Let's just hope that our littering project back there leads to many more in the future."

*

"Pull off here," Bill instructed.

Almost a week had passed since the team had acquired the nuclear warhead from the underground complex southeast of Wolfpoint, and Steve Siler had been successful in arming the device in the basement of another retired airman, John Vickers, who was also friendly to the cause. Now riding in a four wheel drive pickup to scout the area prior to deploying the bomb inside the mountain, Bill, Frank, and Steve were conducting surveillance of the facility to determine the amount of security they would be facing when they delivered their surprise package the following day.

The truck turned off the main highway and onto a dirt lane that was becoming heavily overgrown. Soon, Bill motioned for Steve to stop, and they all exited the vehicle. A short distance away, a clearing in the Ponderosa pine forest on the north side of the mountain afforded a vista of the entrance to the Cheyenne Mountain Complex. Bill trained a powerful pair of binoculars on the entrance tunnel and focused them.

"It's open," he reported. "That means the heavy blast doors inside should be as well. Now we watch and wait."

"Maybe it won't even close at all anymore, after all these years," Steve suggested.

Bill shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps, who knows? Maybe they're just bombastic and don't believe anyone would dare to enter."

After several hours, a small light blue military vehicle of unfamiliar origin approached the guard shack and stopped for a few moments before proceeding into the tunnel.

"That didn't seem too complicated," Bill remarked. "Now, all we need to do is grab one of those things and duplicate the process, only with the secret toy surprise stowed in the back."

He trained the binoculars on the tunnel again and turned back to Steve.

"Let's go! It's coming back out. We'll intercept it and try and commandeer it."

"How do you plan on doing that?" Frank inquired, as Steve spun the pickup around in a cloud of dust and bounced back toward the main road.

"We'll make it look like we had an accident," Bill answered. "You lie in the road, and make it look like Steve ran you over. I'll be crouched in the brush, and I'll dispatch whoever gets out."

He produced a small semi automatic handgun, and poised himself to bail from the truck, as it turned onto the pavement and proceeded in the direction of the complex, hoping the light blue vehicle had taken the south route instead of the north.

"There's a good spot!" Frank announced, pointing to a spot ahead. "Pull slightly off to the side of the road, so it looks like you cut the wheel after you ran me over."

Bill exited the truck and crouched behind a clump of chaparral, while Frank stretched out on the pavement about fifty feet behind the truck. Steve positioned himself over Frank, to appear to be checking him out. Within minutes, the hum of the approaching

military vehicle grew audible, as it climbed the hill in their direction. As it rounded a curve in the road, Steve looked up and began waving his arms frantically. The vehicle slowed to a stop and Steve called out.

“Sir, can you help me? Oh my God! I ran over this guy! I do not know where he came from; he was just there, and then there was a bump. Can you help him?”

The driver’s door opened and a lone uniformed man jumped out.

“Is he still alive?” he inquired in an accented voice.

The sharp crack of a 9mm barked out, and the man tumbled forward, blood flowing from his left ear and right eye. Bill raced over and removed his shirt, wrapping it around the fallen man’s head to absorb the massive quantity of blood issuing from the wounds.

“Get his uniform off!” Bill instructed, as he kept mopping the blood up. “We need it clean. See if you can hang him upside down from the back of the truck.”

Frank and Steve dragged the soldier to the bed of the truck, where they hoisted him into it and let the upper half of his body hang out. After several minutes, the flow of blood lessened considerably, and finally stopped altogether.

“It appears that he has bled out.” Steve observed.

Bill and Frank removed the man’s black BDU uniform, while Steve retrieved the blue beret that had fallen from his head when Bill shot him. Bill and Frank then dragged his body to the edge of a deep arroyo, where they let it tumble down the steep, rocky slope. Nashir Globlus finally came to a rest in a broken and jumbled heap two hundred feet below the group, and Frank looked down for a few seconds before turning to Bill and shrugging.

“That’s what he gets for being a Good Samaritan in this day and age. It’s just not safe out here anymore, what with a revolution brewing and all. No telling what kind of crazies you’ll run into alongside the road nowadays. Nice shot there by the way, Tonto.”

*

“Look what we got!” Frank exclaimed jubilantly, as he brought the commandeered vehicle to a stop in the driveway of John Vickers’ house.

John whistled.

“Nice! How did you get that, or do I even want to know?”

“It’s a secret.” Bill replied with a wink, as he stepped out of the pickup. “Let’s get the bomb put into it. We’re going to drive right through the front door and give them a special delivery, first thing in the morning.”

The warhead was transferred from the basement to the *Yuchmah*, as it was called. Frank had found the name emblazoned on the grill of the military truck, although no one knew whether it was the name of the make or model. Steve wired the final switch to one he mounted on the dash of the vehicle, and checked the circuit with a voltmeter.

“She is ready to go.”

The next morning dawned bright and clear, and Steve, Frank, and Bill headed back toward the Cheyenne Mountain Complex located some sixty miles to the south. Barry Bearwood had returned to his home in Scott’s Bluff, Nebraska after the warhead had been located. He and Justin Bird had served the group well, but were no longer needed for this leg of the operation.

Bill had donned Nashir’s uniform and was driving the *Yuchmah*, as he was familiar with the inside of the complex. Steve and Frank followed in the pickup, to retrieve Bill

after the bomb had been planted in the heart of the mountain, provided everything went as planned.

“Okay,” Steve said, as he set the sequence for the bomb up, “the timer is set for five minutes. If something goes wrong and you need to detonate it on the spot, just pull any of these wires. It will abort the failsafe and start the process within a picosecond. You will never know what happened.”

“That’s very reassuring, Steve,” Bill retorted, “but I understand your point.”

“All you need to do,” Steve continued, “is flip this switch, and in five minutes the core of this mountain will liquefy at somewhere around a million degrees.”

“Toasty.” Frank quipped. “Talk about your ovens.”

“Wait for me here.” Bill instructed. “I’ll get the Yuchmah into the center if I can, and set the timer. It should give me just enough time to jog back out and alert the sentry that there’s been an intrusion. They’ll shut the doors and seal the entire nuclear blast inside the complex.

“It sounds like we have a plan.” Steve agreed.

Bill approached the guardhouse and was greeted by another soldier of some sort in the same black uniform and blue beret as the one he now wore. He nodded in greeting at the sentry, who said something in a language he could not understand. Bill nodded again, and saw the sentry suddenly reach for his sidearm.

Bill’s 9mm was faster to the draw and it barked out two quick shots that dropped the sentry where he stood. He then floored the vehicle and crashed through the gate, setting off an alarm as he passed into the cool interior of the mountain complex.

The massive blast door was beginning to close, as he passed through and screeched to a halt. Bill pushed the timer on his watch and flipped the switch to activate the warhead. He jumped out of the Yuchmah, and ran at top speed toward the steadily closing door. He made it through with only three feet to spare, and continued sprinting down the half-round concrete tunnel as fast as he could, as the massive door shut with a shuddering clunk behind him. The only thing that stood between him and ten megatons of raw atomic energy was the twelve-foot-thick alloy steel blast door, and he wasn’t feeling terribly secure in its ability to withstand that massive a blast from less than a hundred feet away, particularly when the door was designed to keep an atomic blast *out*, and not *in*.

As he exited the tunnel into the bright Colorado sunlight, Bill was amazed to see the familiar red pickup truck waiting for him beside the guardhouse. He leapt into the bed and shouted at Frank.

“Go!”

The pickup slung dirt and gravel as it spun around and sped down the paved road leading back toward the main highway. The speedometer hovered near seventy, as the tires on the little truck screeched around every curve. Bill clung to the rail of the bed as they twisted around each curve in the winding road. They turned onto the main highway and Frank accelerated away from the complex. Bill looked at the numbers on his stopwatch and held his breath as it reached zero.

“Pull over!” he shouted. “It’s going to blow!”

Six miles away in the heart of the granite mountain, a chain reaction began that in less than a millionth of a second, reached a temperature hotter than the surface of the sun. White-hot plasma raced throughout the entire complex in less than a second, melting

everything within the manmade cavern, including the twelve feet of reinforced steel in the blast door. By the time the door gave way however, the majority of the explosion was over, and a much reduced - although still spectacular - brilliant jet of white atomic fire shot out the entrance to the former Cheyenne Mountain Complex. Bill held his hands over his face, as did Frank and Bill, and could see the bones of his metacarpals showing through the muscle; the light was so intense.

The entire mountain shuddered, as did the ground beneath the truck in a massive earthquake, and the entire top half of the mountain suddenly lurched and dropped almost three hundred feet into the manmade caldera caused by the massive nuclear explosion.

Bill jumped into the front seat and Frank floored the truck again, as they raced away from the invisible cloud of radiation that would soon envelop the entire area. The unidirectional shockwave passed less than a thousand feet behind them with a deafening roar, flattening trees like matchsticks, as they fled the valley at one hundred, fifteen miles per hour.

“What were you doing up there?” Bill inquired breathlessly. “I told you to stay put; not that I’m complaining, mind you.”

“We heard the shots and the alarm, and figured something went wrong.” Frank explained. “We weren’t about to leave a buddy behind.”

“And that,” Bill said with satisfaction in his voice, “is the difference between them and us. There’s no honor among thieves.”

He looked to the west, and gazed at the plume of smoke arising from the fires started by the escaping nuclear heat. Everyone in the group felt elation at their success, yet it was also coupled with regret at the destruction they had caused. This was war however; the end result was the important thing, and this was only the beginning of things to come.

All across Zion, security and monitoring equipment failed as the satellite links were lost. The listening devices along the buffer zones also fell silent, as did all communication between Zion and the seventeen urban areas. After thirty years of unspeakable terror against mankind, the intrusive eyes of Zion had been blinded. The belly of the beast had been effectively eviscerated, and now it was time to cut off its ugly head, once and for all.

CHAPTER 17

“...all Men... are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” - Declaration of Independence

The crowded urban areas began suffering almost immediately. Without communication from Zion, chains of command began to be questioned and daily operations fell into disarray. In the Dallas area, many flyers had made it into the hands of inquisitive minds, and with the fall of Zion's communication abilities, many citizens were now copying the flyers at their places of work and readily passing them out, as it became more and more apparent every day, that there was something significantly wrong with the system.

Food supplies dwindled and the citizens of the seventeen urban areas became increasingly alarmed. Many began openly walking across the invisible lines into the buffer zones, and freedom. By the same token, with strangers pouring into the border areas of the now-former buffer zones, many people from the outside began traveling into the areas they had until recently thought had been destroyed by nuclear fire many years before. Word spread like a wind-whipped firestorm across an open plain, and riots sprang up all across the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Enforcers killed hundreds in these uprisings, but the wrath of the citizens was not to be underestimated. The sections of the Texas urban area where the enforcers and overseers lived were set ablaze, enforcers were attacked as they left their patrol cars and beaten to death, and in Dallas, several snipers, apparently citizens of the States, shot and killed two dozen enforcers in a riot near Plano with deer rifles hidden away in basements and attics for over thirty years. The remaining enforcers had fled; leaving the crowds to rampage and attack offices of the Authority in droves. News of the nuclear assault in Colorado quickly spread by word of mouth as well, and over the airwaves in the States, where the media was now reporting the event.

In Minnesota, Paul, Stephanie, George, and Brooke watched the television intently, as the reports of the nuclear explosion at the Cheyenne Mountain Complex and the riots in the formerly forgotten cities of Dallas and Ft. Worth cut into the reruns of 80's shows.

“Looks like those flyers worked.” George said with a broad grin. “Apparently, the peasants are picking up their pitchforks and revolting.”

Paul nodded.

“It looks like Frank and the others were successful too.” he added.

He stared thoughtfully for a moment.

“You know, I know someone with an old crop duster. He services the farms in this area. What if we flew in over Chicago and dropped leaflets by the thousand over the entire city?”

“Just the sight of a plane would shock most citizens.” George mused. “I can only imagine if a flying machine also dropped news of the biggest con since the Trojan horse, complete with photographic evidence to back it all up.

“Talk about your one-two punch; this one will knock ‘em dead. If you can convince your friend to fly one of us over Chicago, we could even take some aerial pictures of the city while we drop the flyers too. Wait until the news gets hold of that!”

“Things are falling into place, George.” Paul replied. “Thank goodness I stopped that day to check on you guys. Someone had a plan for us; that’s for sure. None of this would have happened like this, if not for everything falling into place the way it did, when it did.”

“Probably not.” Brooke agreed. “Things happen for a reason sometimes, though. I’m certainly happy we met you, if nothing else. Even if none of what’s going on now had happened, you two are the best friends we’ve ever had.”

George nodded.

“I agree. You took us into your home and trusted us enough to put your lives in danger for us. That means a lot, and we’ll never forget it.”

“Ah, you had an honest face.” Paul replied with a grin. “We couldn’t help but believe you. Besides, I’ve never been snookered by a pregnant gal before, so you had to be for real.

“I’ll admit, your story did sound fantastic at first, but once we both added our twos together, we came up with four, and it all made a lot of sense. As a peace officer, I have to depend a lot on hunches and gut instinct, and the vibes I got from all of you were that you were telling the truth.”

He was interrupted by the sound of his telephone ringing, and he reached over to answer it. A wide grin broke out on his face as he picked up the receiver, and he spoke into the phone.

“Hang on; I’ll put you on speaker.”

“Hey there!” Frank’s voice spoke over the open line. “How is everyone doing?”

“Hi Frank!” Brooke called excitedly. “How are you? How were you able to call here?”

“I’m doing just fine.” Frank replied. “See our handiwork?”

“You bet!” Paul responded enthusiastically. “We’ve been a little busy ourselves.”

“The propaganda drop in Texas?”

“Yup.”

“Made the news. Not officially, mind you, but through the grapevine.”

“How are you able to call?” George inquired.

“Since the Hall of the Mountain King went kablooeey, it seems that outside calls are going through now.” Frank replied. “Must be the old fiber optic lines taking up the slack for the loss of satellite. Damn those smart old self-thinking computers, anyway.

“I’m calling from a pay phone in Kalispell. Didn’t want to tie a call directly from somebody’s land line; never know who might be checking records after all this. By the way, someone wants to say hello.”

There was rustling on the line as the receiver changed hands.

“Hey there!” a familiar sounding Cajun-laced voice boomed. “How y’all doing?”

“Hey Roy!” Paul and George called out simultaneously.

“Heard y’all got a good thing going there.” Roy responded. “You keep it up and before ya know it, y’all’ll have ten million Indians and no chief tearing up the eastern half of the country. Be bedlam. Here’s Frank again. You guys take care, now, y’hear?”

“You bet.” George replied.

“Hey guys,” Frank said, “we’ve got to be going, but we wanted to say hello. Maybe sometime soon, we can all have a big reunion.”

“Looking forward to it.” Paul said. “Keep it rubber side down.”

“Damn, it was good to hear from them!” George exclaimed. “I’m glad Frank’s okay; and Roy too.”

“Who was that?” Brooke inquired.

“Roy Guilbault.” George replied. “We stayed at his house while we were there. Wonderful Cajun guy. Used to be a cop in New Orleans, before it washed away. Those pictures Paul showed you were taken at his place.”

“Oh, okay.” Brooke replied.

“Someday, you’ll meet him.” George assured her. “This country will open up again, and we’ll go out there to visit. You’ll love Montana, Brooke. It’s absolutely beautiful.”

“That it is.” Paul agreed. “Now, let’s design some new flyers to drop over Chicago. I’ll call Billy in the morning, and see about doing a flyover.”

*

“It’s just ahead!” Billy Carlisle called back to Paul, via the open cockpit of the old biplane.

He had been allowed to keep it after the Biosickness, to dust the crops that the farms governed by Zion in the Minnesota/Wisconsin/Iowa area grew to supply what was left of the country.

“I’ll come in low, and you start throwing those papers out!” Billy added a few minutes later. “What a surprise they’ll have when they a real old-fashioned flying machine right over their heads, eh?”

Paul nodded, and grabbed a handful of flyers. He had almost worn the photocopier at the Sheriff’s Office out, printing over five thousand, before he ran out of paper. Billy brought the plane to about two hundred feet off the ground and came in over Oakparkgrid. Citizens stared upward at the plane; some in apprehension, others in fascination. Some of the old timers waved in elation at a glimpse of a relic from the past.

Billy slowed the plane almost to stall speed, to gain as much attention as possible. It was Sunday, and the day was sunny and warm. Many citizens were outdoors enjoying the weather, so they could not have picked a better day to drop their leaflets into crowds of inquisitive people.

Paul began dumping the flyers by the handful. They scattered in the wind and fluttered slowly toward the ground, and the curious spectators rushed to pick them up as they fell. Billy circled around the old downtown area, south along Lake Ontario, then back in a northwestern direction, zigzagging as he did so, to spread the pattern of the flyers out even more. All five thousand-plus leaflets were snatched up as soon as they hit the ground, and within minutes, stories began to circulate about the mysterious flying machine that had brought news of life outside their urban area. Word spread of the lies and treachery caused by the New World Order, and the directors and overseers that now governed them.

Billy flew the plane low to the ground on the return trip, just in case a lone tracking station was still in operation, and landed on the grass strip behind his farmhouse. Paul departed for home and burst through the front door.

“We did it!” Paul exclaimed jubilantly, as he entered the house.

He picked Stephanie up and whirled her around in triumph.

“You should have seen them picking those things up!” he continued. “They weren’t even on the ground yet, and they were snatching them right out of the air! It was incredible; like watching kids at an old time Easter egg hunt. I couldn’t believe it; grown people acting so excitedly.”

“Good job.” George congratulated him. “That plane was an excellent idea. Too bad we didn’t have it in Texas, or that it’s too far to any of the other urban areas. It served its purpose well though.”

“Indeed it did.” Brooke added with a nod.

She was petting the black and white tuxedo kitten that Paul and Stephanie had given to her and George. Quite the lap cat, Brooke had grown rather attached to her, and had named it Cootie, after the one George had owned when he was a boy. Cootie was purring loudly and was quite content to be the object of Brooke’s affection.

Brooke gave a sudden start and bent over slightly, dislodging Cootie from her comfortable position on Brooke’s lap. The small cat dropped to the floor, giving her a dirty look, and began washing her right paw to cover her embarrassment at falling. Brooke’s lips parted slightly, and she gasped for breath.

“George...” she said, her eyes opening wide.

“Is it time?” he asked in alarm, dropping the bottle of soda he was drinking to the floor, where it began draining its contents onto the carpet. “Are you having contractions?”

Brooke nodded, and sucked her breath in again as Stephanie mopped up the soda with a napkin.

“I think so. It sure felt like it. It was pretty sharp and it’s only been thirty minutes since the last one. I didn’t pay it much attention, but this one is definitely sending a message.”

“Do you feel any pressure inside?” Stephanie inquired, setting the bottle and napkin on the coffee table.

“Yes.” Brooke replied. “I think it wants to come out. Oh, it hurts, Steffie! Joshua never hurt this bad!”

“I still think you’re carrying twins.” Stephanie replied. “You’re awfully big, Brooke. It would sure account for a lot of things.”

“We’ll get you to the county clinic.” Paul responded. “I’ll get the car started. George, help Brooke out front. Stephanie, grab some of her things if you would, Hon.”

Cootie watched the proceedings with a puzzled look on her face. She gazed at everyone curiously, as they began scurrying around the living room like a colony of displaced ants. This activity was entirely foreign to her, and she wasn’t too pleased with the ruckus that was responsible for the interruption to her nap.

Stephanie gathered some of the personal items she had given Brooke, while George helped his wife down the front steps of the farmhouse. Paul swiftly guided the car to the small hospital that served the area, and ushered Brooke into the emergency room.

"I'm Sheriff Raines." Paul announced to the receptionist. "This lady's about to give birth. Her water broke on the way over."

The receptionist motioned to an orderly, who promptly arrived with a wheelchair. He helped Brooke into the chair and began wheeling her away, when she suddenly cried out again.

"It's coming!" she wailed, as she disappeared around a corner, her voice echoing oddly down the corridor. "George!"

George and Paul sat in the waiting room, while George looked around nervously. He thumbed through a magazine and fidgeted with his hair for what seemed like hours but was in reality less than thirty minutes.

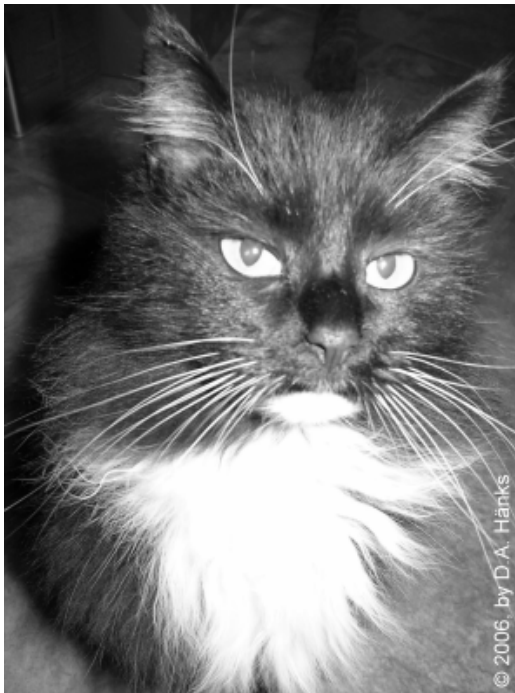
"Mr. Cooper?" a nurse finally addressed him.

"Yes?" George answered nervously as he looked up from the magazine.

"Congratulations, you're the proud father of twin girls."

George felt his head begin to spin, and Paul helped him sit down, while the nurse returned with a cup of water.

"Here you go, Buddy." Paul said. "Just drink this slowly, and take your time. Looks like Stephanie was right. Twins eh? And girls at that. Woo-boy, you're going to have your hands full with them. Twins! Way to go, George!"



Cootie watched the proceedings with a puzzled look

He slapped his friend amicably on the back

"May I see them?" George inquired, after the initial shock wore off.

"Shortly." The nurse replied. "They're quite healthy; just need a little cleaning up, and for your wife to settle down. We gave her a sedative."

Ten minutes later, George gazed at Brooke, who was nursing the twins, and smiled at her. She smiled back at him and whispered softly.

"Aren't they beautiful?"

"Yes," George whispered back, "but what are we going to name them?"

"How about Liberty and Independence?" Paul suggested from behind George's right shoulder. "I can't think of two more beautiful words for two beautiful girls at this time in history."

"Liberty Candice Cooper and Independence Michelle Cooper. What do you think, George?" Brooke inquired.

"I think that is beautiful." George replied.

Brooke placed her hand over her mouth and yawned, blinking her eyes as she looked at George.

"I'm tired, Honey," she said in a comfortable voice. "I feel sleepy."

"It's the sedative," one of the nurses explained. "It's starting to kick in now."

"Get some rest," George advised his wife, as the nurses took the twins and departed for the nursery, leaving Brooke to drift off to sleep.

He and Paul left the small room and wandered back toward the waiting area, stopping to peer in the window of the nursery at a few infants that were sleeping soundly, before continuing onward. George ran his fingers through his hair and took a deep breath.

"How am I going to raise them?" he wondered aloud. "All I know how to do is check people onto their trains. I don't know what I am going to do now. Josh was already old enough to be somewhat self-reliant, but those two girls will need more than I can provide for them. It's all starting to hit me now. What are we going to do?"

"I've been meaning to add a new deputy to the department," Paul replied. "Besides, I have a feeling that for the next good bit, things are going to get a little dicey in the world. I'll need some extra help until a new government is established from the shambles of what we have now, and you would make an excellent lawman. Even then, it's going to take people a while to get used to their new-found freedoms, so I think you can count on being a peace officer for as long as you wish. With a free society comes some additional responsibilities, but it's a trade I'm more than willing to make.

"I'm sure Stephanie will be happy to help you two out with looking after them. You know how close those two have gotten; I'm telling you George, one squats and the other one wants to pee. You'll have all the help you need. It's what friends are for."

"Thanks Paul," George responded. "You're the best friend I've ever had."

"The old Mitchell place is empty," Paul added, glossing over the compliment. "The whole family died last winter in a car accident. They were on the way home from some friends' and never made it. Hit a patch of ice from what I could determine, and skidded off the road into an old farm pond. Someone found them two days later, frozen solid in the ice. It took us a couple days to chip them out; it was heartbreaking. Anyway, the place probably just needs a little dusting and such. There's plenty of room for you and the kids, and the little Cootie-cat too. It's that red house two places down from ours."

“The one with the little barn out back, on the same side of the road?” George inquired. “We noticed it looked empty. Brooke mentioned the other day that she wished we could have a little place like that ourselves. She’ll be ecstatic to hear that we can actually have it.”

“Grow old together, and die happy.” Paul said with a smile. “Raise your kids and enjoy your grandchildren. They’ll be living in a much better world than you and I grew up in, or could have ever hoped to envision. This is our second chance at life. You two have many, many years ahead of you in a free world now. Enjoy them together, my friend.”

*

In Chicago, news of the plane and the messages it carried, spread throughout the city like wildfire. The flyers were shared among friends, and animosity toward the Authority grew exponentially, as people began to realize the degree to which they had been misled, and worse, of the murders of their friends and loved ones during the Biosickness.

Many people had grown extremely complacent over the last twenty-five years, but many more either remembered freedom or were now experiencing the thirst for it. Already on the brink of turmoil from several missed food drops, angry citizens began marching in the streets and protesting. Many sought out overseers and other officials to demand an explanation and even cause physical harm to them when they got the runaround. Just as in Dallas and Ft. Worth, fires were set; particularly in the forbidden areas of the overseers’ neighborhoods, and one mob even beat an overseer and his entire family to death with bricks. Thirty years of internment had finally taken its toll; the delicate thread of tolerance had finally snapped, and now the citizens of Urban Area Eleven were reclaiming their rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

All across the country, the seeds of doubt and frustration had been sown, by nuclear attack, leafleting, and via good, old-fashioned rumors. Over time, they would grow into a descendent of the same tree of liberty that so long ago, Thomas Jefferson had so prophetically stated in the Declaration of Independence, “must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

The glow of liberty was beginning to shine like a brilliant beacon of freedom, which illuminated the soul of every awakened man and woman across the continent. Beaming into the darkest corners of their very being, that beacon was becoming a glowing ray of hope, for the chains of oppression had been broken and slung into the abyss of submission to be melted by the eternal fires of freedom. The master control plan had indeed been foiled, while *free* minds had prevailed in pure - but separate - genetic wisdoms.

In Chicago, tensions were mounting as overseers and enforcers alike, began to realize the severity of the situation and the impending disaster it spelled for them. Before long, the news of liberty would spread across the crowded city like a tsunami crashing upon the shores of ignorance, and this genuinely concerned all of those in positions of authority.

“We can’t contain this forever.” Chief Overseer Saul Horowitz observed to the director of Urban Area Eleven, as several plumes of smoke could already be seen rising in the distance. “Word is going to get around of what happened in Zion and Dallas/Fort Worth. There aren’t enough of us to keep the population in check if they revolt. We’ve been operating on fear and terror to keep them in line, but once they realize that, we’re done. We’ll see reprisals against us that will make Aushwitz and Dachau pale in comparison. We should leave while we still have the chance.”

Jeff Goldstein nodded grudgingly. His coveted prize of totalitarian authority had been stripped from him, and he was none too happy about losing it. All those years of putting up with Bush were fruitless now. He had tasted total power and complete control, and the thought of losing that power was almost more than he could take.

"There's no stopping it now," he agreed bitterly, as he pondered the events at hand. "It's out of our hands now. What will be will be; there's nothing more we can do. After all this time we've come so close and gotten so far, but once again our dreams have been crushed. We were so close this time too; I thought we had it Saul! For almost thirty years, we reigned supreme over the rest of the people in this world, and now it's gone. All we can do now is watch and wait, and see what happens, but we may never be able to fully recover from this; in fact, the damage they've caused us could even be irreversible. We're all in one place now! What if they decide to annihilate us in retaliation? What if they get those old missiles fired up and nuke Zion? The tables have turned; somehow they've managed to beat us at our own game."

"I don't know about that." Saul replied, as flames began licking at the inside of several windows of an Authority building less than two blocks away. "We've overcome pitfalls before, but this will certainly set us back tens of decades - if not more - I agree. At the very least, they've cost us a hundred and fifty years worth of carefully staged chess moves in almost every political arena around the world. Everything we got that lackey Lincoln, to do when he federalized the country has been in vain now. All the divisiveness he created is gone.

"Damn Americans and their stupid, blind, jingoistic patriotism! They just *had* to throw tea into the harbor again, didn't they? What is it with them and their insatiable thirst for freedom anyway? Why do they always have to question authority? Why can't they just do what they're told, like every other country in the world?"

"That's why it took over two hundred years to take control." Jeff replied sourly. "We had to usurp their liberties one by one, and gradually replace and mix them with people that don't know any differently. We should have just killed them all outright, and not left any of them alive after the Biosickness.

"They'll always have that freedom gene. It runs in their veins. It's like their blood - their very being - is saturated with the desire to be free. As long as they exist, their blood will *always* be stained with freedom."

He picked a white landscaping rock up in frustration, and smashed the colorful glass eye mounted atop the small stone pyramid that sat in the middle of a large Unification Star in front of the Urban Director's office. The rock dropped to the ground, and Jeff looked at Saul. He reflected on the unfolding chain of events for a minute, before finishing his train of thought.

"This little 'revolution' of theirs could set us all the way back to the 1770's."

The end



